

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Vadības koledža

Study field: Management, Administration and Management of Real Property

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## Summary Assessment of the Study Field

### Summary Assessment of the Study Field

Riga Management College (thereafter RMC) study direction "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" (thereafter the Study Direction) includes one study program - the first level professional higher education study program "Business Administration" (thereafter the Study Programme). The Study Programme is taught in full time (2 years), part time, part time extramural and part time distance learning forms (all 2,5 years) in Latvian and English. The previous accreditation of the Study Direction and the Study Programme took place in 2017 and 11 recommendations were formulated. To implement recommendations received during the previous assessment procedures, the Development Plan for 2018-2023 with 7 directions to develop and 28 tasks was created. Based on the self-evaluation report (thereafter SER), its annexes and information collected during the on-site visit, the expert panel concluded that (despite what is claimed in the SER) only 4 of 11 recommendations were fully accomplished. For the remaining 7 recommendations RMC had taken proactive approach towards the required changes and improvements; yet issues related to implementation of quality assurance (thereafter QA) systems in practice, more active involvement of social partners into study process, inefficient internal communication, lack to present social entrepreneurship in tasks and learning outcomes (thereafter LOs) of the Study Programme, etc. remained unsolved.

The aim and professional orientation of the Study Direction corresponds to the RMC strategy. The Study Direction and the Study Programme under the assessment are broad profile, generic and similar to the programmes of the other HEI. Yet, the strategic directions of the development of the Study Direction towards social entrepreneurship is not sufficiently integrated into the curriculum of the Study Programme. The Study Direction has a strong focus on the local labour market needs; orientation towards the needs of the global market is weak. With the further expansion of specialisations towards Sales management and Tourism the focus of the Study Programme becomes unclear. The sustainability of the Study Direction and the Study Programme is under the consideration due to the dependence on the other higher education institution (thereafter HEI) in daily operations and low number of students taught in multiple languages and formats.

After the last accreditation RMC made evident developments in their QA system. Yet, elements of the QA system still lack logics, are not systematically developed and implemented, and do not correspond with each other. It was not evidence on how elements of RMC QA system systematically and comprehensively contribute to the achievement of the aim and LOs of the Study Direction and Study Programme. Feedback on the study process and the study content is collected mainly using various surveys. Taking into consideration the small number of respondents, results of such surveys may not be reliable. Procedures for student feedback collection on Moodle do not ensure anonymous and unbiased students' opinion. The role and importance of internal audits to develop the study process remains unclear. Implementation of elements of the QA system in daily operations need to be improved.

RMC has developed a system to determine the financial resources required for the implementation of the Study Direction and Study Programme. The system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of the material, technical, methodological, and informative provision is developed and implemented. RMC has well-developed and functioning e-learning resources. Yet, the current approach towards using material resources of Baltic International Academy and having teaching staff working in multiple HEI, threatens the identity of RMC and sustainability of its operations.

Teaching staff looks not very acquainted with the system and procedures of the College. As the majority of teaching staff work in multiple higher education institutions, their involvement in activities of the Study Direction and Study Programme seems limited. The teaching staff did not provide knowledge and understanding of the LOs of their teaching courses. Outgoing and incoming mobility of the teaching staff is very low (non existent).

Support system of RMC students is sufficiently developed, is well functioning. The owners provide scholarships to students from socially vulnerable groups, yet this process could be more transparent.

RMC has clearly defined priority topics of the scientific activities which are in line with its strategic development directions. Yet the current topic of scientific research in social entrepreneurship does not fully represent the content of the Study Programme and areas scientific activities of teaching staff. International cooperation of RMC scientific activities is underdeveloped and is not inactivated. Outcomes of the scientific research are not sufficiently integrated in the study process in the Study Programme. The overall level and scope of scientific research and publications is in line with what would be expected from the first level higher education institution (thereafter HEI) but could be more oriented towards applied research. Complex system and plans towards involvement of the students into scientific activities proved to be overstated.

Engagement of social partners into activities of the Study Direction is underdeveloped and not efficiently managed. Involvement of social partners into the study process is not sufficient. Cooperation with local business entities and organisations are mostly concentrated towards social services. Cooperation in other areas was merely evident. Study Direction development plan 2020-2023 does not include strengthening cooperation with local Latvia based businesses. High reliance on one partner (Baltic International Academy) in terms of use of resources used and the overall provision of the Study Direction was evident. With low number of international mobility partners as well as low incoming and outgoing mobility of students and teaching staff international cooperation of RMC is underdeveloped. Yet, the system for attracting foreign students for full time studies is well functioning and efficient.

A system of internships is implemented and is well functioning for local students. RMC does not provide international students with internship places. This may become an issue in the future, taking into consideration the growing number of international students.

The 1st level professional higher education study programme "Business Administration" is in line with the formal requirements. The name and aim of the Study Programme, and the professional qualification are interrelated. To enter the Study Programme the applicants must have completed secondary education and follow the admission procedure. Additional admission requirements for the applicants to study in English are applied. The admission requirements are in line with level of studies. The structure of the Study Programme is balanced towards general management; specialisations/orientations in social entrepreneurship, languages and/or sales management is not clearly visible in either the aim or tasks/LOs of the Programme and focus of the Study Programme is unclear. LOs of the Study Programme are too numerous, complex and not in accordance to the level of the studies. The descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the internships, and qualification papers comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments and include all the required information. Content of study courses is the same in all forms of studies except for contact/independent work hours. The objectives, results and content of the study modules/courses are too numerous and complex for the first level professional study programme. Objectives of the study modules are formulated towards the teaching process rather than students' learning. Descriptions of study modules/courses seem to be developed by the administration and teaching staff demonstrated little knowledge about the content of these documents. None of the titles of qualification papers were related to social entrepreneurship. The study process is dominated by traditional, passive learning and assessment methods, therefore there could be some room for improvement in the diversity of the teaching and learning methods. The outcomes of students, teachers and employers feedback are used to improve the quality of studies.

Teaching staff involved in the implementation of the Study Programme is qualified, its composition is sufficient to ensure the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies, to reach aims and LOs of the Study Programme. Academic competencies of teaching staff could be further strengthened to empower them using more active and practice-oriented learning and assessment.

RMC provides support to professional development and the scientific research activities of academic staff. Premises, laboratories, information, material and technical provision comply with the needs of the Study Programme and are adequate for the achievement of its LOs. Yet, the current arrangements with BIA regarding use of resources does not ensure a high-quality study process in the future. RMC has a well-developed and functioning e-learning system and resources efficiently adapted to full time, part time and distant forms of studies.

## **1. Management of the Study Field**

### **Analysis**

Self-evaluation report indicates that the aim of the Study Direction "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" and its development plan are closely related to the development strategy of the Riga Management College (thereafter RMC) for 2018-2023. The aim of the Study Direction is to prepare qualified, socially responsible, competitive in the market business professionals who are able to organise and manage the activities of the company's structural unit or how entrepreneurs to establish and manage their companies. Information provided in Selfevaluation report and collected during the visit indicate that RMC is oriented towards local market needs while needs and requirements of the global market are not considered. This approach should be rethought taking into consideration the increasing number of international students. During the visit the expert panel got an impression that the Study Direction places a lot of emphasis on (or even changes its direction towards) social services and social entrepreneurship (including directions of scientific research, cooperation with local partners, advertising of the Study Programme etc.) Yet this is not in line with the current aim of the Study Direction. The expert panel believes that the strategic direction of the Study Direction is not clear and is not aligned with the current aim.

The need and importance of implementing the Study Direction and Study Programme was adequately justified in the Self-evaluation report by aligning it with the needs and the development trends of Latvian Republic. Great importance is paid not only to the knowledge, skills and abilities provided for in the professional standard and competencies, but also attitudes. The task of RMC, thinking about the Republic of Latvia interests are not only the training of good professionals who manage their profession well, but also great attention is paid to the growth of the personality, its attitude towards the work to be performed and socially responsible attitude towards society as a whole.

The expert panel noted that the aim of the Study Direction and the content of the Study Programme under the assessment are very general and broad. Comparing this first level professional higher education Study Programme with similar programmes in business administration of the other higher education institutions, it is unequivocal that all programmes have a lot in common – duration of studies, forms of studies, etc. Yet RMC Study Programme differs from the other programmes by its social orientation (which was repeatedly mentioned during the visit). RMC compares its Study Direction and Study Programme with similar programs at the Baltic International Academy (BIA) and Alberta College, not only because the programs are similar, but also because RMS and Alberta College first-level graduates very often choose BIA and EKA University of Applied Sciences as a place to continue studies. At the same time, RMC positions itself as one of the strongest players in the field of social entrepreneurship not only in Latvia, but also internationally.

