

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: University of Latvia

Study field: Social Welfare

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# Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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The report includes the assessment of the study field "Social Welfare " implemented by University of Latvia (UL), Faculty of Social Sciences, and two study programmes: professional bachelor's study programme in Social Work (42762) and professional master's study programme in Social Work (47762).

The mission of the study field "Social Welfare" is to develop social work as a profession and as a field of science, promoting the principles of social justice, social development, and inclusive society.

A deficit of social workers in Latvia allowed UL to reintroduce bachelor`s study programs in 2019 and to develop a broad cooperation network between branches and employers across Latvia which allows students to acquire social work education at bachelor level close to their homes.

Broad cooperation networks both at national and international levels are established in order to fulfill objectives of the study field: 1) to provide internationally competitive education in social work and to train highly qualified specialists capable of creative thought and realisation of their professional and human potential for the benefit of Latvian, European Union (EU) and global society and competitive in the national and international labour market; 2) to become one of the leading research centres in Latvia and the Baltics in the field of social welfare and in the sociology and social work, strengthening the synergy between studies and research.

Most of the academic staff is involved in different research topics and have published research results (articles, books chapters, etc.). Those who do not have publications have five-year practice in the field. This is related to the fact that some lecturers are practitioners and are working as social workers.

Objectives of the study field clearly states internationalization as one of the important aspects but at the same time several challenges related to students' mobility were identified.

The UL has good infrastructure and well adapted digital platforms, as well as other resources. All parties (students, staff, municipality representatives, branch managers) have strong mutual understanding and cooperation. Meetings with above mentioned stakeholders gave an impression of good cooperation networks and supportive environment.

Each of the programmes have its strengths and challenges. The bachelor's study programme allows students to enroll after secondary school or after graduation from the 1st level higher education institution. The Master's study programme allows not only to continue professional and academic growth for those who acquired a social worker qualification at bachelor level but also allows enrolment of those who hold their diploma in other fields.

Stated specialization opportunities at master level studies allow students to gain in-depth knowledge in criminal justice social work or social work with families with children, however, it brings challenges to synchronise these specializations with the newly introduced senior social worker professional standard in 2021.

In order to provide students with professional knowledge and skills several internships during studies are held (both at bachelor and master study programmes). However, there is a demand to state a clear difference between internships at bachelor and master study programmes.

## 1. Management of the Study Field

### Analysis

University of Latvia (UL) defines seven strategic directions of development: Development of higher education; Development of research capacity and competitiveness; Development of human resources; Development of Academic staff renewal and succession; Development of resources and performance management system; Promotion of cooperation; and Internationalization. The new UL strategy (p. 12 of the Self-Evaluation Report – hereinafter SER) announces an increased focus on scientific excellence accompanied by a focus on green thinking, organisational culture, innovation, and cooperation. The mission and objectives of the Social Work study field subscribe to the above-mentioned directions of development (pp. 36-37 of the SER).

The aims of the Social Work (hereinafter SW) study programmes are conformed to the main goals of the UL (see art. 2.1 in the Constitution of the University). SW field aims to promote education and research that is internationally relevant and locally contextualized (SER, p. 35).

The university fulfills the objective set out in its strategy in the field of study “Social Welfare” to provide internationally competitive education in social work and to train highly qualified specialists capable of creative thought and realization of their professional and human potential for the benefit of Latvia. At the meeting with employers, local government leaders and alumni, everyone emphasized that there is a shortage of social workers and that university graduates who have moved to the labour market after graduation will be able to do their job well and that there will be a great need for educated social workers in the coming years. (SER p. 35; Meetings with employers, leaders of municipalities and graduates). To achieve and evaluate the goal of training competitive social workers for the international labor market, we recommend applying the analysis of graduates' employment in the international (Baltic) labor market. It will then be possible to assess the fulfillment of this goal in more detail.

Challenges are identified with the objective to become one of the leading research centres in Latvia and the Baltics in the field of social welfare (SER 35). To achieve this goal, it is necessary, on one hand to plan activities boldly but at the same time realistic considering the achievements of the last 7 years (see Annex 4) and, on the other hand, more precisely (e.g. to create a set of criteria to measure the progress comparatively with the other HEIs in the region; to launch doctoral studies in the field, etc.). However, meetings with the academic staff and programs administrators confirmed that they consider these goals realistic and achievable (SER p. 35; Meetings with teaching staff and administrators of the study field and programmes).

The goal of strengthening the synergy between sociology and social work and studies and research has been achieved. This is shown by the research and development work carried out by the lecturers and the subject courses that are taken in the curricula (Annex 9. List of academic staff publications).

The aims of the study field - to ensure the compliance of the study programmes with the topical trends in the social work profession in Latvia and internationally - are clearly defined and attainable. All indicators have been achieved throughout the planned period: starting in 2014, the master's level study programme, which is concentrated on the focus on specific learning outcomes in conformity with the needs of the social work profession. A total of 100 students have entered the bachelor's study programme PBSP in 2018-2021 and started their studies (Annex 4).

The study field and programmes respond to the needs and development trends of Latvian society

and justify existence in respect with:

- Latvian state development plans (Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030; National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021–2027) to advance toward a Scandinavian model of social welfare state.
- the current level of socio-economic development of the country (the need to develop social services considering: the high rates of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion; social protection budget below EU average; shortage of social workers and a deficit of qualified personnel working in social services - see pp. 29-31 of the Self-Assessment Report.
- the need to develop research in the field of social work in general and in Latvia in particular (i.e., evidence-based policy making; a closer link between education, practice and research).

A comparison (highlighting similar and dissimilar characteristics) with other HEIs in the Baltic region is provided (p. 33 of the SER)

The study field and the relevant study programmes comply with the main directions of the strategic development of the higher education institution and meet the needs and the development trends of the society and national economy.

During the meetings with the evaluation team the administration and the teaching staff expressed a deep understanding of the academic and professional requirements of social work. During the meetings, the students and graduates demonstrated competencies of working in different SW areas, which require new strategic approaches, taking independent responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice, reflecting upon, and researching practical activity in their organizations. Graduates are working in different positions as a social worker, leader of social work departments and institutions and with different client groups, as youth, children and families, with elderly and people with special needs, also in different social work fields, as probation, social pedagogy in schools, social work in municipalities etc.

The strategy and development of the Study Field Social Welfare and Social Work Study Programmes are related to the vision, mission, values, operational objectives, and strategy of the higher education institution and understood by all stakeholders. The development of study programmes is related to the UL plans to develop regional education based on the identified needs of the region in cooperation with regional governments, to expand the range of study programmes and other educational services available in the region, including continuing education programmes and courses (SER p. 10; Meetings with branch managers, employers and representatives of municipalities).

The study field “Social Welfare” is important in the strategic development of Latvia, and therefore the university has followed the strategic directions of the national development plan “Latvian Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030” (SER p. 27) in targeting and developing the action strategy of this study field. The social substantiation of developing the study programmes of this study field is closely related to the shortage of professional social workers and the spread of manifold social problems. The university has analysed both social problems and the resulting need for social workers through several studies and used them as a basis for developing curricula (data of the Ministry of Welfare Register of Social Service Providers, as of 10.12.2020; Labklājības Ministrija, 2020; Reports on social services and social assistance in the regional / city municipality, 2019, ER p. 27-29).

The UL presents a functional organizational structure (see 1.2\_UL\_Organizational chart ENG). The departmentalisation is based on both function and geography. The management structure of the SW field combines academic and structural units (see Annex 5. Administration structure of the study

field).

The structure of the management of the study field and branches and the subordination-cooperation relations are fully described in the Self-Evaluation Report and Annex 2. Academic structure and roles are described in the Self-Evaluation Report (pp.46-48). UL Administration Units are enumerated (p.49) and the roles of the Department of Studies and Department of Science are described in the Self-Evaluation Report (p.49). Administrative structures at the branch level are nominated one by one, and their attributions are specified (ch. 5-Annex2). The roles of the Head of Branch, Programme assistant(s) and administrative assistants are described (ch. 2-Annex2). A description of the technical and material facilities of the Alūksne, Bauska, Cēsis, Jēkabpils, Madona, Kuldīga, Tukums branches is included (ch. 6-Annex2). Discussions during the meetings with the representatives of the UL enriched the understanding of the roles and attributions of each decision body and management staff.

The laws of the University define the collegial responsibility for the administration of the field of study (SER p. 47; Figure 7. Administrative structure of the field of study and the corresponding curricula; Appendix 5. Administrative structure of the field of study). UL management is responsible for the operation of the learning quality management system, the management of results, the monitoring of processes and audits.

The development plan of the study field “Social Welfare” has been elaborated on the basis of the goals and tasks of the study field. The most important development tasks are related to development of study programmes, including development of professional continuing education programmes, professional development of academic staff and strengthening research excellence with developing international cooperation both in study and research areas. The development goals of the study field and plan correspond to the development goals of the study field and are realistically feasible (SER p. 46; Annex 4).

The achievement of the planned results is assessed on the basis of the developed indicators. The indicators for evaluating the planned results are presented in the appendix to the SER (Annex 4. Study Field Development Plan). Annex 4 describes the development of the study field, in terms of objectives and indicators. The level of fulfillment/progress of each indicator per academic year, for the last 7 years is presented. A plan for the coming years is included. Some targets are realistic while some seem to be too ambitious when compared with the accomplishments of the last 7 years (e.g., 5.1 versus 7.4; 11.2, 11.3). Some indicators are rather qualitative (i.e., harmonization and update of learning outcomes, update of study courses). The planners should reflect over the actual possibility to quantitatively measure such indicators.

The Council of Study Field initiates updating of learning outcomes taking into consideration the remarks of external experts, employers, students and teachers as well as the requirements of legal documents. The aims and the learning outcomes of the programmes are periodically (not less than once per three years) reviewed. The programme's titles, the intended learning outcomes, its contents and granted qualification are in compliance with each other. Learning outcomes of the programmes are clearly stated, publicly available and realizable. Information about the programme's aims and intended learning outcomes is easily accessible for students, stakeholders as it is disseminated in LU public space (SER p. 61; Meetings with students, graduates, programmes managers and teaching staff).

The coordinator and dean of the study field, the heads of the study programmes and the heads of the sub-programmes are responsible for the quality of the study field and the study programmes

implemented in it, whose task is to ensure the management and operation of studies and research activities. Each lecturer is responsible for the content and quality of study courses, research and professional development of the course. Lecturers are advised by the program directors and by the specialists of the Faculty and Science Councils. (Meetings with UL Riga management representatives, members of SER preparation group, administrations of study field). Responsibilities for decision-making related to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme are clearly defined. The main documents of the university have been developed and implemented, which regulate the principles of quality assurance of teaching and research, the division of responsibilities for ensuring the quality of teaching and the quality assurance processes in the development, implementation and improvement of study programmes.

A transition from study programme councils to study field council was accomplished (as recommended in the previous external evaluation). The discussions with the study field director and programme directors revealed that the new collective body of decision is more operative, decisions are easier to reach. However, one opinion that emerged during the meeting with the staff was that the previous form of government was more participatory. In the next period we recommend strengthening and extending cooperation among study field council and staff members.

At the meeting with the evaluation team, the persons responsible for the development of the field confirmed that the study field council operates, and that regular feedback is provided on the implementation of the study programme. The study field council consists of study field coordinators, all study programmes' directors, representatives of students (at least 20% of the composition of the council), employers and partners who participate in the curriculum development process (see SER, pp. 47-48; Annex 5). At the meeting with the experts, it was confirmed that the study council meets regularly, and important issues are discussed there. During the meeting with the experts, the administrators of the study field confirmed that the activities of the faculty council, where issues related to the academic, economic, financial and other activities of the faculty are decided, are operational and provide feedback to the activities of the faculty. However, students, employers, branch managers and graduates that participated in the meetings with the experts did not have a clear representation of the composition and roles of the study field council. Thus, we recommend increasing the visibility of this structure for all stakeholders.

At the meeting with the experts, the representatives of the administration and the lecturers confirmed that the meetings of the employees of the department are held regularly, where topical issues related to the implementation of the field of study are discussed and decisions are made collegially in connection with the organization of practical studies.

During the meeting with the experts, the partners confirmed that professionals in the field are involved in the development of social work study programmes, with whom regular meetings are held in cooperation with lecturers to discuss issues related to the implementation of studies in the field of study. Meetings have taken place in a virtual environment using MS Teams or ZOOM platforms since the declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency and the restrictions on assembly (Meetings with administrative staff, SER p. 49).

Sample of reflexive development of the study programmes is described in the SER (p.124-12).

In the study field, an organization's culture is based on values, ethical and equal treatment, cooperation, a high culture of work and communication, creating a healthy and active lifestyle environment. In the study field the principles of academic honesty and ethics are respected in the studies and research, including the system for verifying the originality of content (Meeting with UL Riga Management representatives; SER preparation team; students, academic staff; SER p. 35).

The support of administrative and technical staff contributes to meeting all the needs of the respective study programme. The duties and responsibilities of the administrative and academic staff related to the implementation of the study field "Social Welfare" are defined in the job descriptions and normative acts of the University of Latvia. According to the roles (Annex 2 & Annex 5) prescribed to them (and the discussions with the study field representatives and study branch directors) administrative and technical staff provide relevant support to the study programmes.

The Department of Studies has an essential role in the management of the study field, whose main functions are to draft legal acts and documents related to the study activity, to coordinate and control their implementation and further development, to ensure the planning of study processes according to the UL mission, goals and strategy. The tasks of the Department of Education are monitoring and analysis of study programmes, study courses and programme content, ensuring their quality and cost-effectiveness, also the development of widely demanded capabilities and practical skills, such as e-studies development (SER p. 49). The leaders and administrators of the study programmes who attended the meetings confirmed that the teaching process is working well and that problems will be solved during the work if necessary (Meetings with administrative staff and study programmes directors).

The university has developed rules governing the admission process of students to the university, including admission conditions and criteria for the validation of study programmes and fields of study, relating to the period of study, professional experience, previously acquired formal and non-formal education. An overview of the procedures and rules is provided in the self-assessment report (SER p. 51). Admission procedures vary across study programmes and levels and are described in the self-assessment report as a well-functioning process. The admission process is governed by the Enrolment Rules and procedures, elaborated on a yearly basis, that are listed on p.3 of the terms of admission at UL. Admission procedures are different for the BA and MA levels. Rules of admission are described here: [https://www.lu.lv/gribustudet/study/bachelors-study-programmes/general-rules/?no\\_cache=1#c68398](https://www.lu.lv/gribustudet/study/bachelors-study-programmes/general-rules/?no_cache=1#c68398). During the meeting with the directors of the study programmes and the academic staff, it was explained that a system for the evaluation and recognition of previous studies is being developed at the national level, which in the near future will harmonize the treatment of this topic in universities as well (Meetings with programme directors and academic staff).

Registration for bachelor's studies takes place centrally in the "One Registration Programme in Bachelor's Degree Programmes", which unites enrolment in 12 Latvian universities. The competition for study places is based on the results of centralized examinations or the grades of persons with secondary education, centrally exempted persons or persons who have acquired secondary education abroad until 2004. Admission to master's study programmes is decentralized and takes place under the admission conditions specified in different study programmes, but within the same deadlines. Secondary education is a prerequisite for admission to bachelor's curricula (Bachelor's vocational curriculum, SER p. 152).

In the master's study programme "Social Work", which is based on previous education in various fields, is subject to an entrance examination, on the basis of which the conformity of applied prior knowledge to the field of the curriculum is determined. Entrants must submit a CV, and during the entrance interviews the connection between the applied work experience and the field of social welfare is assessed and the conformity of the applied prior knowledge to the field of the curriculum is determined. Such an organization of admission ensures a wider opportunity to come to study social work also for those social work practitioners who have not previously studied this specialty, but have a first-level higher education in a related field (Vocational Master's Degree Programme,

SER p. 109, p.; Meetings with Study Programmes directors).

During the assessment visit, the study programme directors described the admission process as a well-functioning system. According to the students, they have been admitted and are happy to be admitted (Meetings with students).

The main functions of the Department of Student Services are to organize and ensure the matriculation and exmatriculation of Latvian and foreign students, circulation of study documents and their record-keeping and other tasks, which are described in the SER (p. 50).

The Department of Science is involved in organizing study-related research and promoting student involvement in research. To prevent violation of academic integrity, the UL has developed the Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System (hereinafter - System) (UL 22.04.2014. Order No 1/125). The System verifies students'; final study research paper (qualification paper, diploma paper, bachelor's thesis, master's thesis, doctoral thesis). The procedure has been established to determine further course of action (UL 22.04.2014. Supplement to Order No 1/125), in the case of plagiarism (SER p. 57). During the meeting with the students, the students explained that they are using the plagiarism detection system with the teacher, as the teachers have the appropriate access rights. The necessary work has always been checked and advised by the teacher. The SER mentions on p.58 that during the reporting period two cases of plagiarism were detected at the MA level (in the final thesis, at the pre-defence stage) and the two students were expelled.

In the study field "Social Welfare ", as in the case of the UL in general, the cooperation and mutual relations of the administrative staff, academic staff and students are based on mutual respect, focusing on the strategic goals of the University of Latvia. The university has a number of laws in place to regulate the ethics of teaching and research. The Academic Ethics Codex of the University of Latvia, Regulations for Academic Integrity at the University of Latvia, Rules of Internal Regulations of the University of Latvia for Students, Procedure for the organization of examinations of study courses at the University of Latvia and 50 other UL regulations are observed directly in the implementation of the study process and also in informal communication (SER p. 49).

Graduates and social partners are actively involved in the development process. The staff of the study field and students continuously collaborate with social work organizations, municipalities and politicians. Their representatives are invited to lectures, seminars, forums, conferences, and discussions in Riga and in the branches. That helps to enrich the study field and programmes with practical and/or political perspectives. Teachers of study fields provide training and professional supervision for social work practitioners. (Meetings with students, graduates, employers and representatives of municipalities).

Feedback from the stakeholders of the study programme is collected and analysed regularly. Feedback is used to improve the programme. All stakeholders (teachers, students, social partners, alumni) are involved in the appropriate aspects of programme management and administration. During the meeting, it was confirmed that students' feedback regarding teaching is recorded for every study subject by filling individually electronic questionnaires and these results of the evaluations are used for improving teaching. Graduates of the programme confirmed that they also participate in the evaluation of the programme not only as representatives of the Study Programme Committee, but also give annual feedback on the quality of the programme. (Meetings with students, graduates, employers and representatives of municipalities).

The University informs students, university staff and its partners, including other universities,



employers, politicians and people interested in university activities, via the website <https://www.lu.lv/en/>. The site is intended for access to and storage of public information, providing its visitors with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the UL's activities as reflected in the digital environment on the Internet (website <https://www.lu.lv/en/>; SER p. 59). Responsibility is the preparing and publishing information on the Department of Communication and Innovation in cooperation with the Department of Studies and the Department of Student Services.

In the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), a public relations specialist is responsible for the online publication of content. During the meetings with the teachers and students stated that the availability of information is very good. If there have been problems, then the problems are solved quickly. All needed information is available also in branches (Meetings with students, teachers and branch managers).

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

### **Conclusions.**

In conclusion, the goals of the study field are clearly defined and achievable. The study field and the corresponding curricula correspond to the main areas of strategic development of the higher education institution and correspond to the needs and development trends of the society and the national economy.

The structure of the management (administration) of the study field and the relevant study programmes is oriented towards the development of the study direction. Decision-taking is efficient. The support provided by the administrative and technical staff contributes to meeting all needs with regard to the relevant study programmes of the study field. The higher education institution has set certain academic integrity principles and mechanisms, and it uses appropriate plagiarism detection tools which are effective and contribute to the development of the internal culture of the higher education institution, and the stakeholders are aware of such tools and mechanisms.

The higher education institution has established a system and developed/ implemented procedures for the admission of students, the recognition of the study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education, as well as for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students, and these procedures are logical and efficient. The information published on the website of the higher education institution regarding the relevant study programmes of the study field complies with the information available in the official registers. It provides important information for the candidates and the students and is published in all languages in which the study programmes are implemented.