The expert panel drew attention to the tight cooperation of RMC with Baltic International Academy in terms of execution of the Study Direction and Study Programme (using the same premises, sharing teaching and some administrative staff, having joint lectures, providing continuity of studies, sharing results of scientific research, etc.). Such cooperation may bring a lot of positive aspects to the Study Direction and Study Programme, but it also raises concerns about dependence on a much bigger higher education institute in running daily operations. It also questions the identity and, in general,

sustainability of the Study Direction in RMC.

According to the self-evaluation report management of the Study Direction is carried out at multiple levels. In order to ensure the overall functions of RMC and the high-level execution of both- the Study Direction and the Study Programme administration of the Study Direction involves administrative staff (incl. general and support staff), teaching staff (incl. guest lecturers), students, employers' representatives (including graduates) and the other stakeholders.

Management structure of the Study Direction and Study Programme was analysed to assess its efficiency, including the role of the Head of the Study Direction and Study Programme managers, responsibilities and cooperation with other study program managers, the administrative and technical staff and students. Based on the information provided in Self-evaluation report and information collected during the visit the expert panel concluded that the structure of the management of the Study Direction and Study Programme is well planned and documented. It is oriented towards the development of the Study Direction. Specialists with extensive professional experience involved in the management of the Study Direction. Experienced, dedicated and highly engaged Head of the Study Direction

For the regulation of its work RMC has 33 internal normative documents which include practically all aspects of the nature of the college. They have all been adopted or reaffirmed between June 2017 and January 2020. The expert panel found the number, scope and the level of detail of the internal regulations and procedures being difficult to comprehend and too extensive taking into consideration the size of RMC. Also, it became evident during the visit that due to the changes in the ownership and management team of RMC some inconsistencies and inefficiencies in management exist (i.e. currently RMC has nobody to supervise quality management). Also, the experts felt that different stakeholders perceive their responsibilities and employ procedures somewhat differently. It became evident during the visit that RCM has an active student self-government which represents RMC students, defends their rights and interests, and ensures that students' opinions are taken into consideration when solving RCM-related issues. The expert panel appreciates active involvement of students into management of the Study Direction.

The experts also acknowledge the business-oriented development and marketing of Study Direction and Study Programme which allowed RMC to offset loss of groups taught in Russian and quickly replace them with English groups. Due to the amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, students are no longer admitted to study programmes implemented in Russian, thus the number of these students is rapidly decreasing. At the same time quick changes and adjustments in the study process were implemented as well. During the self-assessment period, the number of students with English as the language of the study program has increased. The number of students to study programmes implemented in Latvian is almost equal to the number of students studying in English. Yet the expert panel raises a concern that the sustainability of RMC, the Study Direction and Study Programme may be under threat due to teaching in multiple forms (full time, part time, distant learning), multiple languages (Latvian, English) while the number of students remains low.

Information provided in Self-evaluation report and in the webpage of RMC suggests that the system and procedures for the admission of students are detailed, clearly defined and in line with the formal requirements. The procedure for admission of students is defined by the Admission Regulations issued in accordance with Latvian regulation requirements. Admission rules are specified for each academic year and approved by RMC Council, as well as in accordance with the requirements of regulatory enactments, they are approved by the Supreme Board of Education and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science.

There was not sufficient evidence about the system and procedures for recognition of previously acquired formal and non-formal education. Such procedures may not seem important for the first level professional higher education programme, yet the expert panel believes that they might become a daily necessity with the increase of international students and entrants with practical experience. Taking into consideration global trends towards life-long learning the expert panel

suggests that the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge and professional experience could become a competitive advantage and possibly attract more students to the Study Direction and Study Programme.

With the 2018/2019 academic year, the RMC has started implementing socially responsible approach for attracting students (i.e. agreement with a prison). RMC, by increasing the number of foreign students, thus attracting funding, provides an opportunity to study without paying tuition fee, studies funded by founder for local students from social exclusion groups at risk, usually those with insufficient education to compete in the labour market. The expert panel appreciates social orientation of RMC towards admissions of entrants to the programme

RMC has developed and implemented rules for control and prevention of plagiarism to be used in written works of students and teachers. RMC has approved internal normative documents Code of Ethics of the College of Management and the Study Regulations in which the academic the principles of fairness and responsible conduct and the conditions for complying with them. The study regulations stipulate that after the detection of plagiarism in the qualification work, the student is exmatriculated and repeated state examination is possible only after one year. In turn The Code of Ethics of the College of Management sets out the responsibilities of the students and lecturers of the College plagiarism in the study process. The Self-evaluation report also states that the lecturers of the RMC and the methodologists of the Study Department get acquainted with the Unified Computer Plagiarism Control system used in college, a training seminar on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism was organised. Yet during the visit neither the students and graduates nor teaching staff were able to explain how to find the rules for control and prevention of plagiarism. Still they confirmed that they were informed about the plagiarism prevention rules before writing their final report and do understand the concept of plagiarism.

Similar to the other areas, evaluation of the achievements and LOs are thoroughly defined in rules and procedures, including the basic principles for the evaluation of the results of studies in the Study Programme. RMC uses various methods for the evaluation of learning achievements and the majority of the study courses have a cumulative evaluation system. Students are informed about the evaluation system, conditions and requirements of the examinations, as well as the form of the examination. The expert panel agreed that, in general, the established a system and developed procedures for the evaluation of the achievements and LOs are logical and efficient yet have to be clarified and involve more practical skills and abilities-oriented tasks and methods (as further discussed in Section II).

Information about the Study Direction and the Study Programme, their contents, the expected LOs are available on RMC website. Information published on the RMC website corresponds to the information available in the official registers. Also, information is published in all languages in which the Study Programme is implemented. At the same time, it should be noted that the information available in Latvian is more extensive and it is updated more regularly than the information in English and Russian.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The aim and professional orientation of the Study Direction corresponds to the RMC strategy. The need and importance of implementing the Study Direction and the Study Programme are discussed from the perspective of the needs of Latvian economy. Study Direction and Study Programme under the assessment are broad profile, generic and similar to the programmes of the other higher education institutes. Social orientation and social entrepreneurship as an exclusivity of the Study Direction in RMC is not sufficiently supported in Self-evaluation report. Sustainability of the Study Programme is under consideration due to the dependence on the other HEI in daily operations and low number of students taught in multiple languages and formats. Management structure and procedures of RMC had been reviewed over the past couple years along with the changes in the

management team. In general, they are business oriented and take a market-needs approach towards the development of the Study Direction. The system and procedures for the admission of students are clear, in line with the formal requirements and the level of the studies. No evidence on recognition of formally and non formally acquired skills and competencies were collected. A system and procedures for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes are in line with the requirements, logical yet need to be somewhat improved. Academic integrity principle and mechanism are effective and sufficient, they should be made publicly available and better explained to the students. Information regarding study programmes that is published in the RMC website is accessible, understandable and in accordance with information available on the official registers.

#### Strengths

1. Market-needs and business oriented approach towards management of RMC, which is translated into efficiently designed systems and relevant procedures.
2. Specialists with extensive professional experience involved in the management of the Study Direction. Experienced, dedicated and highly engaged Head of the Study Direction.
3. The management structure and procedures of the Study Direction generally comply with the requirements of Latvia's higher education system.
4. Quick and efficient re-orientation towards groups taught in English. Well-developed international sales of the studies.

#### Weaknesses

1. Sustainability and financial stability of RMC may be impaired due to the shared resources (premises, teaching staff, etc.) with the other HEI and the teaching in multiple forms (full time, part time, distant)
2. Strong focus on the local labour market needs, weak orientation towards the needs of the global market.
3. Strategic directions of the development of the Study Direction (i.e. towards the social entrepreneurship) is not in line with current aim of the Study Direction

## 2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

### Analysis

Based on the information provided in SER and collected during the visit, the expert panel concluded that RMC had developed a quality assurance (QA) system. The SER states that the concept of RMC development is based on European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education (ESG) and Framework for Excellence in the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). The expert panel, however, claims that QA system of RMC is a composition of elements corresponding to the ESG provisions and also to international standard ISO 9001. SER describes the QA system as a composition of the following details: 1) College sets the goals and expected results for each study programme. 2) To ascertain the effectiveness of the quality assurance system within the study direction, College organizes optional surveys of students (after the courses), also surveys of the employers and the graduates. 3) The Internal audits audit the study process.

Quality policy documents of RMC: "Quality Management Policy" and "Quality Management System Policy Manual" are publicly available. The College publishes them in English on the web page.

Nevertheless, after discussions and deliberations the expert panel concluded that elements of the QA system lack logics, they are not systematically developed and implemented, and do not correspond with each other. The expert panel was not able to collect sufficient evidence on how elements of RMC's QA system systematically and comprehensively contribute to the achievement of the aim and LOs of the Study Direction and Study Programme under the assessment.

The SER provides very little information on how QA system is implemented in practice. Information provided in the SER and collected during the visit mostly emphasises the surveys of students and

some lecture inspections. Although surveys are an essential element, they are not sufficient to prove the effectiveness of the QA system. Moreover, the results of the surveys are not shared with students and other stakeholders. It also became evident during the visit, that the expected results of the Study programme (in the form of LOs) were unknown to the teaching staff, which supports shortcomings of the implementation of QA system in practice.

The experts were not assured that recently introduced procedures for student feedback collection on Moodle are according to the best standards across similar higher education institutions and if they are acceptable to capture anonymous and unbiased students' opinion. In general, management culture of RMC could be transited towards collaboration, openness and deregulation.

Based on the information provided in SER and collected during the visit RMC runs internal audits as a part of their QA procedure. The role and importance of internal audits to develop the study process remained unclear to the experts. It also became evident that during the visit to RMC nobody was responsible for QA in RMC (as the responsible person was on maternity leave). Based on all the above mentioned arguments the expert panel concluded that the QA system of RMC does not ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the Study Direction and Study Programme under the assessment.

In order to assess the procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programmes of the study direction and the feedback mechanisms (including feedback to students, employers, and graduates) have been defined and they are logical, efficient, and available for all stakeholders, the experts analysed information provided in SER (which was not very clear and sufficient) and also raised questions to all groups of stakeholders during the visit to RMC. The expert panel concluded that RMC has the procedures for the development and review of the study programmes and the feedback mechanisms. SER indicates that College performs surveys to obtain feedback from students, employers and graduates. It was confirmed during the visit, that the students take part in these surveys on a voluntary basis, not all students and graduates (who participated in the meetings) even knew about such surveys. Considering the small number of the students in the Study Direction, the reliability and practical utility of survey results are under question. The expert panel would suggest to use the focus group discussions as an instrument for keeping in touch with the stakeholders.

The expert panel learned that as an outcome of the conducted surveys, RMC intends to introduce a new study programme Tourism Management. However, due to a very competitive market of Latvian higher education, such programmes are already provided by the Hotel Management College and Turība University. The experts believe that survey regarding development of the new study programme supports business-oriented approach towards development of the Study Direction. Yet, taking into consideration the concern of the experts regarding low sustainability in the RMC operations such a decision should be well thought of.

In the SER RMC provided examples of the questionnaires ("Study Course Evaluation questionnaire", "Practice Supervisor questionnaire", "Graduate survey questionnaire") used to collect feedback about the study process. Analysis of the data and results of such surveys (as it was provided in SER) showed that the collected answers mostly represent examples of technical or organisational issues. The experts also found some inconsistencies in how feedback about the study process and study content was used to improve the quality of the Study Direction and/or Study programme. For example, results of students' surveys indicate that students expressed a need for a stronger "relation of the acquired knowledge, skills and competencies to real life". According to the SER, to correspond to this issue, the College had planned to invite guest lecturers from business companies. However during the on-site visits neither students and graduates nor employers provided evidence that any visits of guest lecturers from business were actually organised.

The SER also discusses an established procedure for students to submit complaints/suggestions about the study process. According to the provided information, most of the questions and requests indicated difficulties of using the study environment. As a result of this, the Head of the Distance

Learning Department has developed several instructions for using the distance learning site. The students also have an opportunity to appeal the assessment. The above-mentioned examples provide evidence that some elements of the quality assurance are implemented in practice and their results are used to improve the quality of the study process.

As it is presented in SER, RMC has identified the standards outlined in Part 1 of the ESG, which require special attention. All nine sections of ESG Part 1 are marked as "Increased Attention". As for the "Challenges" the College highlights the five areas: QA policy, Student-centered learning, Teaching and assessment, Teaching staff, Learning resources and student support, Informing the public. However, this part of the SER lacks more in-depth self-analysis and supporting actual information. For example, the review of the section "Learning resources and student support" the SER does not explain the need to share resources (physical, also human) with the Baltic International Academy. Also, the section "Teaching staff" of ESG does not indicate the need for the development of English language skills of teaching staff. Yet, during the visit experts noted that not all teachers were able to communicate in English and English language skills need to be further developed. Also, the expert panel noted that for areas which require special attention RMC had only defined the aims but not the measures. Therefore, assessment of how those areas are improved is not measurable and therefore not efficiently assessed.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

RMC had developed a quality assurance (QA) system, which is a composition of elements corresponding to the ESG provisions and also to international standard ISO 9001. Some elements of the QA system lack logics, they are not systematically developed and implemented, and do not correspond with each other. The expert panel was not able to collect sufficient evidence on how elements of RMC's QA system systematically and comprehensively contribute to the achievement of the aim and LOs of the Study Direction and Study Programme under the assessment. In general, RMC has the procedures for the development and review of the study programmes and the feedback mechanisms. Yet, taking into consideration the small number of respondents, results of such surveys may not be reliable and RMC shall consider other forms of feedback collection (i.e. focus groups). The experts noted both appropriate and inconsistent ways in how feedback about the study process and study content was used to improve the quality of the Study Direction and/or Study programme. The areas or ESG which require special attention are identified. However, they only have aims but not the measures. Therefore, their achievement cannot be efficiently assessed. This proves that the implementation of elements of the QA system in daily operations needs to be improved.

### **Strengths**

1. QA system is well documented.
2. RMC clearly expresses the constant importance of collecting data and information from various surveys to promote evidence-based policy.

### **Weaknesses**

1. The SER did not provide any indications of usage of the EFQM model at any level (study directions, study programme).
2. The on-site visits did not provide any evidence on how QA is used to develop study direction or study programmes.
3. Procedures for student feedback collection on Moodle do not ensure anonymous and unbiased students' opinion.
4. The role and importance of internal audits to develop the study process remains unclear.
5. The teaching staff did not provide knowledge and understanding of the LOs of their teaching courses.

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

#### Analysis

RMC has developed a system to determine the financial resources required for the implementation of the Study Direction and the relevant Study Programme. All necessary infrastructure for the provision of services is provided by the Director in coordination with the Executive Board of RMC. The Director in consultation with the Head of the Study Directions and other staff determines the need for materials for the provision of a quality service as well as seeks for possible cooperation partners. With only one Study Programme currently implemented the expert panel was not convinced about financial sustainability of the Study Direction Providing a single Study programme in the Study Direction in multiple forms and languages while number of students is low – 155 students in 2019/2020 (with some of them receiving discounts and scholarships) brings an issue of the sustainability of the study process.

The expert panel had learned that the scientific research activities of teaching staff (although the first-level professional higher education does not require them) are supported by the management of RMC. Teaching staff gets financed to participate in scientific events, they also receive financial rewards for high level publications. The system for financing the scientific research is in place and is efficient for the first level higher education.

RMC had made arrangements for the infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision required for the implementation of the Study Direction. They are available to the RMC students and teaching staff. RMC is sharing premises, library and information resources, such as databases, plagiarism prevention tools, etc. with BIA. Yet, the expert panel is concerned that RMC is highly dependent on resources of the other HEI. Some of the study premises (i.e. majority of auditoriums) look like old style classes and do not facilitate an active and engaging learning process. Therefore, its identity and sustainability are under the threat.

The day-to-day maintenance of the operation of RMC also includes a budget for the purchase of the necessary low-value inventory and stationery goods, which shall be organised by the Director of RMC. There is a common system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of the material, technical, methodological, and informative provision, etc. in place and the teaching staff knows them. The expert panel believes that the system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of the material, technical, methodological, and informative provision are in place; such decisions made and then actions are implemented in an organised manner. The expert panel agreed that RMC has well developed and functioning e-learning system adapted to the needs of different study forms (distant, part and full time). Reviewing the e-resources of some study courses (on e-learning platform) allowed the expert panel to conclude that information was prepared and provided according to the best practices.