### **Strengths:**

1. The objectives of the field of study and study programmes are clearly defined and correspond to the needs and development trends of the society and the national economy, labour market needs, academic and professional requirements. The university offers students the opportunity to study in branches close to the student's place of residence and work. At the same time, the university supports the implementation of one of the priorities of the "Territories for Growth" plan in order to achieve sustainable economic growth by strengthening the capacities of the regions.
2. The higher education institution has a well-functioning information system, including information published on the website about the respective study programs of the welfare study field and information about library services and databases.

### **Weaknesses:**

1. Challenges are identified in respect with the objective to become one of the leading research centres in Latvia and the Baltics in the field of social welfare (SER 35). To achieve this goal, it is

necessary, on one hand to plan activities boldly but at the same time realistic considering the achievements of the last 7 years (see Annex 4) and, on the other hand, more precisely (e.g. to create a set of criteria to measure the progress comparatively with the other HEIs in the region; to launch doctoral studies in the field, etc.).

2. Study Field Development Plan (Annex) 4 describes the development of the study field, in terms of objectives and indicators. Some targets are realistic while some seem to be too ambitious when compared with the accomplishments of the last 7 years (e.g., 5.1; 11.2). Some indicators are rather qualitative (i.e., harmonization & update of learning outcomes, update of study courses).

3. Students, employers, branch managers and graduates that participated in the meetings with the experts did not have a clear representation of the composition and roles of the study field council. Staff members that participated in the meeting with the experts suggested that the previous form of management (i.e., study programme level councils) was more participatory.

## **2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System**

### **Analysis**

The UL has established a quality policy and a quality system: a) committees (e.g., Study Programme Quality Assessment Commission/Board; Qualitative Consultative Committee- see p.13 of the SER and 1.2\_UL\_Organizational chart ENG) b) regulations and procedures (see Annex 3 for a list). A chart illustrating the system of quality assessment and improvement of study fields and programmes is presented on p. 22 of the SER (see. Fig. 6 in SER).

A new Quality Policy (QP) has been enforced starting with the 27.01.2020, replacing the previous one (approved on 30.10.2012). An annex to the Quality Policy entitled Quality Action Policy (QAP) was approved on 06.02.2020. Both documents are available in English at: [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/2/Kvalitates\\_politika\\_majas\\_lapai\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_politika_majas_lapai_ENG.pdf) and [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti\\_EN/2/Kvalitates\\_ricibpolitika\\_majas\\_lapai\\_ENG\\_new.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_ricibpolitika_majas_lapai_ENG_new.pdf). The QP addresses 6 strategic principles (art 5). Even though not explicit, the annex most likely addresses these principles in relation with the management of research, studies, and cooperation with stakeholders. If the QP document is considered as an element of strategic planning, the annex (QAP) could be conceived as a tentative operational plan. However, concrete results and milestones should be included in the QAP.

The existing quality assurance system is contributing to the achievement of the aims, learning outcomes, and to the improvement and development of the study programmes. An example is the development of the SW programme at the BA level, both in what concerns its content (i.e., curricula – see pp. 120-126 of the SER) and territorial coverage (i.e., in UL branches), as a result of the consultations with the stakeholders (e.g., city halls representatives), of the documents provided by the National Association of the Social Workers and considering results of various studies commanded by the Ministry of Welfare. Discussions held on the 14th of December, with professors teaching at the SW programmes, support this view. Another example is the translation of the development strategy at the UL level to the programmes level. For the 2016-2020 a development strategy exists (the document for the current period – approved on 08.04.2021 – was not available). The existing document contains a detailed action plan (development directions, goals, indicators, targets, and dates) that is reflected at the study field level in one development plan for 2014-2022 and another one for 2022-2029. The latter contains concrete quality measures which contribute to the achievement of the aims of the programmes.

Besides the Constitution of the UL that mentions responsibilities for programmes development at

various organizational levels, and the Regulations on University of Latvia study and continuing education programmes (approved on 24.04.2017, amended on 28.10.2019) mentioning mechanism of development and review of programmes (see ch. XIII, XVI), two procedures/regulations addressing this criterion exist: Regulations on the University of Latvia Study Field Management and The Procedure for the Organisation of Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the University of Latvia. (See SER p.62-63 for a short description regarding the above documents)

The procedure for developing and reviewing study programmes is described in the document entitled Regulations on the University of Latvia Study Field Management, has been enforced starting with the 27th of January 2020 (available in English at [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/3/Nolikums\\_par\\_LU\\_studiju\\_virzienu\\_parvaldibu.doc\\_ENG\\_2020.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/3/Nolikums_par_LU_studiju_virzienu_parvaldibu.doc_ENG_2020.pdf)). Among other key issues, concerning the management of the study fields, the regulation explicitly refers to attributions and tasks concerning the development and review of study programmes (see art. 13.1, 13.2, 13.4, 13.5, 13.6, 20.1 to 20.9, 28.2 to 28.11, 28.16, 28.18-28.23 in Regulations on the University of Latvia Study Field Management). Even though, most often, explicit shared or clear delineation of responsibilities for development, among different actors, exist, some examples of inconsistencies could be found (see art. 28.6, 28.8 and organisational chart in Annex 5, the latter suggesting a direct subordination of the study programme director to the coordinator of the study field).

Reports and reviews of the study field are assessed, endorsed or approved, as appropriate, by the Study Field Council, Faculty Council, Study Programme Quality Assessment Commission or Senate (see Fig.6 in the SER).

The study results of the study field and study programmes are evaluated by the Study Programme Quality Assessment Board, which includes representatives of the university management, heads of structural units, Internal Auditor, Head of Quality, representative of the Department of Science, representative of the UL Library and a representative delegated by the Student Council and a representative delegated by the UL Alumni Club. (SER p. 48) If necessary, independent experts are involved in decision-making.

The Procedure for the Organisation of Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the University of Latvia has been enforced starting with the 22.08.2016 (amended several times, the last on 31.03.2021). It is publicly available (English version) at: [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/3/aptaujuma-kartiba-studiju-procesa-novertesanasai-lu-EN\\_aktual.21-04-2021\\_.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/3/aptaujuma-kartiba-studiju-procesa-novertesanasai-lu-EN_aktual.21-04-2021_.pdf). Feedback mechanisms from undergraduate, graduates, doctoral students and employers are clearly defined within this procedure. Instruments of data collection (questionnaires) are available. Several surveys are organized per year. Some surveys are compulsory. Among the topics of the surveys, we find: first years of study experience, study courses and work of teaching staff, learning outcomes, attrition, satisfaction with the quality of the study programme (the knowledge, skills, and competences acquired; the contribution of the study programme to their employment), employers' assessment on the compliance of knowledge, skills and competences of graduates with the labour market requirements.

However, feedback mechanisms to students, graduates and employers are not described in this procedure. Feedback offered to various stakeholders is mentioned in the SER (p.21, p.62, p.64, p. 68, p.130, p.136, p.168). Feedback mechanisms addressed to students were discussed during meetings with staff and students (e.g., mentions of feedback were made when Moodle platform was presented). Feedback mechanisms to students, graduates and employers should be also formalized.

Procedures addressing mechanisms of complaints and proposals of the students, complement survey feedback. Several such procedures exist (e.g. Order of submitting and examining proposals and complaints of the students, approved on 18.02.2002, – available in English at [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/3/19\\_ORDER\\_of\\_submitting\\_and\\_examining\\_proposals\\_and\\_complaints\\_of\\_the\\_students.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/3/19_ORDER_of_submitting_and_examining_proposals_and_complaints_of_the_students.pdf); Procedure for organization of examinations of study courses at the University of Latvia approved on 29.06.2015, – available in English at [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/3/nr\\_211\\_parbaudijumu\\_organizesana\\_eng.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/3/nr_211_parbaudijumu_organizesana_eng.pdf) – art. 36.3, 45, 46, 48, 49). These and other procedures referring to students' possibilities to submit complaints are described in the SER pp. 65-66.

Throughout the SER data, tables and figures exist. They are proving that UL collects and analyses information on the SW study field and programs and uses it for improvement & development. SER describes at pp. 67-70 the categories of data collected. Apart from surveys, a tool for data collection is the UL information system. A series of annexes present data collected (see Annexes 8, 9, 10.1, 10.2; Annex\_Statistical data on students in the professional bachelor's study programme "Social Work".doc; Annex Table 14. Statistics of database use.docx; Annex Table 15. Assessment of teaching staff growth promotion - improvement of didactic skills and raising qualification.docx). Discussions with academic staff revealed that the Moodle system is also used by professors to extract and analyse data concerning students' engagement in the online learning activities. Apart from the categories of data enumerated in the SER (p.67-70), data concerning factual academic performance (i.e., research performance indicators) of staff could be collected.

Even though it is obvious that data are collected for the annual reports at programme and study field levels, no procedure or regulation to explain the mechanisms of data collection was found, nor a template (formalized document) indicating what kind of data must/should be collected. A possible practice might be to stipulate minimum types of data to be collected and analysed at the programme/field level. That would enable, on one hand, comparisons among study fields/programmes and, on the other hand, would constitute a foundation for data aggregation at upper organizational levels.

Surveys (see The Procedure for the Organisation of Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the University of Latvia) also provide data/information for the improvement of the study programmes. Survey results are discussed with the academic staff either in formal or informal meetings.

The UL presents the compliance to the ESG in Table 10. Implementation of "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG) at the University of Latvia. Annex 4. Study Field Development Plan presents aims and measures that were/are/will be taken to improve the performance of the SW programmes in relation to ESG standards.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

### **Conclusions.**

UL has established a quality policy and a quality system. The existing quality system is contributing to the achievement of the aims, learning outcomes, and to the improvement and development of the study programmes. Feedback mechanisms reflecting students and other stakeholders' opinions exist and are functioning. Data are collected on a regular basis and used in annual reports of the programs/study field. ESG are correctly identified and addressed.

Strengths:

1. A quality policy has been enforced.
2. The system of quality assessment is clearly represented.
3. Data are collected at least once a year and are used for revising & developing study programmes.

#### Weaknesses:

1. If the Quality Action Plan is conceived as a tentative operational plan, concrete results and milestones should be included.
2. No procedure or regulation to explain the mechanisms of data collection (other than survey data) was found, nor a template (formalized document) indicating what kind of data must/should be collected.
3. Minor fuzziness in what concerns responsibilities and communication regarding quality assessment between study programme director and study field director.
4. Feedback mechanisms to students, graduates and employers are not described in The Procedure for the Organisation of Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the University of Latvia.

### 3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

#### Analysis

The higher education institution has developed a system for determining the field of study and the financial resources necessary for the implementation of the respective study programmes. The available funds of the study field "Social Welfare" implemented by the University of Latvia are determined by the state budget funding (agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and the University of Latvia) and income from tuition fees (SER p. 71).

In the case of the study field "Social Welfare", when the location of study implementation in the professional bachelor's study programme is both FSS and UL regional branches, financial planning takes place in cooperation amongst UL dean and executive director, and the directors and executive directors of the UL Regional Centre, as well as the directors of the UL branches (SER p. 72).

Based on the data of January 1, 2021, the financial support of the full-time regular study form of the professional bachelor's study programme "Social Work" is currently fully covered by the state budget grant. The professional master's study programme "Social Work", a subprogram of 80 CP is funded mainly from the state budget - 91%, tuition fee income is 9%, while the professional master's study programme "Social Work" in 60 CP format can be attended only with personal funding. The university keeps records of the cost of study programmes (Annex "Calculation of the cost of the study programme").

The branches are funded by tuition fees and financial monitoring is the responsibility of the UL Regional Centre. The UL Regional Centre monitors the activities of the branches, organizes the recruitment of new employees through competitions according to the required position. Each branch has a teaching methodologist (programme assistant) and a branch director (SER p. 72; Information of the Director of Regional Centre; Annex2-Information on the implementation of the study field in the branches).

Based on the information of the Director of Regional Centre different study programmes are implemented in the branches. Social work is studied in Riga and 3 branches (Kuldīga, Alūksne and Cēsis). The number of students is currently 101, 70 of whom are studying in branches (Annex. Statistical data of students in the Bachelor's vocational study programme "Social Work").

LU's branches in the regions operate as educational centres that offer study in 1st level professional bachelor's and master's degree programmes, including continuing education programmes offered by the faculties of different study fields of the University of Latvia.

The budget of the branches is managed by the UT Regional Center. Each branch has its own budget, which consists of tuition fee revenue. 26% of the revenue is transferred to the general budget of the UL according to the internal norms of the UL, 6% of the revenue is intended to ensure the operation of the UT regional center, the rest of the budget. The cost of study programmes is calculated according to the developed cost models (Appendix. Study programme costs).

The UL Regional centre has considered the actions to be taken in the event of financial risks. So far, the branches have not needed additional funding, but if this situation arises, support will be sought from UL's main source of funding. In the worst case, if a branch is closing, it is possible to offer a student the opportunity to study at one of the other branches close to his/her residence, in order to ensure that students have the opportunity to study close to home.

The development of the UL branches is linked to the UL strategic goals and development plans of the municipalities of the region. The study programmes implemented in branches are actively supported by the local governments, as they promote the development of Latvian regions by offering higher education close to the place of residence, thereby facilitating the development of human resources in the regions (SER p. 9). In meetings with local government representatives and employers, they confirmed that co-operation with the university's branches was going very well. In cooperation, various projects are carried out, which are financed by both local governments and the university in accordance with the agreements. A number of conferences and seminars have been held in the regions, co-financed by the municipalities (meetings with employers and representatives of the municipalities).

In cooperation with the regions the university plans to actively cooperate with local governments, social services and private organizations where there is a need for social work specialists in order to ensure the number of students in the branches. To this end, opportunities for learning social work in the regions will be promoted, discussions will be held on specific learning-related topics and people who already have a higher education will be informed about opportunities for further training and retraining in social work in the regions (Information of the Director of Regional Centre).

Research is funded mainly by projects and is an important resource to ensure the involvement of teaching staff in research and to balance the workload of academic and research activities, which are crucial aspects in the research university. During the meeting with the experts, the lecturers and the administrators of the study programme, it was confirmed that the continuous project work both domestically and internationally in Latvia allows for research and development and thus ensures the development of the academic staff and relations with partners.

The higher education institution has identified the infrastructure resources and material and technical equipment necessary for the implementation of the study field, and the higher education institution has them. Students and faculty have access to the resources they need. There is a unified system and procedure for the improvement and purchase of material, technical, methodological and informative equipment, etc. Teachers and students have good facilities and equipment that is appropriate for the learning outcomes of the programmes, as well as cross-sectoral cooperation between programmes and institutions. During the visit, this was confirmed by the administrators, students and lecturers of the study programme (Meetings with branch managers, representatives of the libraries, students and teaching staff).

The Library is equipped according to the required standard. The quantity, quality and relevance of reading materials matches the needs of students. Students have good learning conditions, suitable classrooms, laboratories, practice places etc. Wireless internet network and internal stationary computer network is available in all UL premises (including branches) and provides communication between students, lecturers and administrative staff. During the visit, this was confirmed by the administrators, incl. the branch administrators (SER pp. 73-74; Meetings with branch managers, representatives of the libraries, students and teaching staff).

In the meeting with representatives of the Library it was mentioned that although for the students in branches, resources of the library are not available at the same intensity (for example, in terms of speed) it is not seen as an obstacle which disturbs the process of the acquisition of the programme. In addition, so far and also is planned for the future, that studies will be ensured by the same lectures, as they are in Riga. Lecturers use the resources of Riga's library and make proposals on what books should be bought (Meeting with the academic staff of the study field). The representatives of LU library confirmed that lectures take chances and express proposals with what resources of literature the stock must be supplemented (Meeting with representatives of the Library).

The study material and technical base at the UL branches allows to fully ensure the conditions required for the acquisition of the study courses included in the study programme (Annex 2 "Information on the implementation of the study field in the UL branches", subchapter 6). The necessary investments in the renewal of the material and technical base are carried out every year and an investment plan is developed. As well, heads of the branches pointed out that they have not observed any unsolvable problems regarding technical provision and students' IT skills, including the involvement in online studies (Meetings with Branch managers).

Library services have been developed according to the needs of users; the services are innovative. The library consultant and staff of sectoral libraries provide UL students, academic, research and general staff with bibliographic, thematic, factographic, addressable, clarifying, and other information and consultations. Students are offered different courses and seminars, including in Branches (Meetings with branch managers, representatives of the libraries, students and teaching staff).

During the visit, the representatives of UL library pointed out that students are asking for help to select the literature for the process of studies, including, the search for electronic materials. It is observed that the support is much more needed for elderly students. In Riga, students have good provision to work in the library (including the opening hours of the library), but the students in branches are more dependent on support, which is organized exactly for them. Students take chances and order books from Riga. If the branches are planning to grow their role in the field of higher education, possibly, it is time to organize the availability of professional literature in the regions. It would be possible to ensure cooperation with native libraries (Meetings with representatives of the Library).

The Faculty of Social Sciences Library collection has enough resources for the implementation of "Social work" study programmes in study field "Social Welfare" (67% of the total number of resources available at the UL Library). In cooperation with the UL Department of Information Technologies, the UL Library ensures the free online access to the e-resources repository of the University of Latvia DSpace Home (lu.lv). Once a year the UL Library evaluates and analyses the usability of the subscribed databases as well as regularly provides its users with trial access to various databases. (E-resursi no A līdz Z (lu.lv). (SER p. 79-80).

In general, during the visits, students pointed out that they are satisfied with the available sources and range of the professional literature. They appreciated very much that the literature of social work is available more in Latvian, because some of them find it difficult to read in English. Also, the lecturers of LU have the same opinion. The online process of studies has suggested thinking more about the e-resources, including, usage of scanned literature and books. This is very actively used by the students (Meetings with students).

The qualifications of the academic staff of the study field are ensured by applying the University system of competition and assessment. Internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the quality of work have been developed ("Human Resources Management Policy of the University of Latvia", "University of Latvia Academic Staff Development Action Plan 2018-2020", program "Growth and Employment"), "Strengthening Academic Staff of Institutions of Higher Education in Strategic Specialization Areas" (SER p. 26). At the meetings, UL Riga management representatives and teaching staff confirmed that all the above strategies have contributed to staff development and have been effective. (Meetings with UL Riga management representatives and teaching staff).

The study field "Social Welfare" is implemented by elected UL lecturers (professors, associate professors, assistant professors, researchers and research assistants), as well as professionals and employers of the field, all together 35. From them 28 lecturers are involved in the training of students of the professional bachelor's study programme "Social Work", while 21 lecturers teach the students of the professional master's study programme "Social Work". The workload for the LU elected teaching staff also consists of work with students of sociology and other studies' programmes. Social work practitioners are also involved in the learning process in the branches, who participate in the study and supervise the students' practice. Also, two prospective doctoral students and UL ASPRI research assistants have been involved in the study process. (Meeting with academic staff; SER p. 87). Based on the data presented in the self-assessment report, it can be stated that all teachers in the field meet the required qualifications (Annex 6, Annex 9, Annex 8, Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CVs).

The number of academic staff is sufficient. The ratio between the academic staff and the students is appropriate, which gives an opportunity for teachers to deal with students individually and supports the attainment of learning outcomes. The workload of the elected UL teaching staff also includes work with students in sociology and other study programmes (Annex 6, Annex 8).

A significant part of the teaching staff workload at the University of Latvia, as a research university, consists of work in research projects, which enables the advancement of excellence in research and promotes a closer connection between studies and research. Closer links with research are reinforced by involving researchers and research assistants in the implementation of the programmes. The ratio of students to lecturers is 72:28 (2.57 students per lecturer). This proportion is due to the circumstance that students have been admitted to branches only since 2019 and in Riga - since 2020. When implementing a student-centric approach, one of the basic principles is cooperation between students and lecturers, which is feasible with an appropriate number of lecturers. The planned number of students per lecturer is no more than 10 students (SER p. 185).

Close co-operation of lecturers and regular meetings with lecturers of various courses at least once a semester support the development of study programmes and fields of study and ensure the quality of teaching. This was confirmed at the meetings by students, lecturers and branch managers.