Based on information provided in SER and collected during the visit, the expert panel agrees that the RMC teaching staff is professional and knows their teaching subjects well. RMC has developed and implements the procedures for attracting highly skilled teaching staff (for the study field and the relevant study programmes) from the other Latvian HEI. However, experts learned during the visit that the majority of teaching staff work in multiple HEIs. Teaching staff looks not very acquainted with the system and procedures of RMC; they were not able to discuss the LOs of the Study Programme they work in. Efforts and results of scientific activities are also spread among different HEI. This raises questions about the loyalty of teaching staff to RMC, also if RMC name and identity among the students, graduates and teaching staff is on the acceptable level; it reassures that risks related to the sustainability of Study Direction and Study Programme under the assessment are high.

The needs of the teaching staff for professional development - i.e. use of Moodle and different kinds of IT solutions for delivering lectures, materials and consultation online - are identified and supported by in-house training. During the visit the teaching staff assured that they receive

consultations and other types of help upon request, they are timely and sufficient. The expert panel noticed that some of the teachers do not have sufficient level of English therefore some coordinated actions from RMC in improving such skills are needed. Also, the expert panel notices that there was no or very little training related to the improvement of the study and assessment methods while current teaching methods and forms of learning (during the lectures) are very much theory oriented and passive. RMC shall take a long-term institutional approach and place a greater emphasis on the development of teaching staff competencies towards active and more practice oriented learning methods (including those suitable for on-line learning).

The expert panel also noticed that no incoming or outgoing mobility of the teaching staff took place during the SER period. The expert panel believes that low outgoing mobility of teachers may be due to low level of English and also due to employment in multiple HEI. Yet management of RMC shall place the mobility of teaching staff among the priorities of the Study Direction, especially taking into consideration the increasing number of international students and the overall internationalisation strategy of RMC.

RMC had identified the support necessary for the students and established a well-functioning support system, based on the needs of the students. The owners Of RMC provide financial support to the talented students from low-income families and social risk group representatives (like prisoners education projects). Yet the rules and procedures of such support are not clear and are not publicly available. Student Council activities ensure students with the opportunity to participate in the improvement of the study process by submitting written or oral proposals to RMC administration, working also with students complaints. The expert panel acknowledges active and efficient work of students' self-governing bodies and their efforts in student support, quality assurance and student life of RMC.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

RMC has developed a system to determine the financial resources required for the implementation of the Study Direction and Study programme under the assessment. As RMC took an approach towards using materials resources of Baltic International Academy and teaching staff working in multiple HEI, the expert panel raises concerns about the identity of RMC and sustainability of its operations. The system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of the material, technical, methodological, and informative provision is developed and implemented in an organised manner, such resources and provisions are available and sufficient. RMC has well developed and functioning e-learning system adapted to the needs of different study forms. In RMC the system for financing the scientific research and/or artistic creation activities is developed and seems to work efficiently. Procedures for attracting skilled teaching staff are implemented and, in general, teaching staff of the Study Direction is professional in their teaching areas. Needs of the teaching staff for the improvement of their skills are collected and fulfilled. RMC shall take an institutional long-term approach towards development of the teaching staff's knowledge and skills of English as well as active and practice-oriented learning and assessment methods. Outgoing and incoming mobility of teaching staff in SER period is very low. Support system of RMC students is sufficiently developed and is well functioning. Yet the criteria for financial support are not clear; the support system could be more transparent.

### **Strengths:**

1. RMC has well-developed and functioning e-learning resources.
2. The owners of RMC provide financial support to students from low-income families and social risk group representatives.
3. RMC provides support to the scientific research activities of teaching staff.
4. Teaching staff are professionals in their teaching field.

#### Weaknesses:

1. The current approach towards using material resources of Baltic International Academy and having teaching staff working in multiple HEI, threatens the identity of RMC and sustainability of its operations.
2. Teaching staff looks not very acquainted with the system and procedures of the College. As the majority of teaching staff work in multiple higher education institutions, their involvement in activities of the Study Direction seems limited.
3. The rules of providing the owners financial support to students are not clearly defined and are not transparent.
4. Some of the study premises (i.e. majority of auditoriums) look like old style classes and do not facilitate an active and engaging learning process.

## 4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

### Analysis

At the strategic level scientific research in the Study Direction under the assessment complies with the aims of RMC. Current priority topic of scientific research is Social Entrepreneurship Developments Trends in Latvia and Europe. This is in line with RMC mission to train creatively minded and socially responsible professionals to shape the modern world. Social entrepreneurship and a socially responsible approach is clearly evident in RMC activities (studies, cooperation with local partners, recruitment of students, etc.). However, the expert panel is concerned that for a relatively small college operating in a small economy concentration of scientific, academic and cooperation activities in a single scientific field (social entrepreneurship) become a limiting factor for the further development of the college.

RMC has a designated body – Scientific Council which defines the priority directions of scientific work, plans and coordinates scientific activities of teaching staff and students, is responsible for international scientific cooperation as well as evaluates results of scientific activities. The Scientific council is composed of the Head of Methodological Commission, Director of the College and one teaching staff representative, which should ensure efficient connection between scientific research and the study process of the Study Direction. Yet, during the visit such connection was not clearly evident – majority of the study modules (especially in general business) are quite theoretical, their content does not represent scientific research of the teaching staff or the other up to date results of empirical research. Applied research and other consulting activities to local community and business, which are among best international practices among first level HEIs, also were not evident during the visit. Lack of more engaged applied research activities does not support positioning of RMC as a socially responsible player in the market. Moreover, analysis of the content of study courses revealed that only one third of them are designated towards social entrepreneurship studies. The other study courses, which represent the majority of the Study Programme, analyse general management topics and do not have social entrepreneurship topics or cases integrated into the study process. Therefore, the expert panel concluded that outcomes of the scientific research are not sufficiently integrated in the study process of the Study Programme under assessment.

International cooperation of the Study Direction is yet very limited. As it is presented in SER RMC has 5 cooperation agreements for scientific research activities with two foreign and three national HEI to organise joint international conferences and other scientific research activities. During the visit the expert panel was not presented with the evidence of the actual international scientific cooperation. Moreover, specialisation of cooperation partners (for example B.H.M.S., Switzerland in hospitality business) is not much relevant to the priority direction of scientific activities of RMC (i.e. social entrepreneurship).

International cooperation is undergoing a process requiring constant involvement and development. The expert panel was not provided with concrete plans or clear vision of the development of

scientific cooperation in the Study Direction. Therefore, the expert panel recommends that RMC needs to improve its national and international scientific visibility by establishing focused and viable international cooperation with HEI institutions from neighboring countries and/or working in a similar direction of scientific research.

The SER discloses that RMC has a clear and well-designed system and procedures for involvement, assessment and remuneration of teaching staff for their scientific activities. It became evident during the visit that teaching staff is aware of the existing mechanism for the assessment of their scientific activities and have an appreciation of remuneration for them. Yet, the expert panel also learned that the key people, who are involved in scientific research in the priority direction (i.e. social entrepreneurship), at the same time are doctoral students in the other HEI institutions. Their scientific activities are very much related to their studies. Moreover, during the meeting the majority of the teaching staff confirmed that they are employed in multiple HEI institutions and therefore split their scientific activities and publications among those institutions. Also, topics of scientific research of such teaching staff are little related to social entrepreneurship. The expert panel is concerned that current involvement of the teaching staff is much dependable on their activities in the other HEI, remuneration system and/or is not sustainable. Teaching staff is not involved in applied research, which would be expected for the first level HEI institution. But it also has to be noted that the overall level and scope of scientific research and publications is in line with what would be expected from the first level HEI (and even exceeds expectations of the expert panel).

Students' involvement in scientific activities is mostly executed through scientific work in term and qualification papers. To develop skills of scientific work students of the Study Programme have a special course where they study research methods. Students also have the right and are encouraged to participate in Student scientific writing contests (with cash prizes for the best papers) and students' scientific conferences. During the visit some few students confirmed that they knew about the mentioned possibilities yet non participated in such events. The SER also claims that students develop their research skills conducting various independent tasks during their study courses. However, provided course (module) descriptions in general do not show the description of independent tasks in such level of detail that the experts were able to confirm this.

The SER also states that in student research work, RMC administration motivates teaching staff to engage students not only in one area of science that has its own conservative traditions, but in interdisciplinary research that requires a complex view and is problem-oriented. Also it is stated that during their research projects teaching staff also engages students in science communication and a variety of other science events at RMC Yet during the meetings with students, graduates and teachers the expert panel was not convinced that such practices exist.

Also, although the SER states that students of the Study Direction are actively involved in the research activities- they develop business ideas for social enterprises, organize guest lectures with industry professionals and field trips to social enterprises, during the visit the expert panel did not find sufficient evidence of such involvement.

The expert panel noted that topics of the best student's scientific works are in line with expectations for the first level higher education. Yet none of the listed four topics was related to the priority direction of scientific activities of the college – social entrepreneurship.

The expert panel believes that first level higher education is not required to have such ambitious goals for students' scientific work. Therefore, a simplified, more engaging and achievable approach towards students' scientific work should be considered.

The SER presents a substantial chapter of innovations in the study process, yet the expert group draws attention that not all of the changes were made towards improvement of the study process. The expert panel believed that development of Moodle platform and readiness of the teaching staff to shift towards distance learning is among the most significant competitive advantages of RMC. Some other efforts, such as agreement with business incubators for cooperation in development of students' social enterprises, would also be a great facilitator to the study process, yet COVID

restrictions stopped it from happening. Yet some of the other analysis presented within the chapter of innovative solutions in the study process (ie. participation in medieval events or launching marketing campaigns to buy Latvian products) of the SER are not clearly related to the study process and raise doubts if the group of SER distinct what innovations in the study process are. It became evident during the visit that management of RMC has an active and efficient approach toward continuous improvements and innovations in the study process. Development of achievable and measurable targets with clear directions and aims of innovations would allow RMC to stay more focused and facilitate the better development of the Study Direction and the Study Programme.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

RMC has clearly defined priority topics of the scientific activities which are in line with its strategic development directions. Yet the current topic of scientific research in social entrepreneurship does not fully represent the content of the Study Programme and areas scientific activities of teaching staff. International cooperation of RMC scientific activities is underdeveloped and is not inactivated. The expert panel also concluded that outcomes of the scientific research are not sufficiently integrated in the study process in the Study Programme. However, the overall level and scope of scientific research and publications is in line with what would be expected from the first level HEI and even exceeds expectations of the expert panel. Development of achievable and measurable targets with clear directions and aims of innovations would allow RMC to stay more focused and facilitate the better development of the Study Direction and the Study Programme.

### **Strengths**

1. System and procedures for conducting scientific research and involvement of teaching staff into it are well developed and clear.
2. The college has approved a clear direction of scientific research.

### **Weaknesses**

1. Low number of cooperation with Latvian and international HEI institutions in scientific activities.
2. Scientific research and publications of teaching staff is split among multiple HEI therefore sustainability of Colleges scientific achievements and visibility are under consideration.
3. No or very little applied research.
4. Complex system and plans towards involvement of the students into scientific activities proved to be overstated.

## **5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

During the self evaluation period RMC made efforts to develop successful cooperation with various local social partners – universities, colleges, employers, employer organisations, municipalities, nongovernmental organisations. The expert panel commends RMC for cooperation with organisations that address important social issues (i.e. Latvian Samaritan Association) and for the re-socialisation program for prisoners (in cooperation with Prison Administration and Olaine Prison). Such cooperation reinforces the mission and strategic goals of RMC. Further strengthening of cooperation with the State Agency for Social Integration and other public and academic institutions for the implementation of scientific and applied research and for the participation in the study process with social entrepreneurship related topics could be further strengthened. RMC could further develop cooperation with social businesses in applied research and consulting services.

RMC also has some study process related cooperation with other HEIs, organisations and business entities. Yet the expert panel believes that such cooperation is insufficiently exploited in the study

process of the Study Direction under the assessment. It became evident during the visit that the cooperation mainly is implemented in a form of internships (see also analysis below). Students and graduates commented that businessmen and public servants as well as foreign teachers merely never visit lectures, field trips to business entities are also rare. RMC is also not engaged in applied research with local business and organisations. The expert panel believes that the engagement of social partners into activities of the Study Direction is underdeveloped and not efficiently managed. Cooperation with local business entities and organisations are mostly concentrated towards social services. The expert panel also noted that the Study Direction development plan 2020-2023 does not include strengthening cooperation with local Latvia based businesses. It does not indicate usage of opportunities for academic staff development available in Latvia for academic staff development. The expert panel suggests that the Plan shall be revised.

Cooperation with colleges in the Latvian College Association and participation in various events (such as one organised by Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, developing a profession standard Business Specialist) may be important from an institutional perspective, however they do not add value to the development of the Study Direction. Instead, RMC shall strengthen its relationships directly related to the study process – such as inviting business people into guest lectures, taking students to field trips, creating cases and examples using data from local business entities and public organisations. Social partners could also be more involved into improvement and quality assurance of the Study Programme.

The expert panel believes that RMC placed too much emphasis on a few existing collaborations. Cooperation with the Baltic International Academy (using premises, running joint study course classes, etc.) enables more efficient use of resources and create new opportunities for students. However, in the expert panel's opinion, such cooperation may be also viewed as a threat to the sustainability of RMC operations and the Study Direction because of the high dependence on a third party to run operations and possibly diminishing identity of RMC and its programs.

In terms of international cooperation, the expert panel concluded that international cooperation is underdeveloped in RMC. In order to implement its strategic goal toward internationalisation RMC needs to place a greater emphasis on development of new international and local cooperation agreements in the Study Direction with academic and business partners. The SER presents some details on existing and planned international academic cooperation. Yet during the visit the expert panel did not receive assurance that such cooperation was actually implemented in practice. Also, it is not directly relevant to the orientation of the Study Programme towards social entrepreneurship. The SER states that internationalisation is among the key priorities of RMC and it makes efforts to enlarge its international incoming and outgoing mobility. This was confirmed by the administration of RMC during the visit, and the expert panel agrees that efforts towards this process are evident. The experts also learned that RMC has developed an efficient and well-functioning system for attracting foreign students for full time studies. With more than 50 international full-time students involved in the study process of RMC this represents more than one third of all RMC's students. International students confirmed being happy about their studies and claimed that RMC builds a good reputation in their countries. With the loss of the groups taught in Russian, further development of studies in English may contribute to the sustainability of the RMC's operations.

Based on the information provided in SER RMC only has two cooperation agreements with international HEI (from Croatia and Switzerland). During the self-evaluation period cases of international mobility were rare. Three students of the Study Programme went on international mobility; there was no incoming mobility of the students and no incoming or outgoing mobility of the teaching staff. With the growth of international students' group enlargement of Erasmus + mobility cooperation for incoming and outgoing mobility of students and teaching staff shall be set a priority. RMC has a well developed e-learning system which could make it easier to attract international teaching staff to teach in the Study Direction on a part time basis.

A system of internships is implemented and is well functioning in RMC. The internship procedures

are clear and well documented. The procedure for the organisation and assessment of internships is defined in the Regulation on Study Practices. RMC requires all students to take part in three practices. The final qualification practice is implemented in real companies. According to SER the college has identified 11 internship agreements which provide 81 places for internships. Yet all agreements are for the internship places are in Latvian; needs of international students to have internship in English are not addressed. During the period of 2017-2020 students of the Study Direction had participated in internships in 46 companies. The SER also presents a detailed description of skills, knowledge and competences to be acquired during the internships. After reviewing them the expert panel concluded that they are in line with the level of education and with the aim and learning outcomes of the programme.

It was made evident during the visit that all students get sufficient information about internship requirements and, if needed, get assistance in finding a place for their internship. Social partners (mainly social service companies and organisations) are dedicated to accept students of the Study Direction for an internship, which allows students to gain relevant and up to the markets knowledge and experience. However, the expert panel learned during the visit that RMC does not provide international students with internship places. Some of the students did their practices in their own countries. Availability of internships and, therefore, possibility to fulfil requirements of the Study Programme may become an issue in the future, taking into consideration growing number of international students and orientation of the study programme in social entrepreneurship. Implementation in internships in foreign countries makes a process of coordination and assessment of internships more complex and needs to be clearly defined in the Regulation on Study Practices. RMC shall consider using the Erasmus + program for financing internships in foreign countries within the frame of this program.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Efforts of RMC to develop successful cooperation with various local social partners are evident during the self evaluation period. The expert panel commends RMC for cooperation with organisations that address important social issues and for the re-socialisation program for prisoners. In general, cooperation with local partners in areas of social services and social entrepreneurship is at a good level and could be further developed in applied research and consulting services. Cooperation in other areas was merely evident. Study process related cooperation with other HEIs, organisations and business entities is also insufficiently exploited in the study process of the Study Direction under the assessment. Engagement of social partners into activities of the Study Direction is underdeveloped and not efficiently managed. Cooperation with local business entities and organisations are mostly concentrated towards social services and provisions for internship places. RMC places too much emphasis on the cooperation with the Baltic International Academy (using premises, running joint study course classes, etc.) which may be also viewed as a threat to the sustainability of RMC operations and possibly diminishing the identity of RMC and its programmes.