The recruitment and selection of academic staff are regulated by the Regulatory enactments on



academic and administrative positions at the University of Latvia and are available for all on the website ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/ Dokumenti\\_ EN /5/nr\\_153\\_akad\\_visp\\_amatu\\_nolikums\\_eng.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/ Dokumenti_ EN /5/nr_153_akad_visp_amatu_nolikums_eng.pdf)). Competitions for elected academic positions are announced openly and are published on the University of Latvia's website and in the official gazette *Latvijas Vēstnesis* (SER p. 82).

It is considered important at the university that in addition to academic qualifications, social work teachers have also acquired the profession of a social worker. Procedure allows the selection of academic staff in accordance with the needs and opportunities of LU. During the reporting period, for the first time the lecturers with the qualification of a social worker were elected to teaching positions (SER p. 83). The qualification of a social worker is important because it attracts qualified and motivated teaching staff, improves the quality of study programmes, and reinforces research in the field of social welfare.

The UL continues to develop its academic staff for ensuring the quality of studies and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence. In line with the UL Strategy, a single UL academic staff professional development system is introduced by amending internal regulatory documents and offering to academic staff professional development opportunities (SER p. 84).

The professional development of the UL academic staff is organized in accordance with the Republic of Latvia Cabinet Regulation No. 569 of 11.09.2018 - Regulation on Requirements for Necessary Education and Professional Qualification, and Procedure of Continuing Professional Development of Educators, where paragraph 16 states that each university teacher they participate in training in the amount of 160 academic hours in a vocational development programme on innovations in the higher education system, or the higher education didactics, or the management of educational work. The information on in-service training of lecturers provided in Annex 15 proves that lecturers are constantly acquiring new knowledge in the fields of higher education didactics.

The university considers the development of academic staff in the field of social welfare to be one of the main challenges. Particular attention has been paid to the expansion and strengthening of the teaching staff for the resumption and development of the professional bachelor's study programmes. To overcome this challenge, for the moment, this target, an assistant professor was created in the field of sociology and social work, subfield of social politics and organization of social work, as well two doctoral students and UL ASPRI research assistants have been involved in the study process (SER p. 87).

The self-evaluation report has pointed out that recruitment of the teaching staff necessary for the implementation of the study field is implemented purposefully, flexibly responding to the needs of study improvement and advancement, as well as the development trends in the labour market and social work as a profession. It is planned to expand and strengthen the base of elected lecturers and assistant professors in the field of sociology and social work, sub-field of social policy and social work organization. (SER p. 87; meeting with administrative staff).

Since UL is planning to expand the work of branches by involving the same lecturers who work in Riga, experts are not sure of the sufficiency of human resources and the lecturers' overload. Also, it has to be taken into account that part of them are practitioners in action. Although during the interviews lecturers expressed their motivation to work in branches and realize the process of studies. At the study field level UL should find a way to overcome the prospective workload problem. For example, set a maximum number of students in one group (e.g. 15).

Erasmus exchange mobility is not sufficiently used. In the framework of the study field “Social Welfare”, 7 Erasmus exchange agreements have been concluded for the mobility of students and teaching staff, but the use of these agreements is insufficient. Every year, 1-2 lecturers use mobility opportunities. The reasons for this have been analysed and presented in the report (SER p. 88; Annex 10, Annex 10.1, Annex 10.2). In the next few years there is a plan to support and stimulate mobility (both – inner and outer) more purposefully (see Annex 4). The mobility will be developed in cooperation with institutions of higher education, with whom UL already has signed the cooperation agreements.

At the same time teaching staff mobility is mainly implemented through scientific cooperation (participation in conferences, international project consortia events, etc.) and mobility projects. For example, Norwegian grant projects “Mobility in Political Science and Sociology”, SiforAGE, PONTES, Fulbright scholarships). The evaluation report has pointed out that since Erasmus exchanges are not sufficiently available due to a limited number of exchanges, consequently, the lecturers actively use more convenient forms of mobility and engage in international exchanges much more broadly than just under the auspices of Erasmus.

It is commendable that the university has decided to pay more attention to the development of mobility in the next period with higher education institutions with which cooperation agreements have been concluded. Incoming mobility of lecturers has been used by guest lecturer Jonas Buechel who taught the course “Social Work in a Multicultural Society” in the spring semester of 2020/2021.

The University supports the professional development of teachers with good working conditions. A rather modest participation in conferences, seminars, courses, internships and mobility programmes, research traineeships and training, is observed in the last 7 years (see Annex4). Teachers are active members of international and national social work organizations, for example the lecturers hold the membership of the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), as well as the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (SER p. 100; Annex UL FSS Teaching Staff CV; Annex 6, Annex 9).

The programme teachers share their expertise in a variety of ways: committees of scientific conferences, editorial boards of academic journals, publishing articles in mass media, open lectures for society, participating in TV and radio broadcasts. (Annex UL FSS Teaching Staff CV; Annex 6, Annex 9).

In conclusion, the development of academic staff in the field of welfare study is in line with the objective of professional development. Professional development of teachers includes international mobility and participation in conferences and seminars, as attested by the submitted documents. Teaching staff has good knowledge about social work theory and teaching skills for bringing it to SW practice. There are good relations between team members at both administration and teaching staff level (Meeting with teaching staff and administrations).

The support services provided by the university are available to students. The students of the UL have access to academic support, career development support and psychological support during the period of studies. Academic support includes the implementation of the first year of study support programme, advice on the study process, information on tutorials, counseling, and workshops on study skills. Academic support in academic matters is managed centrally by the UL Department of Student Services and the responsible persons with the respective faculties: director of the study programme, study advisor, trustee, mentor, coordinator, academic staff, and the UL Student Council and faculty student councils. Table 16 (SER p. 89) shows examples of key tasks to be performed by

student support units or staff.

During the visits it was confirmed that the UL Library provides consultations on the use of the library and Internet resources. Career development support is provided by the Career Centre of the UL Department of Student Services in collaboration with the respective faculties. A psychologist-consultant of the Department of Student Services provides psychological support to students in solving personal and study issues arising from studies, including personal (face to face) counseling and telephone counseling. Special events aimed at integrating domestic and international students are organized in cooperation with the ESN (Erasmus student network), thus introducing international students to Latvian culture and traditions and promoting international and domestic student interactions. (Meetings with representatives of the library, students, graduates, and teaching staff).

During the interviews, students showed that they are informed about different opportunities to receive support, but no one of them said that he or she has used any of these opportunities, for instance, service of Career support centre or service of psychological support, provided by Department of Students' services. Most students declare that for the solutions of the problems they get in touch with the Director of Studies' programmes and all issues are always solved.

The university has created conditions for students with special needs. Students with disabilities receive social support from the university. One of the strategic goals of the faculty is to cherish the dignity of a person, to foster community, respect, equity and social responsibility. This means that discrimination or intolerance is not acceptable among the Faculty members. The University creates an open and friendly environment for people with special needs as well as to all members of the community. There is special equipment for studies and for moving across the campus for the students with disabilities. (SER p. 59, p. 90, p.163; Meetings with UL Riga management representatives, students and teachers).

In cooperation with the association of persons with disabilities and their friends "Apeirons", an infrastructure assessment has been carried out regarding accessibility for people with special needs. The results obtained are taken into account both in the construction of the new infrastructure and in the development of the study programme provision. UL FSS has a lift and the infrastructure of the university is suitable for students with functional impairment (Meetings with representatives of library and students).

The evaluation report has mentioned that until now, there have been no students with special needs in the study field "Social Welfare" (SER 90). During the visits, experts repeatedly asked questions regarding the students with special needs – does the special support exist. Since LU informed that in the scope of studies there have not been students with special needs, it is not possible to assess this aspect. It was not mentioned that there has been any kind of policy or guidelines regarding students with special needs, pointing only to issues of availability of environment. It was observed during the visits, that the availability of the environment is not provided in all branches. In addition to creating an environment, it is necessary for the learner with special needs to adapt the learning material, e.g., to use audio recording of books for the visually impaired, translator for hearing disabilities students, to provide psychological counseling for learners with mental health problems, etc.

Within the faculty and regional branches, students have a wide range of academic support, which is fully in line with the needs of students.

During the meeting with the experts, the students stated that they communicate regularly with the branch managers and methodologists in the branches, if necessary, send questions and receive

answers. For example, there has been a need to help with changes in the volume of homework and submission deadlines, or to obtain course materials or to obtain information about university legislation, events, and so on. Help for students has been supportive and quick.

Also, during the meetings with the students, they confirmed that they have everything they need in the branches, including coffee rooms, the possibility to borrow books, and information on ongoing studies and events. If necessary, a solution to the students' problem is found immediately.

Within the framework of academic support, students are guaranteed with information and consultations on study-related matters throughout the study period by the study programme directors, study director, curators, administrative staff and study methodologists at the faculty and UL branches. The students attending the UL branches are provided with additional library support, especially in the stage of writing the diploma thesis.

The problem in supporting students is the limited number and size of scholarships, which is not in line with the needs of students in the entire higher education system in Latvia. This is especially true for part-time paid students. On the other hand, the student support that is provided under the auspices of the university is in line with the needs of students of the field. Here, the university can be more active in raising the needs of student support at the level of ministries (incl. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs).

LU has recognized the necessary support for the students and, according to their needs, the support system is established – academic, development of the career and psychological support. At the same time, it is definitely necessary to ensure that the career counseling service and other necessary services are as available in the branches as in Riga.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

The higher education institution has a good level structure and resources, including the financial resources for the development and implementation of the social welfare study field and social work study programmes. Good conditions for students and lecturers to work and study have been created, including the university infrastructure, library, study information system, etc.

The number of academic staff is sufficient for teaching social work at the university, but in the future the need for teachers will increase because the labour market demand for social workers is high. This offers the university the opportunity to expand the training of social workers at both the bachelor's and master's levels. The professionalism of the academic staff is of a high level and supports the possibility to increase the broad-based training of social workers, including in the regions.

Strengths:

1. The qualification of lecturers complies with the qualification requirements and international standards established in Latvia.
2. The learning environment, learning and teaching conditions are of a high standard and enable learners to achieve good learning outcomes. Library resources, a university information system, and support for students and faculty are available.
3. The higher education institution takes into account the needs of students when organizing studies and supporting students, and students evaluate this positively.

Weaknesses:

1. Students studying in Riga are in a privileged position because they can use all the services and support offered by the university. Students in the branches must have equal opportunities to receive the same quality of education and support system. Books and other study materials must also be available at the branches, including the necessary supplies to work on site, as students must be able to learn from real books. Which textbooks and tools are more specific is a matter of agreement and strategy that should be developed and followed with students.
2. A rather modest participation in conferences, seminars, courses, internships and mobility programmes, research traineeships and training, is observed in the last 7 years (see Annex 4 & Annex 9).

#### **4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation**

##### **Analysis**

Study field of social welfare meets the development objectives of the higher education institution, field of research and field of study and are important for the development of social welfare fields in society. The university has the principles of managing and financing research and the corresponding regulations for the implementation of activities and the achievement of results. UL in the field of study "Social Welfare" conducts scientific research in the real field "Sociology and Social Work" (5.4), mainly in the subfield "Organization of Social Policy and Social Work".

In the field of sociology and social work, the research strategy "Latvian University Research Programme 2015-2020" (approved by the Senate Resolution No. 268 of 25 January 2016) has four development directions: 1) development of scientific capacity and competitiveness; 2) compatibility of research with the needs of the economy and knowledge transfer; 3) human resource development; 4) promotion of international scientific cooperation. Even though a Development Plan is provided (Annex4), no strategy for the coming period was included in the SER.

It is not clear in the SER and in the meetings with the representatives of the UL management and lecturers, how are the results of research at the university level evaluated and measured? Who decides on the need for research and funding in the area of narrower topics? How are research results planned and measured?

The SER stated that the vision of the research group of the social sciences is to become competitive in the European Research Area, raising the profile of the UL research sector in the Baltics and globally and contributing to social and Latvian economic development (SER p. 91). It should be noted here that in order to follow this vision, the university needs well-planned metrics to guide research and development, implement activities and measure results.

The SER states that the mission of the research is to examine specific issues in the field of social sciences, issues of the Latvian economy and issues related to the priority of the UL in the direction "Public health, quality of life and national sustainability" (SER p. 92). At the same time, the connection between the mission and the field of welfare and social work curricula is not explained in more detail.

The UL has analysed the compliance of the research conducted in the field of "Social Welfare" with the development directions and goals of the Social Sciences and Law Group of the UL, and the goals of the activities are updated every year in order to achieve them (Table 17; meeting with teachers and administrators) and on this basis it can be said that the directions of teaching and research in the field of welfare correspond to the development goals of the higher education institution and are

relevant to the field of study and the respective industry.

The analysis also shows that research and development in the field of welfare takes place in a number of narrower areas, including social policy, social security, sociology, social law, social pedagogy, social work, etc. There is less focus on social work, which is directly related to study programmes. In the future, it is definitely necessary to analyse in more detail where the focus of the research field needs to be directed. How to involve more students in research, including doctoral and master's students? How to measure research results? What still needs to be developed to achieve the desired results, including the launch of a doctoral programme in the field of social welfare, social work or social policy.

The SER has described that linking scientific research with the study process has been implemented in several ways, for example collaboration between teachers and students in participating in research projects (Table 17); students are involved in research work during the development of term papers, bachelor's theses, and master's theses or in working in research projects when appropriate funding is available. Students are using research elements in internship courses and the teachers are using the results of their own and colleagues' research and knowledge to create and update the course content (SER p. 91).

Teachers and administrators of the field point out that the development of the study field significantly benefits from the professional development of the teaching staff, new knowledge created in research and international contacts established in the research process, linking research and studies, and promoting knowledge transfer (SER p. 72).

The SER has pointed out that in welfare study field linking scientific research with the study process corresponds to the practice accepted in the professional education of social work in the world and can be assessed as corresponding to the study field development goal - to become one of the leading social welfare study and research centres in Latvia and the Baltic states (SER p. 93). Meeting with UL Riga management representatives, study programme directors and teaching staff confirmed that they are ready to plan the concrete steps to achieve the goal of becoming one of the leading social welfare study and research centres in Latvia and the Baltic states.

The level of teaching of research is indicated by the dissertations and master's theses defended by students. Diploma papers sent to the evaluation committee "Difficulties of social workers in the development and implementation of social adjustment programmes for teenage behavior, necessary solutions" (2021), "Options for reducing the risks of dysfunction in single -parent families" (2021) and "Inter-institutional cooperation in social work for families with children in the social service" (2021) showed good student reading, as well as the ability to plan and conduct research.

Master's theses of students sent to the evaluation committee "NGO's resources in community social work, Jēkabpils example" (2014), „A Social Worker's Role to Mitigate the Effects of Violence Against Children” (2016) and "The Importance of the Assistants to Persons with Disabilities for Social Work in Ogre" (2016), etc. confirmed the students' very deep knowledge of specific areas of social work and proved their good level skills to plan, conduct research, analyze and present collected data.

The FSS academic staff and students have actively participated in international cooperation, attended international conferences in Latvia and abroad, built research cooperation in scientific projects and through experience exchange, have been involved in organizing international scientific events and in writing applications for international research projects. International cooperation has

been the benefit of the teaching staff and students of the study programmes, also social workers at practice institutions (SER p. 93).

Academic staff have a good network for widening the research contacts and get adequate feedback to their publications and confirm the competitiveness of Latvian scientists. The teaching staff is also actively involved in several research networks by organizing conferences, seminars and workshops, for example the European Sociological Association. Teaching staff also participates in the initiatives of the Anti-Poverty Network Latvia (EAPN Latvia), and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) events. In the future, the aim of research development is to become more actively involved in the study of social work in order to strengthen the study of narrower topics related to curricula (SER p. 93; Annex\_UL FSS Teaching Staff CV; Table 17).

The academic staff of the study programme has been an active leader in organizing several scientific conferences, for example in cooperation with the European Society for Social Drug Research (ESSD) and the Ministry of the Interior organized the 30th ESSD conference, the international conference "Riga Readings in Social Sciences" organized by UL FSS ASPRI, etc.

During the reporting period, five international research projects investigating social welfare issues have been carried out. The projects have supported the development of several narrower social work topics, including the project "Probation Observatory. Networking and Training" (EU EC Justice Program, 2017-2021), two international projects related to youth research ("Regional Youth Study in the Baltic States" and "KNOW and DO." Agency for International Programs for Youth), as well as research on the activities of older people. related to the EU 7th Framework Program project "Social Innovation for Active and Healthy Aging for Sustainable Growth (SIforAGE)" (SER p. 94; Annex Annex\_UL FSS Teaching Staff CV; Table 17).

The evaluation report emphasizes good co-operation in participating in the Nordic-Baltic Network of Doctoral Students in Social Work (NBSW). The participation of teachers in research shows a wide reach, but if they want to move towards their ambitious goal, it is clear that the team is too small to reach everything. We acknowledge the plan for the future of research in the field of welfare to strengthen cooperation with professors and leading researchers participating in the Nordic and Baltic schools and with international social work organizations.

Table 10. Implementation of "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG) at the University of Latvia provides an overview of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance that are followed. This table does not set out the criteria for evaluating the results achieved at the level of both the individual and the field of study. This table needs to be further developed in order to accurately measure the results of the research.

Academic staff of the study field "Social Welfare" has increased its research activities, including publishing, applying for research funding and participating in research projects. Scientific articles have been developed in periodicals and collections of articles, departmental collective monographs, publications in conference proceedings, etc., including 9 articles indexed in the Web of Science and SCOPUS databases (Annex 9; Annex Annex\_UL FSS Teaching Staff CV; Table 17).

Characterizing the involvement in projects, the teaching staff of the study field "Social Welfare" in the reporting period implemented 4 projects of national importance, 5 international research projects, several contract works, included development of a social work terminology dictionary, and two ESF projects in the sphere of social pedagogy. Professionals in the field of study involved in social work programmes have carried out a number of applied research projects in the spheres of

access to social services, violence against children, childcare outside the family, and criminal justice. All the above activities have enriched the study activities in the study programme of the field and developed the academic professionalism of the lecturers.

The University has developed creative solutions to attract new financial resources (SER p. 4), which examples can be found in the various projects carried out by the faculty (Table 17). As project-based funding for research is inherently uneven and related to funding programme opportunities and competition in the educational landscape, it is essential for the university to develop a system of funding and procedures to fund welfare research to ensure the sustainability of social work curricula. With regard to project-based research and development funding, the university needs to ensure that the workload of teachers is balanced between teaching and research in order to ensure the sustainable development of the teaching team in the long term.

Professors in the field have been active leaders in research, including publishing. The narrower topics of the research are diverse, including publications in conference proceedings dedicated to issues such as poverty reduction, housing deprivation, care for seniors in long-term care institutions, and others. The range of topics covered in the collective monographs and in the international publications in books is even wider, including the topics of sustainable development and social innovations, measuring social development, theories of social work, intergenerational solidarity in community practice, social casework, social work practice, etc. On the one hand, publication on many topics related to society and the social sphere is necessary and good, but on the other hand, it does not allow the direction to focus deeply on specific topics in order to move towards the set goal - to do research excellence and set up a research center (Annex Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CV; Table 17).

Research in the field of social work methodology, which focuses on the development of several social work methodologies, is also worth highlighting, as they are necessary for the development of social work practice and can be used directly by students in teaching. For example, project "Application of self-assessment methodology of social service providers in practice", 2019 and project "Methodology and practice of modular education programme development", 2020.

The lecturers of the field also have experience in developing and publishing research in interdisciplinary teams. In many cases, the publications of the professionals involved in the study work do not correspond to the fields of sociology and social work, but instead to the fields of law, psychology, psychiatry, management science or other related fields (SER p. 95; Annex Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CV; Table 17). Both bachelor's and master's students benefit from scientific research and international cooperation.

The SER mentions that at present, the core of the study field's academic staff is now actively involved in the scientific research activities, but in the next reporting period, it is planned to purposefully develop and expand the involvement of lecturers in research, especially those, who so far have not continuously engaged in research. It is also planned to promote experience exchange mobility and cooperation for attracting international projects (SER p. 96). The above lines of action have also been approved by lecturers and representatives of the administration at a meeting with experts.