With a strategic goal toward internationalisation RMC needs to place a greater emphasis on development of international cooperation, which is currently underdeveloped in RMC. RMC has an efficient and well-functioning system for attracting foreign students for full time studies. However incoming and outgoing mobility of teaching staff and students remains at a very low level. A system of internships for local students is implemented and is well functioning in RMC. The internship procedures are clear and well documented. Students get sufficient information about internship requirements and, if needed, local students get assistance in finding a place for their internship. RMC does not provide international students with internship places. This may become an issue in the future, taking into consideration the growing number of international students.

### **Strengths**

1. Well-developed and functioning internship system complies with the needs of the Study Direction and Study Programme and provides local students with knowledge and skills relevant to the local market.
2. Well developed international promotion of studies and admissions to the Study Direction and Study Programme.
3. Good cooperation with local partners in the field of social services and social entrepreneurship.

#### Weaknesses:

1. Engagement of social partners into activities of the Study Direction is underdeveloped and not efficiently managed. Cooperation with local business entities and organisations are mostly concentrated towards social services.
2. Study Direction development plan 2020-2023 does not include strengthening cooperation with local Latvia based businesses.
3. High reliance on one partner (Baltic International Academy) in terms of use of resources used and the overall provision of the Study Direction.
4. Low number of international mobility partners as well as incoming and outgoing mobility of students and teaching staff.
5. International cooperation in scientific applied research and the study process is underdeveloped.
6. International students are not provided with internship places.

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

### **Analysis**

Previous accreditation of the Study direction and Study Programme took place in 2017. RMC has received 11 recommendations. Information provided in Annex 14 "Overview of the implementation of the provided recommendations " of the SER presents a detailed analysis of the actions taken by RMC, the results to be achieved and implementation deadlines. The annex also indicates that all previous recommendations had been accomplished. On the other hand, the Review of the implementation of recommendations provided as Appendix No 14 has tiny indications and comments in the SER.

The SER indicates that to implement the recommendations received during the previous assessment procedures, the Development Plan for 2018-2023 for study direction "Management, Administration and Real Estate Management" (hereafter - Plan) was created. The Plan comprises 7 directions to develop which were extracted into 28 tasks. Nevertheless, despite that it was recommended by the previous experts, the Plan itself has no indications on the implementation steps and monitoring procedures of the aforementioned tasks.

Based on the information provided in SER, its annexes and collected during the visit the expert panel concluded that previous recommendations 8-11 in general were accomplished. The administration has improved the college structure, created a new RMC website. The information on the website is available in both Latvian and English. Students and teachers are using the Moodle platform for the study process and communication. The number of documents regulating the study process, e.g. "Code of Ethics", developed and approved by RMC. To strengthen the cooperation with other HEI and labour market the RMC made a cooperation agreement with the University of Latvia on the use of a plagiarism control system, also became a member of the Latvian Association of Social Entrepreneurship and the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The quality management system of RMC has been implemented. The expert panel noticed efforts and accomplishments of RMC in support and strengthening of the student self-government body as well as involvement of students into study process related decision making. RMC also succeeded in provision of more detailed and consistent public information (on webpage) in all teaching languages.

Changes and improvements made to be able to implement the study program in distance learning format and provide it for foreign students are reasonable and sufficient. The expert panel was also able to review all required information and Moodle page of teaching courses in English and Latvian which proves that recommendation to ensure and demonstrate that all study courses are available for students in all of these languages has also been accomplished. All above mentioned implementations and their quality had been discussed with the stakeholders during the visit and received their verification.

Yet some other recommendations were more or less but still partially accomplished (despite what the SER says). For example, RMC had received recommendation to strengthen the social entrepreneurship aspect within the programme. As it was discussed in the other parts of this report, RMC had placed a lot of emphasis on the social and social entrepreneurship aspects of the Study Direction and Study Programme. Yet, social entrepreneurship is still not reflected in the tasks and LOs of the Study Programme therefore need further development. The expert panel believes that recommendation regarding involvement of social partners, stakeholders and corporate partners to the implementation and development of the Study Programme has not been achieved in practice. As it is further discussed in the other parts of this report, involvement of social partners into the study process and development of the Study Direction is underdeveloped. The current experts panel also made similar conclusions on partial implementation of the previous recommendation on QA system (recommendation 5). RMC was successful in creating a QA system and some of its procedures, yet its implementation in practice felt short. The experts were not assured that the existing QA system is able to provide relevant and reliable information about the Study Programme and the study process. Additional attention and efforts are required to make the QA system as a tool connecting all the aspects of the study process and be recognised in the activities and experiences of different stakeholders.

As recommended (recommendation 4), RMC had reviewed the number of tasks and LOs of the programme, however they still remain too numerous and complex for the 1st level HEI. The expert panel also thinks that communication among internal stakeholders remains an issue in RMC (as indicated in recommendation 3 & 4). RMC administration, Head of Study Direction and teaching staff have dissenting opinions on the aim and LOs of the Study Programme, internal procedures and documents. The experts concluded that for implementation of some previous recommendations RMC has taken a rather bureaucratic approach (to create more regulations and means). In contrary, this group of experts points out that more important is what message to communicate rather than how to communicate.

The expert panel also shared opinions that RMC has proved dedication and efforts to implement recommendations of the previous experts; yet additional efforts are needed.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Previous accreditation in 2017 the Study Direction and Study Programme had received 11 recommendations. To implement recommendations received during the previous assessment procedures, the Development Plan for 2018-2023 with 7 directions to develop and 28 tasks was created. Based on the SER (and its annexes) and information collected during the on-site visit, the expert panel concluded that (despite what is claimed in the SER) only 4 of 11 recommendations were fully accomplished. For the remaining 7 recommendations RMC has taken proactive approach towards the required changes and improvements; yet issues related to implementation of QA systems in practice, more active involvement of social partners into study process, inefficient internal communication, lack to present social entrepreneurship in tasks and LOs of the Study Programme, etc. remain unsolved. Significant steps forward was made by RMC while developing the performance of the study direction since the previous evaluation. Despite that, the continuous development of the QA system requires more emphasis.

## Strengths

1. Management of RMC took seriously recommendation of previous experts and the Development Plan for 2018-2023 for study direction "Management, Administration and Real Estate Management" had been created.
2. Review of the implementation of recommendations is provided in a comprehensive and detailed form.

## Weaknesses

1. The Development Plan for 2018-2023 for study direction "Management, Administration and Real Estate Management" lacks the details of implementation.
2. Not all recommendations had been implemented (despite such claims of RMC in SER). Shortcomings and limitations of practical implementation of QA system, inadequate involvement of social partners into study process, inefficient communication with internal stakeholders remain important issues in RMC.

## 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:** Partially compliant

Elements of QA system are not systematically developed and implemented, they do not correspond with each other. The expert panel was not able to collect sufficient evidence on how elements of QA system systematically and comprehensively contribute to the achievement of the aim and LOs of the Study Direction and Study Programme under the assessment.

- 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

RMC has developed a QA system, which is a composition of elements corresponding to the ESG provisions and also to international standard ISO 9001.

- 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:** Partially compliant

RMC has the procedures for the development and review of the study programmes and the feedback mechanisms. The processes are in place but they are not implemented in a systematic and organised manner. Not all stakeholders are involved/ know about the mechanism.

- 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

Evaluation of the achievements of learning outcomes and students' results in study courses, written works, qualification practice and qualification examination are thoroughly defined in regulations and procedures of RMC.

- 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

Teaching staff is accepted for a position according to Regulation on Academic and Administrative Positions. Periodic qualifications of the teaching staff involve results of scientific work and surveys of their teaching quality.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

RMC does not have developed and implemented key performance indicators. Information from graduates is not periodically collected. Information about foreign graduates is not collected and employed at all.

- 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:** Partially compliant

Development of the Study Direction is based on business possibility rather than quality assurance. The role and importance of internal audits to develop the study process remained unclear to the experts. During the visit to RMC nobody was responsible for QA in RMC. Development and supervision of the performance of the Study Programme is concentrated mostly within administration, teaching staff and social partners seem to be little involved.

- 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:** Partially compliant

Cooperation with local partners in areas of social services and social entrepreneurship is at a good level. Engagement of social partners from other businesses and organizations into activities of the Study Direction is underdeveloped and not efficiently managed. With a strategic goal toward internationalisation, international cooperation is currently underdeveloped.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RMC has clearly defined priority topics of the scientific activities which are in line with its strategic development directions. The overall level and scope of scientific research and publications is in line with what would be expected from the first level HEI and even exceeds expectations of the expert panel.

- 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:** Partially compliant

Despite what is claimed in the SER only 4 of 11 recommendations were fully accomplished. For the remaining 7 recommendations RMC has taken proactive approach towards the required changes and improvements; yet issues identified by previous experts remain unsolved.

## 8. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

1. RMC has review its priority direction of the scientific research to broaden it and/or add additional topics to better match areas of the scientific interest of all teaching staff and better represent the content and the directions of the development of the Study Programme.
2. RMC has to improve cooperation with business entities to ensure that more internships opportunities are available to the students (including those for international students). This is particularly relevant if plans regarding further specialisation in Sales and Tourism are implemented in practice.
3. RMC has to place a greater emphasis on the development of teaching staff competencies towards active and more practice oriented learning methods (including those suitable for on-line teaching). For that it shall look wider on nationally and internationally available opportunities for academic staff development.
4. RMC has to place its international mobility among the key development areas aiming to increase the number of mobility agreements as well as the number of incoming and outgoing students and teaching staff.
5. RMC has to employ forms of feedback collection suitable for small groups of respondents in the Study Direction (i.e. focus groups rather than surveys) to ensure reliable and relevant feedback about the study process and study content.
6. Moodle as a mean for collecting student' feedback must be replaced with the other means which would assure students about the anonymity of their answers.

### Long-term recommendations

1. RMC shall consider making a strategic decision about going into the life-long learning direction, whereas RMC would have a niche with both professional and foreign language training. RMC shall develop Professional Development Training programmes on the basis of existing Business Administration study programme.
2. RMC has to develop a wider vision to social entrepreneurship, than in the existing fields of social services, or prisoners reintegration only. For example, RCM could develop Professional Development Training programmes (PPIP - Profesionālās Pilnveidošanas Izglītības programmas) for persons with disabilities.
3. RMC needs rearrange its QA system according to ESG guidelines (leaving aside trendy names from the business sector, like ISO 9001 or EFQM). The design, content and procedures of QA system has to ensure continuous and systematic development of the Study Direction (also the Study Programme). The QA system has to be made known to internal (students, teachers) as well external (graduates, employers) stakeholders and be actively used to collect their feedback.

4. As the first level HEI, RMC has to concentrate on applied research for and with local social partners in its directions of scientific research and/or competencies of the teaching staff. RMC needs to improve its national and international applied research visibility by establishing focused and viable international cooperation with HEI institutions from neighbouring counties and/or working in a similar direction of applied scientific research.
5. Social partners have to be more employed in the study process, providing lectures about best business practices, field trips and local cases for students independent work. Cooperation with local business entities and organisations needs to be further developed to involve partners from more sectors (additional to social entrepreneurship).
6. Scientific activities of teaching staff have to be more efficiently incorporated into the study process and the content of the study modules.
7. RCM need to take an institutional long-term approach towards development of the teaching staff's knowledge and skills of English as well as active and practice-oriented learning and assessment methods.

## **II. "Business administration" ASSESSMENT**

### **II. "Business administration" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

The SER indicates that the 1st level professional higher education study programme Business Administration is a vocational education programme implemented in accordance to the Regulation No. 141 of Cabinet of Ministers of 20 March, 2001 Regulations on State Standard for the First Level Professional Higher Education. The Study Programme is implemented in 4 forms and 2 languages (which makes it a total of 8 forms): part time studies in Latvian and English (2 years 6 months), part time extramural studies in Latvian and English (2 years 6 months), part time extramural distance learning studies in Latvian and English (2 years 6 months) and full time studies in Latvian and English (2 years). After graduating from the Study Programme students obtain the 1st level higher professional education and the qualification of a Business Specialist (5th level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework) The title of the Programme and level of the studies indicate that this is a broad profile study programme, which shall provide students with the basic level knowledge, skills and abilities in business management.

The aim of the Study Programme, as it is indicated in SER, is to train qualified business specialists who can compete in the market and are able to manage and organise the operation of the company's structural unit or to establish and manage their own companies, incl. social enterprises. Besides the aim of the Programme, the SER also indicates 6 tasks of the Programme, whereas the first task presents further objectives towards 8 areas/fields of knowledge, skills and abilities to be developed during the studies. Annex on Mapping of the study courses/ modules for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme list a total of 32 LOs of this particular Study Programme. The expert panel believes that such a big number of LOs is too complex for the level of the programme and is difficult to comprehend for the stakeholders. During the visit the teaching staff was not clear what the LOs of the programme are and which LOs are covered in their subject. Also, the experts were not clear how the aims, tasks and the LOs are interrelated and what is the reasoning for having both – tasks and LOs. It would be a common practice to have up to 10 LOs in the 1st level professional study programmes, therefore the expert panel recommends to clarify and simplify LOs of the Study Programme.

During the visit administration of RMC, the self evaluation group and the Head of the Study Direction placed a lot of emphasis on the current orientation of the Study Programme on social entrepreneurship. It was indicated during the visit that at least 30 percent of the Study programme's content is dedicated towards social skills and social entrepreneurship. Also, the Programme is being marketed as providing skills and abilities in the field of social entrepreneurship. Moreover, it was also indicated that orientation/specialisation towards deeper studies of languages and sales management are also in the process of the implementation. Currently the Study Programme is planned and executed in two separate blocks - general management and social aspect (business). Two blocks are uneven in the scope of study credits and are inadequately interconnected throughout the Study Programme. However, the expert panel noted that social entrepreneurship, languages and/or sales management is not clearly visible in either the aim or tasks/LOs of the programme and focus of the Programme is unclear. The experts believe that such inconsistencies may create a confusion and an expectations gap among the entrants to the Programme. If the management of RMC is dedicated towards the specialisation/orientation towards social entrepreneurship and/or sales management, this has to be clearly indicated in the aim and LO's of the Study programme. LOs of the Study Programme have to be more focused.

Analysis of the admission requirements revealed that to enter the Study Programme the applicants must have completed secondary education and follow the admission procedure as determined by the RMC Regulations on Admission. Additional admission requirements for the applicants to study in English are applied, namely statement regarding the level of knowledge of a foreign language (specified in national regulatory documents), successfully passed admission tests in English and an interview with RMC representatives. The expert panel concluded that the admission requirements are in line with level of studies and are the sufficient prerequisite to reach the aim of the Study Programme.

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

The name and aim of the Study Programme, and the professional qualification are interrelated. The Study Programme is implemented in 4 forms and 2 languages (which makes it a total of 8 forms): part time studies in Latvian and English (2 years 6 months ), part time extramural studies in Latvian and English (2 years 6 months ), part time extramural distance learning studies in Latvian and English (2 years 6 months ) and full time studies in Latvian and English (2 years). Rationale behind formulating the tasks of the programme and their interrelationship with LOs are not clear. LOs of the Study programme are too numerous, complex and not in accordance to the level of the studies. Specialisation/orientation in social entrepreneurship, languages and/or sales management is not clearly visible in either the aim or tasks/LOs of the Study Programme and the focus of the Programme is unclear. To enter the Study Programme the applicants must have completed secondary education and follow the admission procedure. Additional admission requirements for the applicants to study in English are applied. The admission requirements are in line with level of studies

#### **Strengths**

1. Study programme is in line with 5th level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework and Regulations on State Standard for the First Level Professional Higher Education.

#### **Weaknesses**

1. Title, aim and LOs of the Study Programme do not reflect existing specialisation/orientation of the programme in social entrepreneurship and specialisation/orientation under the development towards the language studies and/or sales management.
2. The rationale for having both - tasks and LOs of the Study Programme is not clear.