The SER describes that students are involved in research in a number of ways. As participants in research, they have the opportunity to participate in research, assistantships and fieldwork (such as interviews) conducted by academic staff in the field. At the same time, students can be involved in research projects (e.g. the SUSTINNO project "The Social Dimension of Sustainability and Social



Innovation") during their research, including bachelor's and master's theses, which support them in writing their dissertations or writing their studies. For example a graduate of the master's programme, used this opportunity to prepare an article "The use of genograms study method in social work with families with children" and to publish it in the Ministry of Welfare periodical "Social work in Latvia" ("Social Work in Latvia"), No. 2 / 2017 article (eg Liene Pike) SER p. 97.

In order to develop the specialty of social work, it is important to involve students in various research and development projects, and the study field of welfare has set this as the goal for the next period. In the meetings with the students, the students confirmed their readiness to participate in joint research and development projects with the lecturers.

The self-assessment report states that updated product innovations, process innovations and organizational innovations will be implemented in the field of study "Social Welfare". Examples of product innovation are the development of new teaching materials or new subject courses according to the demands of the labour market (courses "Family as a system", "Violence in social work", "Social entrepreneurship") An example of process innovation is the renewal of the organization of the learning process, including new interactive solutions of the e-learning platform (MOODLE) - tasks, tests, a forum or the development of study trips that broaden students' understanding of social work experience. An example of organizational innovation is the improvement of the programme management model, which changed the work of study programmes' councils by creating study field councils and thus a broader interdisciplinary scope for planning and managing activities. To the question: how innovations in learning processes have broadened the content of social work learning, teachers and students answered that the changes have been innovative and rewarding, broadened the content of social work learning and meet the latest trends and requirements of the European Higher Education Area (Meetings with teaching staff, graduates and students).

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

### **Conclusions.**

The teachers of the field are active in research and development and contribute to the development of the field of social welfare both domestically and internationally through publication and participation in various professional networks. Research is the basis for the development and teaching of social work curricula. Students acquire good knowledge and skills to conduct research during their studies.

### **Strengths:**

1. Long-term research and development experience of the academic staff.
2. A high level of engagement, detected during the meetings with the academic staff, in attaining research objectives (i.e. becoming a leading research centre in the Baltics).
3. Participation of the academic team in international networking.
4. Positive attitude of students to cooperation with lecturers in research and development.

### **Weaknesses:**

1. There are no indicators for measuring the effectiveness of research and development at the level of the study field. If the system for measuring research and development results is not accurate, a situation may arise where some do more and others do less and this does not motivate the team as a whole to move towards better results.
2. Research is fragmented in different directions (sociology, social policy, social protection, probation, social pedagogy, social work, etc.) and there is a risk of blurring the focus of social work

and welfare. The university does not allocate resources (incl. people and finances) for the development of research on all topics.

3. Record of publication and conference participation suggest a rather moderate success of the group (considering 7 years reporting period).

4. A system of internal funding and procedures for funding welfare research to ensure the sustainability of social work curricula is missing.

5. Limited financial resources for the development of research do not make it possible to plan and carry out research in the field of welfare in all the necessary directions. The risk of project-based funding is to fragment the field and make the profession dependent on funding programmes.

## **5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

In the SER (98 p.) it is stated that the study field “Social Welfare” has a diverse network of partners at national level - policy makers, employers, local governments, non-governmental organizations in the field, universities/colleges.

The SER provides several examples and actions, which show the wide range of LU cooperation with different cooperation partners – policy makers, including the institution responsible for the industry – Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, municipalities, which are the main employers for social workers, social services and different providers of social services, professional organizations, including international, State Probation service. Representatives of the Ministry of Welfare together with employers have been involved in advocacy of students’ practices and advocacy of graduation works. For the promotion of cooperation, especially in regions, collaboration agreements have been signed, as well collaboration agreements are being signed with institutions which ensure the practices for studies. SER shows that also the formal cooperation agreement is signed regarding teaching staff practices in the industry’s companies (SER p.94).

During expert team visits at UL several meetings were organized to give insight in this network. Expert team met a number of employers both from regions (representatives of municipalities and employers illustrating a diverse spectrum of municipalities: Bauska municipality, Kuldīga municipality, Tukums municipality, etc.) and the Ministry of Welfare. It was possible to gain employers' views on cooperation experience with representatives of the study field “Social Welfare”. There is also good cooperation with institutions in Riga for the provision of internships in study programmes both at bachelor and master levels.

Within the study field “Social Welfare” strong cooperation has been observed between branches of UL and municipalities where they have developed a wide range of networks for internships. UL points out that the head of LU Regional centre and heads of branches play a significant role when it comes to cooperation with employers (SER p. 94). During the visits, heads of the branches also pointed out that they do many activities to promote work of branches and to create cooperation with employers. For the creation of cooperation personal contacts with employers are very important, as well the contacts with former students have been maintained. During the visits there was an impression that branches need to establish much more purposeful cooperation with the employers, for instance, it is important to sign cooperation agreements not only with municipalities, but also with every separate employer (social service, institutions of long-term social care and social rehabilitation, centre of social rehabilitation etc.) in order to specify cooperation both to bachelor’s and master’s studies – development of practice and improvement of study programmes in accordance with requirements of trade market, creation of comprehension of social services providers regarding global development of the profession of social work.

Another example on how cooperation is developed is that representation from the Ministry of Welfare, which is the director of the Methodological Management and Control Department of the Ministry of Welfare, has been involved in the final commission of the master's study programme.

Several programme lecturers regularly cooperate with the Ministry of Welfare in various working groups (in connection with social policy issues, development of social services, development of social work as a profession).

Cooperation with non-governmental organizations is also essential - Latvian Social Workers Association (LSWA) or the Latvian Association of Municipality Social Service Leaders, and with NGOs providing social services (such as the foundation "Sociālo pakalpojumu aģentūra" ("Social Service Agency"), association "Resiliency centres" ("Resilience Centre"), and NGOs representing the interests of vulnerable social groups (such as "Cerību spārni" ("Wings of Hope"), "Apeirons" ("Apeiron"), and others). None of the institution representatives participated in the meetings during expert visitations but there are documents provided with the data which shows that students choose NGO's as their internship places.

Cooperation among universities in Latvia takes place and it is identifiable (in the frame of projects and research), in turn to discuss education institutions' strong points, future development expectations and universities' specialization in the industry, the dialog has been established. UL has pointed out that the further cooperation must intensify in the directions of strategic planning and internationalization. Group of experts agrees with that. In experts' opinion cooperation has to be planned also with the universities of other industries or other study directions - architecture, construction, IT, in order to mutually supplement knowledge about the universal design, housing adjustment, usage of welfare technologies in practice etc.

Cooperation is created also with several foreign universities, for instance, in the frame of Erasmus programme (Annex 12), informal cooperation is also being established. Within the framework of external cooperation, the guest- lectures are successfully attracted - expert of community's social work and social planning and expert in the field of homelessness.

Despite a number of Erasmus+ mobility agreements (with Tallinn University, Vytautas Magnus University, Ghent University, University of Tampere, Istanbul University and others) targeted for student and teachers' mobility, participation of students' mobility is very low. Only one student from the bachelor study programme has participated in Erasmus+ mobility. During meetings with students several reasons on why students do not participate in mobility programmes were identified: difficulties to prognose future due to Covid-19, students prefer to have face-to-face experience in a chosen country, students are working and having family which restricts their participation abilities. No incoming students were identified.

Teachers' participation in mobility is more active, every semester since 2013/2014 one or two lecturers have participated in mobility by going to some institution. In one case University of Latvia was a host institution for teachers' mobility in 2016/2017 (as shown in Annex Mobility of lecturers and academic staff) although in the Self-evaluation report two examples of incoming lecturers were mentioned (SER p 88., p 100.).

However, for the moment, the UL did not seem to benefit from the participation in the FORTHEM consortium in what concerns the Social Welfare domain.

University of Latvia is very active by becoming a member of several international organizations

related to social welfare and research: European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW).

In the Study Field Development Plan several objectives related to cooperation and internationalization (Annex 4.) for the next reference period were identified: 1) increasing student and teaching staff mobility; 2) to develop international cooperation for the enhancement of study programmes and content quality by attracting foreign lecturers and developing cooperation network with leading EU universities in social work education.

Essential objective related to internationalisation is specified in the Study Field Development Plan, which is the development of an international joint degree master's study programme. Important to mention that in previous evaluation one of the expert team recommendations was to consider good mobility indicators, to develop joint programmes (Annex 4. "Study Field Development Plan").

During an expert team meeting with UL Riga management representatives, when talking about possibilities to develop a joint study programme, representatives stated that there is no interest from students to enroll in such a programme. Also, it was mentioned that by using interpersonal contacts partnership was discussed but did not develop further. As representatives mentioned, internationalization happens through libraries and literature, where involvement of international knowledge, research, methodology is necessary. Much less by internationalization through programme realisation.

In UL Development Strategy for 2016-2020 internationalization of education is one of the aims. Another aim is to develop international study programmes.

Overall impression of the developed networks represents meaningful contribution to study field aims and results although improvements should be made.

The most important tool for the involvement of foreign students in the study field "Social Welfare" is Erasmus exchange opportunities and various additional funds (DAAD funding for exchanges with Germany, Norwegian financial instruments for exchanges with Scandinavian countries, etc.).

As stated in the SER (p. 100): The internationalization of studies has been significantly facilitated by the UL project SO.8.2.2, which has enabled involvement of two foreign guest lecturers from Germany in the study process – expert on community social work and social planning and expert on issues of homelessness. The German tradition of social work is one of the historically oldest and strongest, Germany also upholds long-standing, strong traditions in social work education.

Important to note that the project realization term is 01.10.2018.–30.09.2022. which means that new instruments on attracting teaching staff will be needed.

Erasmus+ mobility agreements aim to give an opportunity to students to come to study at the University of Latvia. No lecture plans were provided for incoming students but in the Study Field Development Plan one of the objectives to be achieved is to raise the number of incoming students.

In SWOT analysis of the study field the following opportunity is mentioned: development of study content in English and attraction of foreign students to the study programmes of the study field "Social Welfare" at the University of Latvia.

As restrictive aspect of attraction of international students as mentioned in Self-evaluation report is that studies are conducted in the state language, their organization is different from most programmes implemented by the UL (master's programme on Fridays and Saturdays, bachelor's programme in branches, and conducted in Riga only from the academic year 2020/2021). It is important to note that authors of the report mention that during the reporting period due to different reasons the main focus was on quality assurance and improvement, resumption of study work in the professional bachelor's study programme, which were reintroduced after several years of not admitting students at bachelor level studies.

UL Development Strategy for 2016-2020 stipulates the advancement of the academic staff professional development system. In Strategy 2027, the growth of academic staff is stated in the aim "Development and Excellence oriented personnel policy".

The professional development of the UL academic staff is organized in accordance with the Republic of Latvia Cabinet Regulation No. 569 of 11.09.2018 – Regulation on Requirements for Necessary Education and Professional Qualification, and Procedure of Continuing Professional Development of Educators.

The Department of Studies of the UL and the Adult Education Centre of the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art of the UL provide informative, consultative and methodological support to the UL academic staff in the higher education didactics. The Adult Education Centre of the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art of the University of Latvia offers a vocational development programme "Didactics of Higher Education: modern theories and practices", as well as continuing education programmes "Pedagogical aspects of the development of study programmes in higher education", "The professional development of the competence of the student trustee", etc. Coordinator of the UL study field "Social Welfare" and programme directors benefitted from the mastering university didactics courses.

Particularly actively the professional development opportunities have been used under the auspices of the European Social Fund support instrument specific objective 8.2.2. "Strengthening Academic Staff of Institutions of Higher Education in Strategic Specialization Areas", project No. 8.2.2.0/18/A/010 "Academic Staff Renewal and Continuing Professional Development at the University of Latvia" (hereinafter – SO 8.2.2). The opportunity offered by SO 8.2.2 of a traineeships in a company representing the sector has been used by several academic staff members (SER p. 85). One lecturer receives the support of a doctoral student within the framework of this project for the purposes of updating the studies in accordance with research interests, taking into account the latest theoretical findings (SER p. 86).

The lecturers involved in implementation of the study programme also use other professional development courses according to their professional interests.

The organization of the studies practice is clearly declared by the UL documentation, but the attention must be paid to increase cooperation agreements with practice places and also it has to be taken into the account that during the visits the students expressed that there were difficulties for several of them to find the place of practice and as the result – the students had to undergo practice in his/her present place of employment, although in different structural unit.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

UL has developed broad networks both at national and international level by becoming a member of several international organizations, developing cooperation with municipalities to strengthen

internship opportunities for students, and participating in Erasmus+ mobility. UL has implemented a project to attract international lecturers. Traineeship for staff was provided.

#### Strengths:

1. Broad cooperation network at national level – with employers, policy makers (incl. Ministry of Welfare), municipalities (incl. regions), non-governmental organizations, universities.
2. Teaching staff actively participate in projects, take part in development of policy documents, professional organizations.
3. A wide range and close cooperation in the internship field. Cooperation networks serve as a platform for students in finding their internships at national level.
4. Have several Erasmus+ cooperation agreements to allow to implement outgoing and ingoing mobility activities.

#### Weaknesses:

1. A small number of foreign guest lectures.
2. Lack of strategy in attracting more students in Riga faculty.
3. In the Study Field Development Plan there is a plan to raise the amount of mobility for outgoing and incoming both student and lecturers, but it is not clear how this aim will be achieved, especially for student mobility.
4. Small number of both incoming and outgoing mobilities (both of staff and students).
5. Attention must be paid to increase cooperation agreements with practice places and also it has to be taken into the account that during the visits the students expressed that there were difficulties for several of them to find the place of practice.

## **6. Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures**

### **Analysis**

During the previous reporting period, UL had received 3 long -term recommendations that have to be taken into consideration for the purpose of improvement of the quality and reachability of the study programmes and the study field as a whole. First recommendation was regarding the availability of information on social work in general and on social work study programmes in particular, including on the home page of the faculty. For that purpose, the university has managed to improve the homepage ( link to the homepage with the information of the branches and study programme:

<https://www.lu.lv/en/studies/faculties/faculty-of-social-sciences/undergraduate-studies/social-work-in-riga-and-ul-branches> and has brought awareness of the study possibilities through help of the teaching staff who have publications, participate in seminars domestically and regionally that brings attention as well as renewed and extended UL website which includes all the necessary information for potential students and people of interest in the study field. For example, when visiting the website, you can find all the necessary information regarding study fees, amount of budget places, study duration, study courses that have to be acquired and other relevant information of interest. Second long - term recommendation received addressed mutual cooperation between teachers involved in the study programme in achieving the results of studies on the programme, meaning that the teaching staff has to be more involved in these activities. For that reason, joint meetings have been introduced among teaching staff having discussions on topical questions in place as for example, the plan of how to implement study process during the next semester and how to collaborate within the course. Due to Covid -19 pandemic, these sorts of meetings are being organized and done remotely through the online platform MsTeams. Third long - term recommendation was regarding restoration of descriptions of study courses until the beginning of

the implementation of the relevant study courses. As found out by experts during the visit, it has been done successfully and it can be seen in the UL Information System where these descriptions are updated when the relevant course has been started.

Important and relevant aspect to note is that during the reporting period some significant changes have been made within the professional bachelor study programme: 1. UL branches were added in 2018 as places for part-time studies. 2. Transformation of the two-year professional postgraduate programme into a master's study programme.

What regards other recommendations that the university had received during the previous accreditation process, they are concerning mobility, internationalization and qualification of lecturers.

UL has taken into consideration and solved the issue which addresses the increase of qualification of lecturers with an increase of the number and proportion of doctoral degree holders involved in the implementation of programmes as well as increased the number of high-level scientific publications and involvement and intensively participating of lecturers in international and national-level conferences. It also can be noted that there has been a significant increase observed in research funding, which has been attracted for research capacity building which is considered as a positive indicator. The only recommendation that has not fully been able to improve is the low number of both student and teaching staff participating in mobility programmes and gaining international experience abroad. As it has been found out during the experts visit, it is being influenced by various factors that currently are related to Covid-19 pandemic situation as well as personal reasons as family and full-time jobs here in Latvia, especially of master students.

Overall, recommendations made by previous accreditation have been taken into account and been tried to be implemented in full. There is only one recommendation that has been implemented partly which is the mobility question. It has also been indicated within SAR p.103 that the UL is struggling with this question of matter. It can be said that it is a question that can be tried to be dealt with in the future trying to apply various approaches such as offering mobility internships or short - term study exchanges during summer period.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

Overall, the university has taken into account recommendations advised by the previous accreditation expert group. They have worked on finding suitable solutions for the existing shortcomings and they have done it successfully, except one recommendation which was tried to be implemented but it was done partly.

Strengths:

1. The qualification of teaching staff is being improved.
2. The university has improved and updated its homepage with the relevant information.
3. Awareness has been brought about the study programmes and study field.
4. There has been a significant increase in research funding.
5. Almost all of the recommendations have been implemented.

Weaknesses:

1. Still low involvement and participating in mobility programmes of teaching staff and students.

## 7. Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

- 1 R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The UL has established a quality policy and a quality system: a) committees (e.g., Study Program Quality Assessment Commission/Board; Qualitative Consultative Committee– see p.13 of the SER and 1.2\_UL\_Organizational chart ENG) b) regulations and procedures (see Annex 3 for a list). A chart illustrating the system of quality assessment and improvement of study fields and programs is presented on p. 22 of the SER (see. Fig. 6 in SER).

- 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

A Quality Policy has been enforced starting with the 27.01.2020 (replacing the previous one (approved on 30.10.2012). An annex to the Quality Policy entitled Quality Action Policy (QAP) was approved on 06.02.2020.

The system of quality assessment is clearly represented.

Data are collected on at least once a year are used for revising & developing study programmes. Additional information available in chapter Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System.

- 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

Constitution of the UL mentions responsibilities for programme's development at various organizational levels, and the Regulations on University of Latvia study and continuing education programmes (approved on 24.04.2017, amended on 28.10.2019) mentioning mechanism of development and review of programmes (see ch. XIII, XVI), two procedures/regulations addressing this criterion exist: Regulations on the University of Latvia Study Field Management and The Procedure for the Organisation of Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the University of Latvia. (See SER p.62-63 for a short description regarding the documents mentioned above).

The existing quality assurance system is contributing to the achievement of the aims, learning outcomes, and to the improvement and development of the study programmes. Programmes are developed and implemented in response to the demand in labour market.

Additional information available in chapter Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System.

- 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 made public.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Procedure for organization of examinations of study courses at the University of Latvia approved on 29.06.2015, – available in English at

[https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN /3/nr\\_211\\_parbaudijumu\\_organizesana\\_eng.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN /3/nr_211_parbaudijumu_organizesana_eng.pdf)

The higher education institution has established a system and implemented procedures for the



evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students, and these procedures are logical and efficient.

Additional information available in chapter Management of the Study Field.

- 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

The recruitment and selection of academic staff are regulated by the Regulatory enactments on academic and administrative positions at the University of Latvia and are available for all on the website ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/ Dokumenti\\_EN /5/ nr\\_153\\_akad\\_visp\\_amatu\\_nolikums\\_eng.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/ Dokumenti_EN /5/ nr_153_akad_visp_amatu_nolikums_eng.pdf)); SER p. 84.; Annex 15

- 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:** Fully compliant

UL collects and analyses information on the SW study field and programmes and uses it for improvement & development. SER describes at pp. 67-70 the categories of data collected; The Procedure for the Organisation of Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the University of Latvia.

- 7 1.6. The higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their quality assurance systems.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

A Study Field Development Plan exists (Annex 4).

The results of the study field and study programmes are evaluated by the Study Programme Quality Assessment Board, which includes representatives of the university management, heads of structural units, Internal Auditor, Head of Quality, representative of the Department of Science, representative of the UL Library and a representative delegated by the Student Council and a representative delegated by the UL Alumni Club.

- 8 R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

SER pp. 94- 98, Annex 12; SER p. 100

UL has developed a broad cooperation network at national level – with employers, policy makers (incl. Ministry of Welfare), municipalities (incl. regions), non-governmental organizations, universities and international level (Erasmus+ cooperation agreements, implemented projects). UL also has established a wide range and close cooperation in the internship field.

- 9 R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Annex 9; Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CV (1).pdf

As strengths can be mentioned: long-term research and development experience of the academic staff; a high level of engagement in attaining research objectives (i.e. becoming a

leading research centre in the Baltics); students cooperation with lecturers in research and development.

- 10 R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Annex 15. Implementation of recommendations (LABOTS).docx

The qualification of teaching staff is being improved. Awareness has been brought about the study programmes and study field.

The university has improved and updated its homepage with the relevant information. There has been a significant increase in research funding. Almost all of the recommendations have been implemented.

## 8. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

Add results and milestones to Quality Action Plan.

Clarify the fuzziness in what concerns responsibilities and communication regarding quality assessment between study programme director and study field director.

We recommend members of the study field council to reflect over the actual possibility to quantitatively measure identified indicators in the Study Field Development Plan (i.e., harmonization & update of learning outcomes, update of study courses).

Expert team recommends strengthening and extending cooperation among study field council and staff members but also to increase the visibility of this structure for all the other stakeholders.

Providing scholarships to teachers to engage in research or be involved in education.

### Long-term recommendations

To achieve the goal of becoming a leading research centre in Latvia and the Baltics in the field of social welfare, it is necessary, on the one hand to plan activities boldly but, at the same time, realistic considering the achievements of the last 7 years (see Annex 4) and, on the other hand, more precisely (e.g. to create a set of criteria to measure the progress comparatively with the other HEIs in the region; to launch doctoral studies in the field, etc.).

Develop the existing regulations and procedures so that the mechanisms of data collections (other than survey data) are identified and types of data are specified.

Develop the document to include the description and means of implementing the feedback mechanisms to students, graduates and employers.

Enforcing a system of internal funding of research on a competitive basis.

It is necessary to develop a system for measuring research and development results. There are currently no indicators to measure research and development performance at the field level.

Books and other study materials must also be available at the branches, including the necessary supplies to work on site, as students must be able to learn from real books. Which textbooks and tools are more specific is a matter of agreement and strategy that should be developed and followed by students.

To substantially increase the quality (in terms of international visibility) and number of publications.

To develop concrete measures and to implement them in order to increase the incoming and outgoing mobilities of staff and students.

Development and implementation of a doctoral study programme in social work.

To assess environment accessibility in the branches and develop a plan to address the shortcomings so that in the future it would be possible to attract both the students and the teaching staff with disabilities.

## **II. "Social Work" ASSESSMENT**

### **II. "Social Work" ASSESSMENT**

#### **1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme**

##### **Analysis**

Name of the study programme is "Social Work". After graduation students receive the 2nd level professional higher education, professional bachelor's degree in social work and fifth level professional qualification "Social Worker". It is possible to study full-time and part-time. Part-time studies are offered in several branches: Alūksne, Bauska, Cēsis, Jēkabpils, Kuldīga, Madona, Tukums and also in Riga.

Statistics and different analyses show that in Latvia there has been a growing demand for qualified social workers in the labor market (SER pp. 31-32). The need for social workers was also emphasized at the meetings with employers and local municipalities representatives.

The programme's objectives and intended learning outcomes of this study field are well defined, clear, complement each other and are publicly accessible. The programme aims and expected learning outcomes are published and periodically updated in the UL Information System LUIS and on the FSS website (SER p 60; p. 89; Meetings with students and administrative staff).

The goal, tasks, and results of the study programme, as well as the admission requirements are interrelated. The objectives and intended learning outcomes of the study programmes correspond to the type of studies and the level of qualifications. The aims of the programmes and the learning outcomes correspond to the international and national requirements regarding the type and level of studies: Bologna process documents, European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 6 (BA programme), as well as the fifth level professional qualification (NQF) and the second level professional higher education in social work (SER p. 32, p. 53; p 116 Descriptions of study courses of the professional bachelor's study programmes "Social work"; Annex "Professional bachelor's study programme" Mapping of the learning outcomes of the respective study programme and study courses"). The study programme's aims and learning outcomes comply with international and national professional values, objectives and requirements and reflects demanded competences for social workers which are stated in the professional standard of social worker. This includes the International Definition of Social Work as well as the national Law on Social Services and Social

Assistance (SER p. 29, 30, 155).

The programme's aims and learning outcomes match the state, public and laboratory market needs, academic and professional requirements. In the BA study programme are educated highly qualified social workers for employment in the state, local government, non-governmental and private sectors. (SER, p. 150; Meetings with graduates, employers and representatives of municipalities). The university has not collected more detailed data on graduates' employment and post-university activities, and experts recommend that they do it in the future. Cooperation with graduates is very important for the development of study programmes.

The length of the programme for full-time studies is 4 years and 4,5 years for part-time studies, 160CP. The study programme is implemented in Latvian. After completion of bachelor studies students can enroll in master's programme.

The requirements to be fulfilled for persons who plan to study social work are (for those who have acquired secondary education since 2004): 1) Centralized examination (CE) in Latvian; 2) CE in English or CE in French or CE in German; 3) CE in mathematics. For persons who have completed secondary education before 2008, the centralized examination in mathematics may be replaced by the annual grade in mathematics (or the average grade in algebra and geometry) of the secondary education document.

There are two options for the calculation of the admission scores (scores range from 0 to 1000). The initial ranking takes place after the ranking of CE or annual average marks (formulas were provided).

Admission requirements are in accordance with state regulations and to those who are highly motivated to study social work, an opportunity to collect additional points for the enrolment in the study programme exists.

UL organizes "School of Young Social Workers" (implemented since 2021) in order to attract potential interests in social work studies. Those who are awarded as winners of the 1st to the 3rd may receive additional points during (1st place winners receive 100 points, 2nd place winners 75 points, 3rd place winners 50 points). Another way to get additional points are those who are awarded to the 1st place winners of the pupils' research competition in sociology organized by the UL FSS.

In 2021, 24 people applied for "School of Young Social Workers".

However, during the meeting with the programme director no cases when students would be enrolled with additional points were identified.

As stated in the SER, full time studies are mostly chosen after secondary education graduation. Examples during meetings with students from branches allows to conclude that in part-time studies enrol students who are currently working.

Those students who are admitted in the later stages of studies undergo the procedure of study course recognition. From additional information provided by UL it was explained that: "In 2011 the former director of PBSP "Social work" at UL and the former director of college level programmes worked together on content of both programmes taking into account the option of study continuation. There is no official agreement about that process, it was a non-formal activity. Obligatory part (A) was recognized in cases if study course content matched. Obligatory choice part

(B) is possible to be recognized more freely, but only courses relevant to the social work profession were recognized.”

During a meeting with students one student shared her story that she started her studies at UL in the 3rd study year. At the beginning there were some problems with the equation of the study courses which were successfully resolved.

Responding to the labor market needs for qualified social workers, UL since spring 2019 reintroduced bachelor's study programmes and enrolled 11 students to the Alūksne branch and 7 students to the Cēsis branch in the later stages of studies following another admission in the same year in the autumn.

The number of admitted students (in Riga full-time studies and in part-time studies in branches: Alūksne, Cēsis and Kuldīga) could be seen in a table describing “Statistics on students in the reporting period”. Overall tendency is that the number of enrolled students is growing.

Students in Riga were admitted in the 1st study year (both in 2020 and in 2021); students in branches were admitted in later study years and in the 1st study year.

Important to mention that in the academic year 2020/2021, 18 students have been admitted to full-time studies within the framework of the state budget and the UL FSS budget. Studies in part-time programme are financed by students, there is no funding from university/state to support their studies. During meetings with employers and students there were raised questions whether students had any negotiations with their employers (if working in the social welfare field) if they could receive any financial support to fund their studies, however no such cases were identified. Although students admitted that this question will allow them to reflect on such a possibility. Another view by the student was that the study cost per month, which is 150 Euros, is not that high that she would have problems to cover it.

During the meeting with the representatives of employers from various municipalities it was identified that some employers have already started to introduce or develop different support mechanisms for students.

One of the representatives mentioned that at the current moment they have a support system for doctors - they provide support for place of residence and scholarship but not for social workers.

In Ventspils municipality the support can be granted when a student is coming for an internship when the employer can provide the vacancy and student can try social work as a job, then during internship student would be paid as an employee.

Another example comes from Tukums municipality where in the development plan the scholarship is included as a support mechanism, but no finances have been granted yet.

Kuldīgas municipality has a support system where last year students can apply for scholarships and after graduation they would need to work at this municipality for a particular time. As stated by Kuldīgas municipality representative, no candidates submitted their application this year.

Madonas municipality is also planning support scholarships. Cēsis municipality expressed its commitment to evaluate the possibility of covering tuition fees.

The motivation for the representatives of the municipalities who are local policy makers and also for employers to work on such support mechanisms is an urgent need to attract social workers to their municipalities. As employers and representatives of municipalities admitted there are already several vacant places for social workers: Kuldīga municipality – 2 vacancies at the moment and in the next 5 years another 8 vacancies; Bauska municipality – 6 vacancies and in near future another 2, Tukums municipality – 3 vacancies at the moment and another 3 in near future.

The information provided on the website of the Welfare Department of the Riga City Council (23.12.21.) indicates that the local government is looking for 10 employees where education of a social worker is required.

Examining drop-out rate it is visible that both in full-time studies and part-time studies there are dropouts. As stated in the SER (p. 155): The main reasons for dropping out are the discrepancy of the study programme with the student's idea of the tasks, responsibilities and specifics of the social work profession, as well as various personal reasons, most frequently – difficulties in combining studies and work. It should be taken into account that sometimes the dropout rate is also formed by those students who do not participate in the study process from the very beginning (sometimes students have concluded an agreement with the University of Latvia in the summer, but failed to turn up for lectures in September).

As the study programme is reintroduced in 2019 it is controversial to reflect on tendencies because students stop their studies. It is also not possible to reflect whether Covid-19 impacts dropout rate.

One of the mechanisms which students can use if they face a different range of issues is to use the support system UL has developed. Such services include psychological support, career counselling, etc. No cases when students would use these support mechanisms were discovered, in one case a student mentioned that she thought about the possibility of writing to a psychologist but in the end she did not do that.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

Study programme in UL is reintroduced in 2019 by responding to high demand in the labor market for social workers. Students have demonstrated satisfaction with their studies both in Riga and branches. Study programme allows to enroll both graduates after secondary schools as well as those who want to continue their education after graduating 1st level of higher education institutions. Branches have an important role in implementation of the study programme at regional level.

Strengths:

1. Study programme allows students to enter a study programme at different stages: after secondary school graduation or also after graduating from a 1st higher level education institution.
2. Most motivated students can successfully finish “School of Young Social Workers” to gain additional points which will be considered during enrolment.
3. By graduating from a study programme professional qualification can be achieved.

Weaknesses:

1. The length of the programme in months is shown wrong (technical issue).
2. Although there is a high demand for the social workers in the municipalities it is not clear how it could serve as a guarantee for branches that students will be enrolled in the programme.
3. UL does not collect detailed data on graduates' jobs and post-university activities.

## 2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

Study courses are structured in compliance with social workers' professional standard which was approved in autumn 2020. Content of the study programme corresponds to international tendencies by implementing the document "Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training" (SER p. 160).

The courses of the professional bachelor's study programme "Social Work" have been reviewed and approved in 2021, the descriptions (study course annotation and description of study results) provide a clear idea of the skills and knowledge that are planned to be acquired.

As shown in Annex "Compliance of the qualification obtained in the study programme with the occupational standard" the updated standard is structured in three levels of social work practice: 1) client work in micro-practice; 2) community organization and development work in meso-practice; 3) analysis and implementation of social policy in macro-practice. The study courses of the bachelor's programme "Social Work" are developed in accordance with the skills, knowledge and competencies defined in the occupational standard.

UL has provided structured overview on study courses' compliance with defined skills, knowledge and competencies in professional standard. In addition, Annex "The study courses of the Bachelor's programme "Social Work" are developed in accordance with the skills, knowledge and competencies defined in the occupational standard" provides more detailed insight on how each study course is related to professional standards by defining knowledge, skills and competencies. Each of the study course average meets 3-5 criteria in the standard.

Study courses are divided in three parts: 1) A group study courses which are study courses of a wide variety of social sciences subjects in addition to major field of study content and study courses of the study field; 2) B group study courses which are study courses of the study field and 3) C group study courses which are free electives (SER p. 162).

During meetings with students, it was clear that they know where to find descriptions of the study courses, what are the requirements and what evaluation methods will be used.

When students were asked how do they evaluate how and what study objectives they achieved, students mentioned several examples: found practical use in work of theoretical knowledge, when a student understood literature better and gained understanding on what happens around was a sign that she gained knowledge, could use new techniques at work. Students' conclusions that they can use gained knowledge in the practice is a sign of teaching skills and knowledge demanded in the labor market.

Literature in many study courses is one or two decades old. During meeting with academic staff, it was stated that it is possible with a high flexibility option to gain needed books for the study courses and academic staff actively use this opportunity. There are few books (valuing general situation) published in 2019 and 2020 but with a statement that academic staff regularly updates lists of the literature with the provision that it does not match. Also, electronic databases are a good resource to update the list of the literature in accordance with changes in the profession.

One lecturer during meeting with academic staff mentioned that there are no translations of books in Latvian. Therefore, for some students it is difficult to understand and read in English, it takes more time in comparison with other students who have better knowledge.

Examining study course descriptions, no important study course content overlapping was identified. It would be important to give broader description of the topics in the study course to understand the differences on how one topic is covered in several courses (for instance, study course “Introduction to Social Work” with a topic “Insight into theories used in social work” and study course “Theories of Social Work” – what are the differences or succession of the topics which are covered in these courses) (Annex “Descriptions of study courses of the professional bachelor’s study programme “Social work”).

During meeting with academic staff one of the lecturers shared her experience on how she works in mutual cooperation with another lecturer to discuss a sociology research course for bachelor and master level students. She contacted another lecturer and had a discussion on topics to avoid overlapping, also to avoid plagiarism if students would like to submit their papers in both study courses. Also had a discussion on which topics to include and discussion on the deadlines of the papers between both courses. Another example was that during the defence of bachelor and master thesis, lecturers can see strengths and weaknesses and have discussions.

Involved lecturers’ staff in the Riga also provides lectures at the branches. As another lecturer mentioned during meeting with academic staff, special attention is paid to lecture planning. Study courses at the branch are planned in the module system which means that lecturers give several hours long lectures during their visit at the branch. It allows to reduce needed numbers of travel to the branch and be more flexible with planning time. To teach one 2 CP study course would take travel to branch twice (amount of CP might impact such division). Lecturers admit that it might be challenging to travel to branches but at the same time they can distinguish benefits of it: see it as a constructive way to combat centralization of the work; by traveling lecturers bring their ideas with them, it is an opportunity to observe rural reality, beneficial to learn at different places.

The contribution of lecturers practicing social work was especially noted. The students said that they were able to use the acquired knowledge in practice. There were examples provided that the results of the research conducted during the bachelor's thesis had been used to further develop social services according to the needs of the specific group.

During bachelor studies students must take 3 internships (total amount of 26 CP): 1) 1st study year (6 CP); 2) 2nd study year (10 CP); 3) 3rd study year (10 CP). Every internship has its own goal and objectives. Students are provided with a regulation on internship (Annex 13).

The aim of the first internship is to get acquainted with the profession of social workers and its target groups seems to be narrower than achievable goals, for instance, to plan and realize social action. Another aspect to pay attention, is to evaluate if students are knowledgeable at the 1st study year to use research methods (statistical data analysis, interviewing, etc.) to analyse the chosen target group taking into consideration that during the 1st study year students do not have in-depth courses on these topics. Only in the study course “Introduction to Studies and Academic Writing” there are topics which can be related to research methods: “Most often used research methods in social research. Basic ethical principles” (2 lectures, 2 seminars).

Similar question is raised about 2nd internship where one of the students’ tasks is to evaluate criteria of efficiency in the mitigation of social problems. It was not possible to recognize study courses during 2nd study year which would give students this specific knowledge which can be later applied during internship.

UL provided an expert team with several examples of bachelor thesis. In offered examples no



information on what mark each work gained was provided.

Students most often chose to write their topics on families with children, a variety of problems children face social work with women who suffered physical violence, social workers involvement in creation of social policy, availability of services. Additional insight in chosen topics can be seen in SER p. 173. UL have common guidelines "Kursa darbu, bakalaura darbu un maģistra darbu izstrāde un aizstāvēšana" which gives insight on structure, use of literature, citation and other aspects of work

([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/lu\\_portal/fakultates/vff/studijas/metodiskie\\_noradijumi\\_2009.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/fakultates/vff/studijas/metodiskie_noradijumi_2009.pdf)). Valuing choosing topics it is visible that topics which are included in the social workers professional standard are chosen.

Protection of children's rights, including provision of support to children within the entire level of the education system, are identified as important issues in Latvia and thereby the study programmes have been purposefully supplemented with new courses - Social Work with Children and Youth, as well as Inclusive and Special Education. The course Social Case Work has also been revised, which allows to provide social workers with even more targeted competencies in work with an individual client (Appendix: Changes in the Bachelor's study programme "Social Work" after the accreditation of the programme).

The study programme does not include clear content on the work of Orphan's and Custody courts. For instance, social workers may be members of Orphan's Courts, also in letters of support local governments have indicated that social workers are necessary in Orphan's and Custody Courts. During meeting with students, it was discovered that students are aware that UL check both course works and bachelor thesis on plagiarism and said that they have no intention to violate rules of plagiarism.

The purposeful deinstitutionalisation process and administrative-territorial reform in the country require a large capacity of social workers, appropriate macro-level knowledge and skills, including assessment of the needs of the population and developing evidence-based social services. Within the social work practice the students have to advocate and justify municipal budget funding for solving the social problems of the population. Therefore, it is a positive sign that the bachelor's study programme in addition to the existing study courses, which help to acquire macro-level social work, has been supplemented with new study courses. The study programme is supplemented with the Development and Evaluation of Social Services (course content has been revised) and Social Entrepreneurship (Appendix "Changes in the Bachelor's Study Programme "Social Work" after the accreditation of the programme). Assessing the demand for social workers now and in the near future, social workers with a bachelor's degree have and will need to work not only in micro, but also in macro level practice. It is also positive that the balance between the knowledge and skills required for macro, meso and micro level practice has been maintained.

It is important that the students and the alumni during the visits mentioned that within the study process they had been able to discuss a lot with the lecturers on necessary improvements in the study programme, as well as to use immediately the acquired knowledge in practice.

The students appreciated that admission in the bachelor's study programme took into account the previously acquired education and they could start their studies immediately in the second or third year.

By implementation of a student-centred approach bachelor's study programme orientates to

respond to students needs in order to achieve the planned learning outcomes. Study courses are designed by differentiating achievable study results which can be evaluated by lecturers and by students themselves. According to SER (p. 165) several student-centred learning principles are implemented: interactivity, individuality, flexibility, supportive and inspiring study environment, involvement in governance structures.

Study course descriptions (Annex “Descriptions of study courses of the professional bachelor’s study programme “Social work”) give insight into implemented teaching and evaluation methods. During meeting with academic staff lecturers shared their experiences in using various platforms and implemented methods during study process: group work in different environments: Moodle, Zoom, MsTeams; methods: creating Spotify playlists to work with students at emotional level, teaching critical and reflective thinking by using thinking map to differentiate student reactions, thoughts, hypothesis, case mapping, observation, try to give non-academic experience, promotes giving first-hand information from employers to students.

As stated during meeting, distant learning gives the opportunity to invite guests from all over the world (Italy, Greece, Denmark, etc.).

Evaluation methods correspond to achievable study results.

Students’ surveys in the programme are conducted using UL electronic systems. At the end of each course, students fill in a questionnaire, evaluating their study experience on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), questionnaire also allows to add freely formulated answers (SER p. 173).

UL has provided an expert team with a template of a questionnaire. Topics which are covered in the questionnaire are following: evaluation on the compliance of the study course and study course description, study course did not overlap with other courses, teaching staff gave clear explanation of the course topics, on available literature, evaluation on achievement of study course results, open question to give feedback and suggestions, time devoted to study course.

Provided additional data from UL on examples of study course evaluation and also analysis included in the SEF p. 173 states that students value courses very high. Also, the participation in the questionnaires is very high (concluded from the provided examples of questionnaires).

During expert meetings with students, it was noticed that students interpret their involvement in the development of the study programme as a participation in questionnaires. By giving their feedback they participate in development of the study courses meaning also study programmes. Asking if students get any feedback from the university after questionnaires, students said that more important is to know that students’ opinions are taken into consideration. Sometimes lecturers give feedback from previous questionnaires starting the study course. Some students expressed the opinion that they would not like to get any feedback because of being very open in these questionnaires. Overall impression is that students are being heard and they are actively involved in the evaluation of the study courses.

In one case a student mentioned that after critical reviews on one lecturer who did not lead the study course in accordance with the study course description, in the end this lecturer was changed with another.

As stated in the SER p. 174 if during the evaluation process the study course is evaluated by 5 and

students have critical comments, the programme director holds a conversation with the course lecturer. Only in one case within the provided additional examples from UL on questionnaires, one of the study courses was evaluated below 5 (Social gerontology).

Another questionnaire is devoted to graduates which are asked during their last study semester to fill the questionnaires to evaluate the programme. Questions are devoted to examine several aspects of studies: study environment, staff, library; evaluation of the study process; acquired knowledge and skills; overall evaluation of the studies; employment.

UL provided several examples where data on evaluation of the study programme is shown in range from 0 (do not know) to 7(absolutely agree). Graduates from Alūksne branch evaluate study programme from 5.3 (environment of the studies) up to 5.5 (study process). In open answer questions students gave feedback which is very positive. Student's value the positive attitude of teaching staff, very supportive staff of librarians, ability to link theory with practice, etc.

Slightly higher evaluation but less open question answers was given by the graduates of Cēsis branch: environment of the studies: 5.5 and study process: 5.8. Overall students are satisfied with their choice to study in UL, one student admits lack of literature in Latvian, another student would like to have a link between theory and practice more often.

Another example which was identified during site visit in Kuldīga is that common meetings between branch director, study programme director and students are held. During these various meetings they get feedback from students on their problems, challenges, and try to identify if there is any dissatisfaction between students. Also the head of the study course is the link between branch director and study programme director who can signal if there are any problems.

During a meeting with the study field director and bachelor study programme's director it was noticed that views and evaluations coming from students matters and they are considered in the development of the programme.

In order to understand the needs of employers in the regions and plan the further development of the study programme in the branches of the UL, a meeting of employers was organized on the Zoom platform. Meeting was attended by a diverse range of municipality representatives (SER p. 174). During the meetings with the branch directors, it was identified that they are a very important link between the director of the study programme and employers. In different meetings branch managers actualized a variety of topics as on diverse activities to meet different employers and receive feedback from them and cooperation with different social services and the city council.

During the implementation of the bachelor's study programme only one student from Alūksne branch went to Erasmus+ internship in Hamburg, Germany. During the internship, the student enhanced her socio pedagogical skills, inter-institutional cooperation skills, as well as communication skills with children placed in care outside the family. The student assessed her internship abroad positively, emphasising the established contacts and acquired understanding of how out-of-home care services should be developed in Latvia. The internship tasks performed during the mobility were recognized in accordance with the relevant UL procedures (SER p. 176).

During meetings with students' issues on mobility were raised. Students said that they are informed that there are such opportunities to participate in Erasmus+ programme, they know that at the UL web page there is information on mobility opportunities but most of the students have not used it nor plan to do it. Students mentioned that they do not want to go to another country because of uncertainty created by Covid-19. Another student shared that she thought of this opportunity and

already started her paperwork to prepare for an internship but the institution in the Netherlands where she planned to go in the end did not reply. Additional question to the student has been asked if anyone helped her in the application procedure on which a positive answer was received. Also, during an expert meeting with students from Kuldīga was received information that students are informed on Erasmus+ opportunities but they do not plan to participate. Students from branches and those in Riga expressed the opinion that they are working and their prime focus is on studies and work.

The title of the study programme is directly related to its aim – to ensure the acquisition of the second level professional higher education, professional bachelor's degree in social work and the fifth level professional qualification "Social Worker", providing the necessary knowledge, skills and value base for qualified professional activity in the field of social work at micro, meso and macro levels and for further education in master's programmes as well as for employment in the field of social work at the micro, meso and macro levels (Cabinet Regulation No. 512 "Regulations on the state standard for the second level professional higher education").

### **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

Study programme implements a student-centered approach. Study courses are designed in accordance with social workers professional standard. Involved parties (students, teachers) positively evaluate their mutual cooperation. During study programme students have several internships to gain social workers professional competencies.

Strengths:

1. Study courses are structured in compliance with social workers professional standard. Study courses have been reviewed, updated and supplemented with new courses, in particular - children and young people, including in the education system and the protection of children's rights.
2. Study course division in three groups A, B and C allows flexibly to recognize study courses to those who enroll in the programme with 1st higher educational level degree.
3. Students can study in branches which are as close as possible to their homes.

Weaknesses:

1. It is not clear whether the competence of the students enrolled in later study stages from the 1st higher education institutions is equal to the needed knowledge for social workers.
2. List of literature in many study courses is old, the overview and updates would be needed.
3. Human resources might become more challenging by opening several branches at once.
4. 1st and 2nd internship aims and goals are broader than provided knowledge in the study courses during 1st and 2nd study year.
5. Low involvement of BA students in mobility programmes.

### **3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme**

#### **Analysis**

The full-time regular bachelor's study programme is implemented at the UL, FSS and therefore uses the material and technical support of the faculty and library resources. The part-time regular form of the bachelor's study programme is implemented in the branches of the UL (SER p. 176).

The SER has confirmed that the available resources fully correspond to the requirements for the achievement of the study programme's aims and the implementation of a high-quality study process

(premises, material and technical provision, required technologies and software all correspond to the study needs). The provision of information necessary for the implementation of the study process is good. This is also confirmed by the expert group after inspecting the library and its branches during the evaluation visit. (Meetings with representatives of the Library, branch managers, students and teaching staff).

The university has its own library with a separate collection of social science resources. The study literature and available information sources are adequate and up-to-date. The printed information resources required for the studies and work of the UL study field "Social Welfare" (social work, including psychology, medicine, pedagogy, etc.) available at the UL Faculty of Social Sciences library make up 67% of the total number of resources available at the UL Library (SER p. 141; Meetings with representatives of Library).

The library is open 55 hours a week at times convenient to students and lecturers. Workstations are available for students in the library of the Faculty of Social Sciences, including 18 workstations equipped for use of computers, with opportunities to use scanners, printers and a copier.

The library provides free and paid services to users registered with the UL Library, including students and faculty. Electronic ordering / reservation / loan period extension of information resources in the Electronic Union Catalog of Latvian libraries of national significance and receipt of information resources for on-site use in the library reading room or for borrowing are available as free services. The library provides advice to students and teachers - inquiries and consultations, consulting, reference, training and support in research. The UL Library consultant provides bibliographic, thematic, factual, clarifying, etc. references and consultations to UL students, academic, research and general staff. Students use consultations during writing of term papers and bachelor's theses (Table 14. Statistics of database use).

The library has created good opportunities for studying and working. Books can also be ordered from the university library to the branch library. Users have access to a self-service scanning facility, to the open access reading rooms and use of computers and the Internet. WI-FI connection works in all UL buildings. Available are the use of night-time subscription and advance reservation of information resources. Delivery of information resources is available in summer. The technical possibilities in the library are modern and are constantly updated.

The library actively works with target audiences providing different training, in-depth knowledge and skills in working with electronic resources. In the first semester of studies, the library organizes the introduction training for students of social work programmes. The students of the branches can attend these meetings remotely. The aim of the training is to provide users with the skills to work with open access collections, self-service equipment and office equipment - self-service scanners, copiers, thereby improving the competence of independent learning (SER p. 140; Meetings with representatives of Library, branch managers, students and teaching staff).

The UL Library also provides access to electronic resources and subscribed electronic information resources (databases, e-book platforms) can be used both in the UL network and outside the UL computer network by connecting to them with the LUIS username and password. For easier access to electronic resources, the UL Library has introduced the latest technology web services Primo Discovery and SFX. They provide access to search results retrieved from all UL Library-managed databases through a single interface (SER p. 142, Meetings with representatives of Library).

The university keeps accurate records of the cost of the study place by study programme, which

finances the library, the university's infrastructure, staff costs and other costs. A detailed overview of the costs for the professional bachelor's study programme "Social Work" full time regular and part-time regular forms is presented in Annex. Costs of Study Programs.

During the meeting with the experts, the students and lecturers confirmed that they are very satisfied with the services of the library and receive support to study and work there (Meetings with students and teaching staff).

Students and graduates reported that teachers are assisting students' academic and non-academic activities during the studies and support them in further professional development as well as help them in finding a job.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

The demand for social workers, especially in the regions, is high and therefore learning opportunities in the regions are expected, supported and needed by local governments and employers. The study programme is taught by qualified lecturers and a support system has been set up by the university to support students in completing their studies.

Strengths:

1. The provision of study programmes in the regions involves the resources of local governments and employers in development work and thus contributes to the development of social work study programmes and to the preparation of students in the labor market.
2. Availability of electronic resources, including UL e-resource repository, databases of journals, publishers, etc., E-book platforms and subscribed electronic information resources (databases, e-book platforms).
3. Support services, including consultations for the use of electronic resources, free access to services for students and lecturers (library, LUIS, counseling and consultation of study department specialists, branch managers and methodologists).

Weaknesses:

1. Less opportunities for students of branches to participate in student life (student associations, clubs, etc.).
2. Only paid study places in branches that need advice on how to negotiate possible scholarship agreements with local governments and employers.
3. Although the university has created physical access conditions for students with special needs and students with disabilities receive social support from the university according to regulations (SER p. 59, p. 90, p. 163; meetings with UL Riga management representatives, students and lecturers), it is necessary to develop support systems for other students with special needs, including students with visual disability, hearing disability and students with mental health problems. In order for them to come to study, it is necessary to adapt the study materials (braille books, audio cassette books, etc.). Students with mental health problems need to be provided with psychological counseling. There are currently no students with special needs in the field of study, but you have to ask - why and study this topic.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

Since the accreditation of the programme, the composition of the teaching staff has been formed in

accordance with the aim of the programme, which envisages ensuring academic and professional excellence in the study process. Highly qualified lecturers from the UL, professionals from the field, as well as lecturers from other fields are being involved in teaching the programme.

The complementary interaction of academic staff and practitioners ensures the development of the programme in accordance with the latest scientific and professional trends. This was also emphasized at the meeting with teachers, employers and local government leaders. An example is the research seminars and conferences organized in the regions, during which teachers, students and social work practitioners can develop their ideas in the workshops, and thus contribute to the development of both the social work profession and the development of curricula.

28 lecturers have been involved in the implementation of the curriculum, paying special attention to the quality and permanence of the lecturers. The subject courses of the programme are taught by the same lecturers both in the branches and in Riga, thus ensuring that the quality of teaching in the branches is at the same level as in Riga. Contract (hourly) lecturers and guest lecturers may differ, allowing students to gain an in-depth understanding of the specifics of a particular area (SER p. 86, p. 181).

The qualification of the academic staff complies with the legislative regulations established by the State of Latvia and the UL. The qualification of the academic staff enables the students of the social work study programmes to acquire the learning outcomes to the required extent and level. The qualification of the teaching staff is adequate to achieve the objectives and results of the programme. The teaching staff consists of 28 teachers, of which 3 lecturers are professors, 2 associate professors, 6 have a doctoral degree (5 of them are assistant professors) and 15 lecturers have a master's degree in the field corresponding to the study course (SER p 181).

According to the course themes of the study programme, the courses of business, law and economics are taught by the teaching staff of different faculties. Several courses are taught by industry professionals (eg Social Work with Vulnerable Client Groups, Social Work with seniors). (Meetings with teaching staff, employers and representatives of municipalities).

Following the students' recommendations, an attempt is made to maintain a close connection between social work theory and practice, and therefore professional practitioners in the field of social work and doctoral students at UL, as well as lecturers in the fields of law and medicine (etc.) are included. When planning the composition of the lecturers of the programme, the renewal of lecturers and the change of generations are taken into account. The doctoral students of sociology and social work are involved in the teaching of the courses, ensuring the long-term development of both the academic staff and the programme as a whole (SER p. 181).

The professional and scientific qualification of the teaching staff corresponds to the aim of the study field, because the specific study courses allow each lecturer to apply his or her professional and scientific achievements. To the study programmes that have involved highly qualified industry professionals who, in addition to their daily work, are involved in the implementation of projects which contribute to the development of the social welfare sector, have gained attention with their professional and civic activities (for example, work in the Latvian Association of Social Workers, Association of Supervisors) (Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CV). During the meeting with the assessment team, the students stated that they are very satisfied with the competence of the teachers who know their specialty and interact with the students according to them (Meetings with students). For example, if necessary, you can discuss with teachers the deadlines for submitting homework, the use of teaching materials and asking for advice on plagiarism.

Most of the courses in the field are taught by professionals with long-term research and practice experience, such as in social policy, social security, human rights and criminal justice, social care management, social work research and methodology development, etc. The wide range of specialties and competencies of lecturers enriches the development of study programmes and ensures the quality of teaching in the field of well-being.

The qualifications of the academic staff of the programme are ensured by applying the University system of competition and assessment. The needs and abilities of both students and faculty are taken into account in the implementation of the programme. If necessary, the studies are organized in cycles - for example, in a 2 CP course, not one hour a week, but three lessons once in three weeks (SER p. 180). The Administration of UL creates the conditions necessary for teachers' professional development. UL teachers and researchers are attested in every 5 years. Teachers collect the information on their professional development and declare it periodically. Students reported that teachers are assisting students' academic and non-academic activities during the studies and support them in further professional development as well as help them in finding a job. (Meetings with students and teachers)

New lecturers have been involved in the process of improving the study programme and course content to develop new study courses. For example, in 2020 the study courses "Social Entrepreneurship" and "Development and Evaluation of Social Services" were being devised to encompass the knowledge, skills and competences based on the new social work standard (SER p. 181).

Distribution of teachers' workload between teaching and other activities is regulated by UL regulations. During the visit, teachers reported that the academic work is planned for teachers in accordance with the principles of pedagogical workload of academic and research staff of the University. The academic workload of teachers is flexible and gives teachers the possibility of developing their own academic qualifications in the area of personal research (Meeting with teachers).

The calculation of the workload of teachers ensured and teachers are satisfied with their workload. In the meeting with students and graduates they confirmed that they have been satisfied with the work of teachers, including teaching, supervision and consultations. (Meetings with students and graduates).

The study programme has good connections with practitioners and recognized experts from ministries and state and local government institutions are involved in the teaching. At the meetings, representatives of both employers and local governments pointed out that the inclusion of professionals enables them to achieve the results of the study programme more effectively, and to link theoretical learning with real work practice (Meetings with teaching staff, employers and representatives of municipalities).

Professionals in the field are involved in the management of students' course papers, as well as participate in the final thesis defense commissions. For example, in the course Introduction to Social Work the theoretical analysis of social problems is combined with discussions with the specialists of the non-governmental organization "Resilience's Center", which provides social services for adolescents with behavioral problems. When implementing the programme at the UL branches, cooperation is established with regional organizations and professionals, such as the SOS Children's Villages Association in Kuldīga (SER p. 182; Meetings with teaching staff, employers and representatives of municipalities).



During the meeting with the teachers, it was mentioned that in professional communication, competence in working with diversity is strengthened, involvement in the development of the field (Meeting with teaching staff).

In order to ensure the cooperation of the teaching staff and the interconnection of study courses, topical issues are discussed in the department meetings, which take place once a month. Additionally, all lecturers of a particular semester meet once a semester online (SER p. 185). At the meetings, the lecturers confirmed that meetings between them are held regularly, but if necessary, you can always indicate your wish to meet (meetings with teachers).

Cooperation of teaching staff are implemented in various forms: 1) guest lectures, 2) planning and organizing joint study tours, if the course topics complement each other; 3) cooperation in joint social actions or research projects (e.g. in the course "Research in social work"). Regular communication is also maintained with the branch specialists, who can directly provide students with explanations about the specifics of the study process in the branches.

### **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

#### **Conclusions.**

The academic staff that is involved in teaching the study programme is sufficient and competent. The university undertakes measures in a target-oriented manner to avoid negative effects on the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, as a result of the changes in the composition of the teaching staff. The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. The academic staff is involved in scientific research at both national and international level. The results of research and development are used in the study process. Lecturers participate in in-service training, are active participants in international and national networks related to social work.

#### **Strengths:**

1. The teachers of the study programme co-operate very well at the level of various organizations of the Latvian state, including ministries, social assistance (social service providers) institutions and local governments.
2. The University has good cooperation with employers and representatives of municipalities. The cooperation will lead to a good level of student internships and knowledge transfer in the regions, as well as enable people in the regions to participate in in-service training based on life-long learning principles.
3. Teachers of the study programme participate in the important social work networks, eg Nordic-Baltic Doctoral Network in Social Work (NBSW), the International Federation of Social Workers, etc. doing project work in collaboration with international partners and publishing in high-level scientific journals.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. The participation of teachers in international mobility programmes is low and needs more attention than before. It is necessary to develop new innovative solutions for participation.

## **5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Social Work"**

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Compliant to the 10.04.2013. Cabinet Regulation Nr. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus".

- 2 2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Agreement signed between University of Latvia and Riga Stradiņš University (Nr. 1-13/371).

- 3 3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Annex 24\_Rector's certification on compensations. Certifies that UL will reimburse the damages in the amount tuition fees paid, if the professional bachelor's study programme "Social work" of the study field "Social Welfare" will not be accredited or licence will be annulled due to the university's actions (actions or omissions) and students will not want to continue the studies in another study programme.

- 4 4. 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

26.08.2021. Certification by the Coordinator of study field Nr. 24-16/50 confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with 07.07.09. Cabinet Regulation Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi"

- 5 5. 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.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

- 6 6. 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.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

- 7 7. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Sample of Study agreement attached complies with 23.01.07 Cabinet Regulations 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi".

- 9 9. 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 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Study courses have been developed in Latvian in accordance with the established requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme complies with the Social work professional standard. Annex - Compliance of the qualification obtained in the study programme with the occupational standard.

Compliance of the professional bachelor's study programme "Social Work" with the occupational standard.

- 11 11. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable, study programme is a professional not an academic study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Complies with 26.08.2014.Cabinet Regulation No. 512 "Regulations on the second level professional higher education state standard".

- 13 13. The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (if applicable).

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

- 14 14. Each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions (if they have worked for a shorter period of time, the number of publications shall be in proportion to the work period), or artistic creation achievements (for instance, exhibitions, films, theatre performances, and concert activity), or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Each member of academic staff has publications (Annex 9; Annex Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CV; Table 17) or five year practical work experience.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Study programme complies with all the legal requirements set for it.

### Requirements (R6-R8)

- 1 R6 - The compliance of the study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The informative provision (libraries, electronic databases), auditoriums, and the financial resources are appropriate to ensure bachelor studies and to ensure achievement of the learning outcomes.

- 2 R7 - The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification and scientific activities of the academic staff comply with the legal requirements and correspond to the study programme.

- 3 R8 - The study programme leading to the master or doctoral degree is based on the advances and findings in the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

### Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions.

The main resources of the University of Latvia - finances, human resources, technical facilities and research facilities are sufficient and appropriate to implement the bachelor's study programme. Professional social workers are involved in the implementation of the programme. Improvement of the infrastructure is necessary in most regional branches, not only regarding environmental accessibility, but also ensuring comfortable environment for students (more comfortable chairs, tables). A weak point in the provision of the study programme (mainly due to human resources - balanced workload) is a large number of branches in the regions, which on the one hand is very welcoming, but on the other hand can overload the teaching staff. UL needs to think hard about

attracting teaching staff to the regions. The programme has the following strengths: all study courses have been reviewed and updated in 2021, new study courses have been introduced, which allow to ensure the acquisition of a profession in accordance with the standard for a social worker, including strengthening social work with children and young people. The social work programme has been updated very recently, the available information shows that the planning of the study course allows to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the profession. At the same time, it is difficult to check whether the goals of the bachelor's three study fields, namely regarding the first and second study field are fully achievable. It is desirable to closely follow the evaluation of the study fields both in Riga and in the regions, so in case of necessity the goals can be revised meaning whether they are not set too high.

#### Strengths:

1. In general, finances, human resources, technical facilities and research facilities are sufficient and appropriate;
2. UL participates in the development of a glossary of social work terminology, the teaching staff who are social work practitioners participate in the development of theoretical literature in Latvian, as well as take part in the implementation of projects that are very relevant for social work practitioners in local governments;
3. Budget places are available for students, the study programme is available in the regions, there is a demand for social workers. Having a first level education, there is an opportunity to gain a bachelor's degree in a shorter time.
4. All courses have been reviewed and updated in 2021.
5. New study courses have been introduced, which allow to ensure the acquisition of a profession in accordance with the standard for a social worker, including strengthening social work with children and young people.
6. The social work programme has been updated very recently, the available information shows that the planning of the study course allows to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the profession.

#### Weaknesses:

1. There are not only social work studies but also other study programmes provided and implemented in the branches, thus the branches are not financially dependent only on the number of social work students, however the risk of enrolment of student groups remains high.
2. Provision of teaching staff resources in the branches.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Social Work"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Social Work"**

#### **Short-term recommendations**

Update the list of the literature in those study courses where it is one or two decades old (exceptions can be made).

Overview the aims and objectives of the 1st and 2nd internship and synchronize requirements with the knowledge and skills gained during studies in each study year in accordance with the provided study courses.

Increase the number of a cooperation agreements with internships in Riga and regions (incl. study visits in more institutions in different social work practice level, incl. hospitals, Orphan's Court, ministries, international organizations) to develop targeted cooperation.

Develop collaboration with alumni and offer them opportunities to actively participate in university life by organising seminars to introduce lifelong learning opportunities and seek internship and motivational examples for existing students. In order to do so a database should be developed that contains contact and employment details of graduates.

### Long-term recommendations

Build a network and sign cooperation agreements for practice places for the 1st year students.

To implement student-centric approach lower ration of students/staff members should be achieved.

Increase the number of incoming and outgoing students in Erasmus+ mobility by developing and providing study plans for potential interests.

Develop a support system for students with visual impairments, hearing impairments and mental health problems, including adapted learning materials (audio cassettes, bridge-based learning materials) and counselling for students with mental health problems.

Build cooperation agreements with First level professional higher education institutions who educates social work specialists to ensure transfer of the needed competencies for social worker between 1st and 2nd level higher education study programmes.

Pay attention to the system of enrolment to those students who are admitted in the 3rd study year - in order to provide that acquired competence during 1st level higher education study programme matches knowledge that is needed for social worker at the bachelor's study programme.

## II. "Social Work" ASSESSMENT

### II. "Social Work" ASSESSMENT

#### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

Name of the master's study programme is "Social Work". The title of the study programme "Social Work" directly refers to the profession to be acquired within the programme and the qualification to be acquired. After graduation students obtain a professional master's degree in social work (mg. soc. d.) qualification of "Senior Social Worker".

Master study programme is implemented with two sub-programmes with different length and number of CP: 1) full-time studies with an amount of 80 CP and 2) full-time studies with an amount of 60 CP. The difference between the programme is based on the applicant's previous education. Those who have a professional bachelor's degree in social work and a professional qualification of a social worker can study in the sub-programme with 60 CP; those who have 1) a bachelor's or master's degree, or professional higher education in social sciences, humanities and arts or medical and health care sciences; 2) a bachelor's or master's degree, or professional higher education in other fields of science and two years' experience in the field of social welfare will study in a programme with 80 CP.

Until this accreditation period the programme has been implemented with two sub-programmes: 80 CP and 40 CP. The sub-programme with study opportunities to obtain a master's degree within one year (40 CP) was offered to graduates of the professional bachelor's study programme in social work, who have already acquired the qualification of a social worker (the 5th level professional qualification). Due to several changes in the labour market and the newly introduced professional standard for senior social workers there is a demand to shift from 40 CP programme to 60 CP programme. Also, there is a growing demand for specialization which can be obtained during master studies.

The length of a sub-programme with an amount of 60 CP is 1,5 years, and for a sub-programme with 80 CP – 2 years.

The study programme is implemented in Latvian.

After completion of master's studies students can enroll in doctoral programmes.

The goal, tasks and results of the study programme, as well as the admission requirements are interrelated. The aim, tasks, acquired knowledge, skills and competence of the study programme correspond to the seventh level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) and the fifth professional qualification (Cabinet Regulation No. 512 "Regulations on the state standard for the second level professional higher education"). The qualification to be obtained is closely related to the study results at the 7th level of LQF and 7th level of EQF, moreover, it is closely linked with the requirements for master's level education and professional qualification included in the professional standard.

Admission requirements in programmes are different, demands take into account the previously acquired education and professional qualification.

Admission requirements in the sub-programme in the amount of 60 CP: 1) Requirements for previous education: professional bachelor's degree in social work and professional qualification of a social worker. 2) Admission competition evaluation criteria: weighted average grade and total (or average) grade of final examinations in previous studies.

Admission requirements in the sub-programme of the amount of 80 CP: 1) a bachelor's or master's degree, or a second-level professional higher education in the social sciences, humanities and arts, or in the medical and health care sciences; a bachelor's or master's degree, or a second-level professional higher education in other fields of science and two years' experience in the field of social welfare. 2) Additional requirement: curriculum vitae (CV). 3) Criteria for admission competition: weighted average grade and total (or average) grade of final examinations in previous studies; entrance examination, in which study motivation is assessed; experience in the field of social welfare, evaluation of knowledge and skill acquired in practice.

Those who enter studies without a background of social worker education during 4th semester during studies take longer internships with higher amounts of CP (in comparison to those who study in a sub-programme with 60 CP) to acquire for social workers needed competencies. It is common practice to enrol students in master's study programmes with a different professional and educational background to obtain social worker's qualification. In this case UL pays special attention to those without a social work bachelor's degree and evaluates professional experience in the social welfare field of a candidate. As it was found out during the meeting with the director of the study programme, those students who do not have bachelor degree in social work, they evaluate their

work experience in NGOs and other institutions; they can see that they have theoretical background knowledge, some skills and experience.

Overall requirement to enroll in the study programme corresponds to the goal and tasks of the study programme.

During the reporting period (since 2014), 80 students were matriculated in the programme, whereas 47 students have graduated from the programme, but 15 are still in the study process (enrolled in the academic year 2020/2021). Of the alumni, 6 have graduated from the one-year programme of the study programme (40 CP), but 41 have graduated from the two-year programme (80 CP).

When analysing data of matriculated students between programmes with 40 CP and 80 CP, it is visible that most of the students studied at sub-programme which offer 80 CP. This data shows that demand for students without social work educational background at bachelor level to acquire social work qualification at master level is very high. In comparison, 7 students were admitted to the programme with 40 CP.

During a meeting with a master's study programme students, it was identified that there is one case when a student with a social work background (received social work qualification at bachelor level) is enrolled in a programme with 80 CP. The student stated that she is the only one in the group with such a background.

Self-evaluation analysis expresses the view that dropout rates are rather low. Analysing provided statistics on dropout rate, it is visible that every year several students are ex-matriculated, in total 25 (24 from sub- programme with 80 CP and 1 from sub-programme with 40 CP).

As declared in SER (p. 114): Termination of studies is most often decided either in the first study semester or before elaboration of the master's thesis.

As other reasons are mentioned: losing state funded study place, inability to combine studies with full-time work and family care. During a meeting with the director of the master's study programme, she informed that in the programme they take quality standards very high, there are some students who cannot graduate from UL but they can graduate from different programmes in other higher educational institutions without difficulties. As declared by the director of the study programme it is normal if less than 10% of students drop-out.

Director of the study programme discusses with every student who shows the wish to leave the reasons for such a decision.

One of the mechanisms which students can use if they face a different range of issues is to use the support system UL has developed. Such services include psychological support, career counselling, etc. No cases when students would use these support mechanisms were discovered during meeting, although students acknowledge that they are informed about them.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

Study programme offers two sub-programmes which differ in the amount of CP (60 and 80 CP), length of studies and also criteria for enrolment. Study programme implements senior social worker professional standards.

Strengths:



1. Study programme will be implemented in accordance with newly introduced senior social worker standard.

Weaknesses:

1. From the enrolled students it is visible that most of the students want to change their profession and become a social worker without a previous education in the field but with practical experience. No education continuity is delivered to students with bachelor level social work degree.

## **2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof**

### **Analysis**

According to the information provided in the self-assessment report, the developed master's study programme is based on the needs and relevant issues in the field of social work, which are defined in the national level policy planning documents, including The National Development Plan 2021-2027 and the latest global social work development documents.

The study programme has been updated in cooperation between science and practice as indicated in the self-assessment report: the improved programme content includes the results of research in international cooperation projects (in the field of criminal justice and healthy ageing); the teaching staff has cooperated with several universities in the European Union and other countries (eight universities are listed in the self-evaluation report); the teaching staff has been involved in the development of the Glossary of Social Work Terminology and this work is still ongoing.

The study programme is designed to meet the need for social workers at social service offices in Latvia. The evidence for importance of the topic are also the unevenly developed network of social services in Latvia and the lack of community-based social services, which leads to a shortage of social workers in various levels of practice. The topicality of the programme specializations in the field of criminal justice and social work with families and children is justified. The Ministry of Welfare has also included in the draft policy development planning document "Plan for the Improvement and Development of Social Services 2021-2024" (published) the requirement that by 2028 local governments will have to introduce a new approach to social work with families and children.

The courses of the study programme are designed in accordance with the aim of the study programme and the outcomes to be achieved. The mapping of study courses demonstrates how the study programme results are achieved in each particular study course. The mapping shows that the content of the courses ensures achievement of the goal and objectives, as well as acquiring knowledge, skills, and competences of the programme (Annex 32). The structure and content of the study programme have been developed in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 512 "Regulations on the state standard for the second level professional higher education" (p. 127). At the same time it should be noted that the professional standard for a senior social worker does not envisage the implementation of social case work in the context of various social problems and target groups, as indicated in the attached Annex document "Compliance of the Qualification Obtained in the Study programme with the Professional Standard" Compliance of the Professional Master's Study Programme "SOCIAL WORK" with the Professional Standard "; they are listed in the professional standard for a social worker, and therefore reference should be made to both of these professional standards.

The Study programme will be implemented in accordance with the newly implemented senior social worker professional standard in 2021. By researching this professional standard it is clear that the work focuses on mezo and macro levels

(<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-171.pdf>). By evaluating study course descriptions (Annex. "Professional Masters SP Course descriptions") it is visible that part of the content focuses on work at micro level (work with individual clients) and the proportion of courses which are devoted to mezo and macro level competencies could be developed. Also it is difficult to distinguish how several study courses differ from bachelor study programme which are with similar content at the master level: Introduction to research and academic writing, The Challenges of Social Work in Multicultural Society, Communication with the Different Target Groups in Social Work, Modern Social Work Theories.

On the one hand, the study programme states that it implements and grants senior social workers' professional standard and qualification. On the other hand, the study programme provides specialization on criminal justice and social work with families with children where the study programme focuses on micro level (for instance, 3rd internship focuses on psychosocial consulting). It gives the impression that work at micro level dominates. It is not clear whether study programme prepares social workers with deep knowledge in work with families with children/in criminal justice social work or senior social workers in accordance with professional standard.

The course structure of both sub-programmes of the study programme consists of courses, which belong to either mandatory part (A) and limited selective part (B). Part (B) includes courses providing for one of the specializations. Depending on the chosen specialization, students take different courses in the amount of 10 CP, as well as they can choose other courses in the amount of 8 CP from the widely offered range (SER p. 128).

Compared to the previous accreditation, significant changes have been introduced into the study programme, supplementing it with the courses Sustainable Development, Personnel Management, Analysis of EU Social Policy, enabling students to acquire management skills necessary for master's qualification and professional activity and gain a basis for international cooperation. These courses also ensure a deeper understanding of developments in the field of social welfare at a global and European Union level, including the interaction between the environment and the social sphere (SER p. 124).

The SER (Table 28) provides information about the new study courses included in the master's study programme, thus ensuring specialization in social case work with family and children: Approaches to social work with family, Aspects of protection of children's rights in social work with children and youth, Domestic violence.

The course Social Work for Reducing Violence complements the specialization module Criminal Justice in Social Work.

During meeting with academic staff, it was stated that it is possible with a high flexibility option to gain needed books for the study courses, and academic staff actively use this opportunity. There are few books (valuing general situation) published in 2019 and 2020 but with a statement that academic staff regularly updates lists of the literature with the provision that it does not match. Also, electronic databases are a good resource to update the list of the literature in accordance with changes in the profession.

The specific specialization courses allow to achieve the goals of the programme.

All study courses have been approved for the period from 2019 to 2021. There are some parts in description of the courses that are not translated into English (for example Professional practice in

social work I).

Study internships are organized in accordance with the regulations of the University of Latvia. The Master's study program envisages 3 study internships for those who study in the 80 CP sub-programme (6 CP; 6 CP; 14 CP). The aim of Professional Internship I is to analyse the social service(s) in the internship place chosen by the student – a social institution/organization. The aim of Professional Internship II is to gain experience in researching a social problem and an in-depth understanding of the reduction of social problems at different levels of social work practice. The aim of Professional Internship III is to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge of social case management and to strengthen psychosocial counselling skills (SER p. 133). According to experts, these aims (especially the aim of Professional Internship III does not fully reflect) do not fully reflect the professional competence of senior social worker as stated in the professional standard, because the focus is on work at micro level with individual clients rather than developing skills for senior social worker.

The University of Latvia continues to ensure cooperation with a wide range of social service providers who offer internships, which is to be assessed very positively. During the meeting, the employers demonstrated openness to provision of internships, as this is one of the opportunities to attract employees.

The regulations for organizing students' internships stipulate that the faculty or a branch, respectively, must enter into a cooperation agreement with internships. However, according to the information available to the experts, such an agreement is valid only with the State Probation Service. Experts' opinion about the conclusion of a cooperation agreement is very positive. University of Latvia could develop even more purposeful relations with the employers by practicing regular meetings to discuss the achieved results, strengths and weaknesses of the internship. The director of bachelor's programme pointed out that the representatives of the employers are not always responsive to come and participate at the internship defence. This indicates the need for closer cooperation between the University of Latvia and the employers.

By obtaining the qualification of a principal social worker's knowledge and skills related to the macro level are of great importance, however the question how to train practically this knowledge and skills during the period of studies remains open. To develop and move forward policy development documents, the ability to draft and understand legislative documents, participate in the planning of financial resources - this knowledge and skills are especially important for macro-level employees.

By implementation of a student-centred approach master's study programme orientates to respond to students needs in order to achieve the planned learning outcomes. Study courses are designed by differentiating achievable study results which can be evaluated by lecturers and by students themselves. According to SER (p. 129) diverse range of study methods is used in the study process.

According to SER (p.129 – 130) one of the forms of work is lectures, whereby the UL lecturers provide introduction and orientation in the problems of the course and present theoretical issues. Lectures are taught both as introductory lectures (for example, before each professional internship) and in an interactive form including interaction with the audience and discussion elements. Lecturers also use study tours/visits, micro-research, promote mastering teamwork by working with small groups. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of online lectures and classes on the MS Teams platform became especially relevant. An e-learning environment (Moodle) has been created for each study course, in which students have access to lecture materials, task descriptions, additional materials related to the course topics for individual studies. E-learning environment also

provides interactivity in the performance of study tasks (tests, forums, seminars, conferences, etc.). UL Faculty of Social Sciences has developed methodological instructions, which provide a detailed description of the requirements for the final thesis, its elaboration process and evaluation criteria.

Study course descriptions (Annex “Descriptions of study courses of the professional master’s study programme “Social work”) gives insight into implemented teaching and evaluation methods. During meeting with academic staff lecturers shared their experiences in using various platforms and implemented methods during study process: group work in different environments: Zoom, MsTeams; methods: creating Spotify playlists to work with students at emotional level, teaching critical and reflective thinking by using thinking map to differentiate student reactions, thoughts, hypothesis, case mapping, observation, try to give non-academic experience, promotes giving first-hand information from employers to students.

As stated during the meeting, distant learning gives the opportunity to invite guests from all over the world (Italy, Greece, Denmark, etc.).

Students are announced in advance about the evaluation methods. The SER at p. 55 presents in Table 9 information from the “Procedures for the Development and Actualization of Study Courses at the University of Latvia” about the evaluation methodology. Procedure is available to students.

University has a multi-level assessment system that allows to follow the development of students’ final theses “Requirements for the development and defense of final thesis (bachelor's, master's, diploma and qualification thesis) at the University of Latvia” (UL order No. 1/38 of 03.02.2012) to promote students' work motivation and to ensure that the work is performed systematically and meets a good quality standard. Study field has the criteria for evaluating the quality of the final theses (SER p. 56; p. 131).

Cooperation at an individual level takes place in the preparation of the final thesis. The experience of working with a supervisor is highly valued by students, as they receive a lot of feedback from teachers on their work and consultations on modern literature and research methodology. Lecturers evaluate their workload in relation to supervision as good. On average, one lecturer supervises the development of 1-2 master's theses. This allows you to focus on each research project, to support the student in carrying out the research and to ensure the required level of research quality. (SER p. 148; Meeting with students and academic staff).

Students respond to surveys on evaluation of study courses once per semester, another questionnaire is devoted to graduates where they fill study programme evaluation on their experience. Evaluation is carried out on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Both questionnaires are centralized by UL.

SER (p. 136) gives overview on positive feedback from students and also gives insight in open answered questions.

In January 2020, in addition to the regular surveys conducted by the University of Latvia, an online survey of FSS social welfare field graduates and employers was conducted. 33 graduates participated in this survey. Responses indicate that graduates consider they gained the following skills during studies: ability to work in a team, acquired theoretical knowledge, communication skills, research skills, etc. (SER p. 137).

As stated in SER (p. 136) the employer surveys and focus group discussions are organized less

frequently (once in a few years). The last ones were carried out in 2020 and 2021. During these meetings most attention was paid to bachelor study programme but there were outcomes directed to master's study programme as well: the need for specialists with specialization in working with families with children, professionals who want to continue their professional activity in the field of social welfare and social work, are interested in the master's programme, need for information literacy (SER p. 138).

Feedback from all involved parties is positive and proves beneficial outcomes.

UL has 8 Erasmus exchange agreements since 2014. Students can choose to go to Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and other countries. As stated in the SER (p. 139) Erasmus exchanges are not a suitable form of mobility for master's students of social work, they do not take advantage of the wide range of opportunities available to them due to restrictions imposed by work and family.

Even if it is not the case, because no outgoing mobility exists, the ECTS gained abroad are, at least partly, recognized. According to the SER (p. 139): "Although all study courses acquired during the mobility period are recognized, in order for the courses acquired during the mobility period to be equated with the courses of the mandatory part of the study programme, they must coincide in terms of content. If the content of the courses does not match, they are equated with the courses of the limited elective part."

### **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

The study programme offers two sub-programmes with 60 and 80 CP. Study programme will have two specializations in criminal justice social work and social work with families with children. Study programme is developed in accordance with the newly introduced (2021) senior social worker professional standard.

Strengths:

1. There are 8 Erasmus mobility agreements.
2. Regular feedback from students, graduates and employers is collected.
3. Study courses have been reviewed, updated and supplemented with new courses - The Approaches in Social Work with Family; Social Work Preventing Violence; Aspects of Children's Rights Protection in Social Work with Children and Young People.
4. A variety of learning methods have been used.

Weaknesses:

1. No clear vision whether and how UL plans to attract incoming students in Erasmus+ mobility.
2. Qualification "senior social worker" is not linked to the offered specializations, study courses are orientated on the needed knowledge for specializations and are less related to professional standard of senior social worker, focus on micro practice level is kept.
3. 3rd internship (objectives) focuses on psychosocial consulting which does not correspond to senior social worker professional standard and is the same as internship for students with bachelor's degree in social work. Internships are not linked with the mezo and macro practice aims resulting from senior social worker standard.
4. The faculty or a branch, do not enter into a cooperation agreement with all internships.

### **3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme**

#### **Analysis**

The self-evaluation report has confirmed that the available resources fully correspond to the requirements for the achievement of the study programme's aims and the implementation of a high-quality study process (premises, material and technical provision, required technologies and software all correspond to the study needs). The provision of information necessary for the implementation of the study process is excellent. This is also confirmed by the expert group after inspecting the library . (SER p 140, Meetings with representatives of the Library, students and teaching staff).

The university has its own library with a separate collection of social science resources. The study literature and available information sources are adequate and up-to-date. The printed information resources required for the studies and work of the UL study field "Social Welfare" (social work, including psychology, medicine, pedagogy, etc.) available at the UL Faculty of Social Sciences library make up 67% of the total number of resources available at the UL Library (Meetings with representatives of Library; SER, p.141).

The library is open 55 hours a week at times convenient to students and lecturers. Workstations are available for students in the library of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The library provides free and paid services to users registered with the UL Library, including students and faculty. The library provides advice to students and teachers - inquiries and consultations, consulting, reference, training and support in research. The UL Library consultant provides bibliographic, thematic, factual, clarifying, etc. references and consultations to UL students, academic, research and general staff. Students use consultations during writing term papers and master's theses (Table 14. Statistics of database use).

The library has created excellent opportunities for studying and working. Users have access to a self-service scanning facility, to the open access reading rooms and use of computers and the Internet. WI-FI connection works in all UL buildings. Available are the use of night-time subscription and advance reservation of information resources. Delivery of information resources is available in summer. The technical possibilities in the library are modern and are constantly updated.

The library actively works with target audiences providing different training, in-depth knowledge and skills in working with electronic resources. In the first semester of studies, the library organizes the introduction training for students of social work programmes. The aim of the training is to provide users with the skills to work with open access collections, self-service equipment and office equipment - self-service scanners, copiers, thereby improving the competence of independent learning (SER p. 140; Meetings with representatives of Library, students and teaching staff).

The UL Library also provides access to electronic resources. Subscribed electronic information resources (databases, ebook platforms) can be used both in the UL network and outside the UL computer network by connecting to them with the LUIS username and password. For easier access to electronic resources, the UL Library has introduced the latest technology web services Primo Discovery and SFX. They provide access to search results retrieved from all UL Library-managed databases through a single interface (SER p. 142, Meetings with representatives of Library).

The university keeps accurate records of the cost of the study place by study programmes, which finances the library, the university's infrastructure, staff costs and other costs. A detailed overview of the costs for the professional master's study programme "Social Work", the sub-programmes of 80 CP and 60 CP is presented in Annex. Costs of Study Programs.

During the meeting with the experts, the students and lecturers confirmed that they are very

satisfied with the services of the library and receive support to study and work there (Meetings with students and teaching staff).

A visit to the facilities was organized. They correspond to the modern standards (lecture rooms, recreation spaces, ICT, etc.). Moodle platform is used for online teaching.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

The study provision, scientific support, informative provision (including libraries and electronic databases), material and technical provision, and financial provision comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the future.

Strengths:

1. Resources are fully corresponding to the requirements for the achievement of the study programme's aims and the implementation of a high-quality study process (premises, material and technical provision, required technologies and software all correspond to the study needs)
2. Availability of electronic resources including UL e-resource repository, Databases of journals, publishers, E-books platforms, subscribed electronic information resources (databases, ebook platforms). In addition, consultations for the use of electronic resources.
3. Free access to services for students and lecturers (library, LUIS, counseling and consultation of study department specialists, etc.).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were identified.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

Since the accreditation of the programme, the composition of the teaching staff has been formed in accordance with the aim of the programme, which envisages ensuring academic and professional excellence in the study process. Highly qualified lecturers from the UL, professionals from the field, as well as lecturers from other fields are being involved in teaching the programme.

Foreign lecturers are also involved, including lecturers with an Erasmus contract, because the internationalization of the studies enables students to gain a broader insight into the development of the field outside Latvia. (SER p. 142-143; Meeting with teaching staff and study programme directors).

The professional and scientific qualification of the teaching staff corresponds to the aim of the study field, because the specific study courses allow each lecturer to apply his or her professional and scientific achievements. To the study programmes that have involved highly qualified industry professionals who, in addition to their daily work, are involved in the implementation of projects which contribute to the development of the social welfare sector, have gained attention with their professional and civic activities (for example, work in the Latvian Association of Social Workers, Association of Supervisors) (SER p. 143; Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CV).

New teachers can be involved in the improvement process of the study programmes and course

content to develop new fields of study (SER p. 143). During the meeting with the assessment team, the students stated that they are very satisfied with the competence of the teachers who know their specialty and interact with the students according to them (Meetings with students). For example, if necessary, you can discuss with teachers the deadlines for submitting homework, the use of teaching materials and asking for advice on plagiarism.

Most of the courses in the field are taught by professionals with long-term research and practice experience, such as in social policy, social security, human rights and criminal justice, social care management, social work research and methodology development, etc. The wide range of specialties and competencies of lecturers enriches the development of study programmes and ensures the quality of teaching in the field of well-being.

The qualifications of the academic staff of the programme are ensured by applying the University system of competition and assessment. The needs and abilities of both students and faculty are taken into account in the implementation of the programme. The Administration of UL creates the conditions necessary for teachers' professional development. UL teachers and researchers are attested in every 5 years. Teachers collect the information on their professional development and declare it periodically. Students reported that teachers are assisting students' academic and non-academic activities during the studies and support them in further professional development as well as help them in finding a job. (Meetings with students and teachers).

The ratio between the academic staff and the students is appropriate (1 to 1 or if only elected teaching staff is considered, 1 to 2.5 – SER p. 148), which gives an opportunity for teachers to deal with students individually and supports the attainment of learning outcomes. Students reported in the evaluation meeting that they have enough time and supervision from teachers to acquire practical skills or to discuss theoretical materials in depth. Student / teacher ratio is suitable for reaching the programme's outcomes. The ratio of teachers and students meets LU requirements.

Distribution of teachers' workload between teaching and other activities is regulated by UL regulations. During the visit, teachers reported that the academic work is planned for teachers in accordance with the principles of pedagogical workload of academic and research staff of the University. The academic workload of teachers is flexible and gives teachers the possibility of developing their own academic qualifications in the area of personal research (Meeting with teachers).

The teachers confirmed at the meeting that the calculation of the workload of teachers ensured and teachers are satisfied with their workload. In the meeting with students and graduates they confirmed that they have been satisfied with the work of teachers, including teaching, supervision and consultations. (Meetings with students and graduates). However, experts see a risk in terms of the workload of teachers, in particular because some teachers teach both in Riga and in branches (at BA level), and also because it is difficult to accurately account for the research and development workload and balance it with teaching and mentoring. Therefore, teachers need regular and trusting development interviews with programme directors, as well as close collaboration with regional centre directors and branch directors, to anticipate problems and distribute their workload in a timely manner as needed.

The study programme's courses are taught by both academic staff and social work professionals (SER, p. 143, Table 32). The proportion of academia and sector's practitioners is balanced. The interaction of academic lecturers and practitioners in the study process and cooperation in the implementation of social welfare projects (PONT, Glossary of Social Work Terminology) promotes the



quality and efficiency of the study process, compliance with the latest trends in research and practice (SER pp. 144; Meeting with teaching staff).

The qualification of the academic staff complies with the legislative regulations established by the State of Latvia and the UL. The qualification of the academic staff enables the students of the social work study programmes to acquire the learning outcomes to the required extent and level. The courses of study programmes are taught by 20 teachers: 3 professors, 3 associate professors, 3 assistant professors, 1 researcher with a doctoral degree and 1 professional from another sector with a doctoral degree. 6 professionals from the sector have more than five years of experience in the field of social work and a master's degree in social work, 2 researchers are doctoral degree candidates (Table 32, SER p. 143). Interdisciplinary cooperation is also promoted by lecturers from the Faculty of Business, Economics and Management, Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Law. 12 of all lecturers are elected staff members at the University of Latvia. Attracting lecturers from different fields allows to promote the necessary cross-sectoral cooperation in the field of social welfare. Several courses are taught by industry professionals (eg Social Work with Vulnerable Client Groups, Social Work with seniors).

During the meeting with the teachers, it was mentioned that in professional communication, competence in working with diversity is strengthened, involvement in the development of the field (Meeting with lecturers).

The teaching and the research experience of the academic staff is sufficient for the attainment of learning outcomes. They are actively involved in research activities, develop their own professional qualifications and disseminate research results. The research topics of the academic staff in the field of care are diverse, covering social security, social policy and social sustainability, social security, social services and migration, social inclusion, social work with target groups and sustainable national development and quality of life. In order to carry out research, the lecturers of the field have actively cooperated in the field of international research with higher education institutions (Annex 10; Annex 10.1), using various funding opportunities for research projects (Table 17) and Erasmus contracts supporting mobility. With the support of Latvian state development work agreements, the lecturers of the field have developed methodologies that are practically applied in the field of social work, such as "Methodological material for social work with families".

The wide range of research topics supports the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programmes and ensures research-based learning. At the same time, there is a risk that such a wide range of research topics may lead to a blurring of the focus of research in the field of welfare, where the substantive issues of the social work profession are left in the background. In the future, this risk must be addressed, and opportunities must be found to carry out research and development of social work (including project work and publishing) in order to strengthen the profession of social work and the professionalization of social workers.

Faculty members participate in the work of international organizations and networks (European Social Work Research Association and The Nordic Baltic Doctoral Network in Social Work (SER p. 113)).

The scientific activities of the academic staff are reflected in numerous publications, including scientific one's monographs and journals in the field (Annex 9, Annex 10, Table 17). The lecturers have also written on the topic of social work practice supervision to support the development of students into a social work professional (Supervision in social work in exceptional situations: Supervisor's reflections, Competence of a social worker in work with guardian families, etc.)

Students and graduates told in the evaluation meeting that the teachers are competent and highly qualified specialists who are able to maintain cooperative and equal relations with students. Lecturers also make an important contribution to the development of Latvian-language scientific literature in the field. In the period 2019-2021, two monographs have been developed that are important for the promotion of the social work profession in Latvia - "Social Case Work" and "Theories of Social Work".

The academic staff of the master's degree programme in Social Work operates in the field of research and development within the Department of Sociology Studies of the UL FSS. There are organised regular department meetings and discussions on the achievements and problems of the study work, approval of the topics of the master's theses, analysis of the study process and study results. In the Social Welfare study field council are discussed on the study content and study programme improvement. Lecturers of other UL faculties (Faculty of Law, Faculty of Business, Economics and Management, Faculty of Medicine) are also involved in the study programme, which promotes teaching staff cooperation, exchange of views and enriches the intellectual environment of study work (SER p 147; Meeting with teaching staff).

Research and development is carried out in collaboration with the Social and Political Research Institute, which is an important partner in scientific work. Forms of cooperation are project work, involving students in research work, publishing and organizing conferences. The feedback from the teachers on the cooperation is positive (Meeting with teaching staff).

Active co-operation in the social welfare sector is established with ministries and social institutions at the local government level. For example development of code of ethics with the Latvian Social Workers' Association, cooperation in the development of Social Services and the professional standard with the Riga City Council Welfare Department and the Ministry of Welfare. Cooperation is also carried out in connection with student research, for example, professionals in the field belong to the commissions for the defense of master's theses (in accordance with the regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers). The academic staff has good access to the wide range of scientific literature stored at the National Library of Latvia. (SER p. 147; Meeting with teaching staff).

Both the students and the lecturers confirmed at the meetings that their cooperation in conducting teaching and research is good. The student groups in the study programme are not large (10-15 students), which allows to create a personalized approach to each student, to implement interactive lectures, as well as makes the seminars highly effective, because each student has a chance to speak.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

The study programme is taught by qualified lecturers dedicated to the field of social work. Academic staff is sufficient for teaching this study programme. The university implements measures for ensuring the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments.

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. The academic staff is involved in scientific research in the field of social welfare related to the content of the social work study programme both at national and international level. The results of the research are used in the

study process. Teachers co-operate at the level of the study council, but there is still room for improvement in making this co-operation more effective.

**Strengths:**

1. The teachers of the study programme co-operate very well at the level of various organizations of the Latvian state, including ministries, social assistance institutions and local governments.
2. Teachers of the study programme participate in the important social work networks, eg Nordic-Baltic Doctoral Network in Social Work (NBSW), the International Federation of Social Workers, etc. doing project work in collaboration with international partners and publishing in high-level scientific journals.
3. University has the "Requirements for the development and defence of the final thesis (bachelor's, master's, diploma and qualification thesis) at the University of Latvia" (UL order No. 1/38 of 03.02.2012). Students receive a good level of guidance in preparing for their dissertations. The master's theses sent to the evaluation committee are written at a good level.

**Weaknesses:**

1. The study field of social welfare does not have its own doctoral study programme and doctoral students. It directs social work teachers studying in other disciplines to engage in research in various fields, and there is no opportunity to focus on social work, which is necessary for the development of a master's degree programme in social work.

## **5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Social Work"**

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Compliant to the 10.04.2013. Cabinet Regulation Nr. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus".

2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Agreement signed between University of Latvia and Riga Stradiņš University (Nr. 1-13/371).

3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Annex - Rector's certification on compensation. Certifies that UL will reimburse the damages in the amount tuition fees paid, if the professional master's study programme "Social work" of the study field "Social Welfare" will not be accredited or licence will be annulled due to the university's actions (actions or omissions) and students will not want to continue the studies in another study programme.

- 4 4. 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

26.08.2021. Certification by the Coordinator of study field Nr. 24-16/50 confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with 07.07.09. Cabinet Regulation Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi".

- 5 5. 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.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

- 6 6. 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.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not relevant as this is a master's programme.

- 7 7. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable, study programme is a professional not academic study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Sample of Study agreement attached complies with 23.01.07. Cabinet Regulations 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi".

- 9 9. 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 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Study courses have been developed in Latvian accordance with the established requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The study programme partially complies with the senior social worker professional standard (see Ch.The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof) . Appendix 29. Compliance of

qualifications to be acquired in the study programme with the occupational standard. Qualification senior social worker is not linked to the offered specializations, study courses are orientated on the needed knowledge for specializations and are less related to professional standard of senior social worker, focus on micro practice level is kept. 3rd internship (objectives) focuses on psychosocial consulting which does not correspond to senior social worker professional standard and is the same as internship for students with bachelor's degree in social work. Internships are not linked with the mezo and macro practice aims resulting from senior social worker standard.

Additional information in the chapter The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof.

- 11 11. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable, study programme is a professional not academic study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Complies with 26.08.2014.Cabinet Regulation No. 512 "Regulations on the second level professional higher education state standard".

- 13 13. The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (if applicable).

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable as it is professional not a joint study programme.

- 14 14. Each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions (if they have worked for a shorter period of time, the number of publications shall be in proportion to the work period), or artistic creation achievements (for instance, exhibitions, films, theatre performances, and concert activity), or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Each member of academic staff has publications (Annex 9; Annex Annex\_UL FSS\_Teaching Staff CV; Table 17) or five year practical work experience.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The programme generally complies with the legal requirements, except that the study programme lacks balance between requirements resulting from professional standard of senior social worker and content of the study courses.

## Requirements (R6-R8)

- 1 R6 - The compliance of the study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The informative provision (libraries, electronic databases), auditoriums and the financial resources are appropriate to ensure master's studies and to ensure achievement of the learning outcomes.

- 2 R7 - The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification and scientific activities of the academic staff complies with the legal requirements and correspond to the study programme.

- 3 R8 - The study programme leading to the master or doctoral degree is based on the advances and findings in the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The teaching staff have rather low number of publications, although, they are involved in various projects, and use the latest achievements and conclusions from the projects in the study courses.

## Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions.

The main resources of the UL - financial, human resources, technical facilities and scientific facilities are sufficient and appropriate for implementation of the master's study programme. Some lecturers of the master's study programme are involved in the implementation of the bachelor's study programme (full-time and part-time studies), which can cause difficulties in planning human resources, as it is important to find time for research as well. The study programme's content quality is evidenced by the fact that the students are well prepared for doctoral studies. At present, it is not entirely certain whether it can be stated that social workers within the study field acquire the skills required by the standard for the senior social worker because in the 80 CP sub-programme the study field is focused only on social work with an individual case. Master's degree is not purposefully required in the labor market and it depends on the employer's understanding and motivation to set a higher level of remuneration for social workers who perform the same level of work, but their academic degrees are different. At the same time, there is a need for highly educated professionals, both at the mezzo and macro level. During the visit, students and former students demonstrated high motivation to do social work in practice and highly appreciated the knowledge gained.

Strengths:

1. In general, finances, human resources, technical facilities and research facilities are sufficient and appropriate;
2. Students have access to budget study places;
3. After completion of master's studies students can enrol in doctoral programmes.

Weaknesses:

1. Risk of teaching staff capacity and ability to balance lectures with research;
2. There is an unclear demand in the labour market for social workers with Master's degree;
3. The 3rd study field is focused on individual social case work rather than developing the skills for the senior social worker.

### **Evaluation of the study programme " "Social Work""**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme " "Social Work""**

#### **Short-term recommendations**

Advising employers in the regions on the goals and opportunities of higher education, as well as on the needs and opportunities to support learners in order to secure the necessary workforce.

Involvement of master's students in the promotion of social work in the labor market and at the local government level.

Wider disclosure of research work of master's students (incl. Presentations in the regions).

Increase the number of a cooperation agreements with internships in Riga and regions (incl. study visits in more institutions in different social work practice level, incl. hospitals, Orphan's Court, ministries, international organizations) to develop targeted cooperation.

Overview the aims and objectives of the internships to comply them with the requirements which result from senior social worker standard.

Synchronize senior social workers standard with provided specializations.

#### **Long-term recommendations**

Follow-up (at least once in the accreditation period) on alumni's professional competencies from employers' perspective for those graduates who enrolled in a master's study programme without a social work bachelor's degree.

Develop study courses in English which could be offered to international students.

## **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 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:	Fully compliant	The UL has established a quality policy and a quality system: a) committees (e.g., Study Program Quality Assessment Commission/Board; Qualitative Consultative Committee- see p.13 of the SER and 1.2_UL_Organizational chart ENG) b) regulations and procedures (see Annex 3 for a list). A chart illustrating the system of quality assessment and improvement of study fields and programs is presented on p. 22 of the SER (see. Fig. 6 in SER).
R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.	Fully compliant	SER pp. 94- 98, Annex 12; SER p. 100 UL has developed a broad cooperation network at national level – with employers, policy makers (incl. Ministry of Welfare), municipalities (incl. regions), non-governmental organizations, universities and international level (Erasmus+ cooperation agreements, implemented projects). UL also has established a wide range and close cooperation in the internship field.
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).	Fully compliant	Annex 9; Annex_UL FSS_Teaching Staff CV (1).pdf As strengths can be mentioned: long-term research and development experience of the academic staff; a high level of engagement in attaining research objectives (i.e. becoming a leading research centre in the Baltics); students cooperation with lecturers in research and development.



Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.	Fully compliant		Annex 15. Implementation of recommendations (LABOTS).docx The qualification of teaching staff is being improved. Awareness has been brought about the study programmes and study field. The university has improved and updated its homepage with the relevant information. There has been a significant increase in research funding. Almost all of the recommendations have been implemented.

#### 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	Social Work (42762)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
2	"Social Work" (47762)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

#### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

No dissenting opinions were identified.