3. LOs of the Study Programme, are too numerous and too complex for the first level HEI.

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

### **Analysis**

The curriculum of the Study Programme is developed in accordance with “Regulations on the State Standard of the First Level Vocational Higher Education” and the profession standard “Commercial/Business specialist” In the SER the aim and LOs of the Study Programme, its curriculum and courses description were presented in accordance to the expired (in 2019) professional standard, while during the visit they were presented already updated according to the new (10.06.2020) professional standard. The expert panel comments on the information provided during the visit. In general descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the internships, and the qualification papers are of high quality and comply with the existing regulation. As it is more detail analysed in section I of the Assessment of the Study Programme (of this report), the expert panel believes that the LOs are too complex for the first-level professional higher education. The curriculum of the Study Programme, on the other hand, is well thought off. It is made of 8 modules which enable students to study languages, to learn the key aspects of company management and scientific research. The module approach to the study design allows to split complex materials into smaller courses at the same time showing their linkages, to invite a greater number of teaching staff with the right knowledge and experience and to exclude overlapping of themes and topics conducted by different lecturers. Compulsory modules of foreign languages (English, German, French) are the strong point of this programme. All groups met during the visit confirmed that the content of the Study Programme is according to the market needs. During the visit the expert panel also checked if the aim and LOs of the Study Programme and its curriculum were the same irrespective of study form, i.e. full time, part time and part time distant studies. The experts collected sufficient evidence that there are no differences among the forms except for the scope of students’ independent work (which is higher in distant study form) and information provided on study courses Moodle pages.

The current Study Programme is planned and executed in two separate blocks - general management and social aspect (business). Two blocks are uneven in the scope of study credits and are inadequately interconnected throughout the Study Programme. The idea of additional study specialisations in Sales Management and Tourism was introduced to the experts during site-visit, but the vision of how it will be build-in the programme is pretty unclear. Taking into consideration social and social entrepreneurship orientation of the Study Direction, this topic receives too little attention in the Study Programme. During the visit, the Head of the Study Direction, teaching staff and students confirmed that social entrepreneurship is not taught in the other modules either within the topics or as a context.

Analysis of the descriptions of the study courses revealed that the template used for the description of study courses is according to Law of on Institutions of Higher Education and includes all necessary parts: number of hours, prerequisite, topics, individual work of students, grading structure, acknowledgement of the acquired study results, list of literature, etc. The expert panel was provided with the course descriptions for full time and part time studies. Content of the study module and courses in both forms is the same except of the contact/independent work hours which ensures that all students (irrespective of the form of studies) receive the same knowledge and skills. The experts were not presented with the specific course description for part time extramural distance learning form of studies but they got assured that content of the courses is does not differ.

Quality of the material presented in the descriptions is inconsistent and needs improvement. For the example, in the description of the individual work of students, the same approach/style shall be used to formulate tasks of the individual work and expected results; they need to really be tasks and expected results (rather than forms or means). The module/course descriptions do not show what LOs of the Study programme are relevant to a particular study course. Also, study modules give

numerous goals and objectives as well as results. Objectives of the courses are formulated towards what to teach rather than what students should learn. Results of the modules have to be reviewed to make them measurable and according to the level of studies (for example goals and results of study module Finance exceed those which would be common to the course in a 4 year bachelor programme). Such a complex approach in the 1st level professional higher education Study Programme seems to be too complex. Moreover, the teaching staff of the Study Programme seemed to be unaware about the LOs of the Study Programme related to their study courses and goals and objectives as well as results of the study modules. The Expert panel did not get enough evidence that the teaching staff itself uses these module descriptions to prepare their study courses. It seems that the teaching staff was not actively involved in the process of designing LOs of the Study programme and descriptions of study modules/courses.

Analysis of the content of study courses raises concerns that for many courses content is relatively advanced, complex and not according to the level of studies. Taking into consideration the number of hours dedicated for some of the topics (for example in Finance and Law modules), the experts are concerned if students are able to acquire planned knowledge and especially skills and competences. It also remains unclear how students' achievements are measured. The expert panel also drew attention to the number and complexity of literature sources used in the study courses. Taking into consideration that some of the courses are taught online and/or in a distant form, the ability of the students to read all the materials is questionable. The expert panel suggests that in the content of the study courses and their descriptions the approach "less is more" shall be applied; the content and descriptions of the study courses shall be simplified to comply with the level of studies.

Development and presentation of a qualification paper is governed by the Methodological guidelines for the development, design and defence of a thesis and qualification paper. To ensure that students' research is related to the aims of the Study Programme, topics of the qualification paper are supervised by the Methodological Commission of study direction. The SER states that according to the requirements of the Study Programme, topics of qualification papers must be related to entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship. Analysis of qualification papers' topics for 2017-2019 (provided in SER) showed that none of the papers were related to social entrepreneurship. This is inconsistent with the priorities of the scientific work for the Study Direction. It also questions if orientation in social entrepreneurship is appreciated and relevant to the students. Yet, the expert panel concluded that the process and content of the qualification papers is appropriate for the level of studies and is sufficient for the achievement of the study program goal and tasks.

The expert panel found it difficult to assess study implementation and evaluation methods and their appropriateness and contribution to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. The SER does not analyse what learning and assessment methods are used in the study process. Such information is not presented in the module and course description (lecture and practical training are not a learning methods). During the meetings students and teaching staff had a difficult time explaining what learning methods and assessment methods were used. The expert panel concluded that the study process is dominated by traditional, passive learning and assessment methods. Students do many individual and/or group tasks but (from the description of study modules and courses) such tasks merely develop personal and social skills of students in an organised and planned way. Teaching staff seems not well acquainted with active, practice oriented and engaging learning and evaluation methods.

The SER presents a detailed presentation about the surveys conducted among students, graduates and employers (regarding internships). It also explains that surveys are conducted periodically and the results are presented to the College Administration, which uses the data for next semester and academic year. However, during the visit the expert panel did not receive assurance from students and graduates that they actually know about those surveys and fill them in. The expert panel also suggests that focus groups might be a better approach for such a small number of students in a group, which apparently is happening as RMC students are very active in providing their feedback

and submitting requests. Students assured that management of RMC take into consideration their complaints and requests. In the future RMC should better disclose non formal collaboration with students in collection on feedback as a part of its QA system.

The SER presents with examples on how students' complaints and feedback was used to improve the study process. Based on the information provided in SER and collected during the visit the expert panel claims that measures taken by the management of RMC and Study Direction are well thought of, forward looking and efficiently solve the problem. The experts commend management of RMC for professional approach in solving issues related to online examinations.

Students of the Study Programme show little interest in the mobility opportunities. During the SER period just 1 student participated in Erasmus + exchange and 2 more students went abroad for a practice. Incoming and outgoing mobility opportunities are more appreciated by full time international students than locals. The SER does not provide evidence on how learning outcomes achieved during mobility are recognised; during the meeting with students, none of them participated in outgoing mobility, therefore the expert panel was not able to assess the criteria.

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

The descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the internships, and qualification papers comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments and include all the required information. The structure of the Study Programme is balanced towards general management. Taking into consideration social and social entrepreneurship orientation of the Study Direction, this topic receives too little attention in the Study Programme, while the module for foreign languages is a strong point. The template used for the description of study courses is according to academic standards and includes all necessary parts; yet the content of the study modules/subjects is too complex for the level of studies. Content of study courses is the same in all forms of studies except for contact/independent work hours. Teaching staff seemed to be unaware about the LOs of the Study Programme related to their study courses and goals and objectives as well as results of the study modules. Development and presentation of qualification papers is adequately regulated. None of the titles of qualification papers were related to social entrepreneurship. The study process is dominated by traditional, passive learning and assessment methods. The students acknowledge and highly appreciate the student-centred approach towards their studies. The outcomes of students, teachers and employers feedback are used to improve the quality of studies. Mobility of students is very low and needs attention.

#### **Strengths:**

1. Module approach to the design of Study programme allows to exclude overlapping of themes and topics conducted by different lecturers.
2. Compulsory modules of foreign languages (English, German, French) is the strong point of this programme.
3. The template used for description of study courses is according to Law of on Institutions of Higher Education and includes main necessary parts.
4. Feedback received from students used to improve the quality of studies.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. The objectives, results and content of the study modules/courses are too numerous and complex for the first level professional study programme. Objectives of the study modules are formulated towards the teaching process rather than students' learning.
2. It seems that descriptions of study modules/courses were developed by the administration and teaching staff was not actively involved in this process. Teaching staff demonstrated little knowledge about the content of these documents during the meeting.

3. The current content of the Study Programme is oriented towards general management while social entrepreneurship is not much evident (in the content of study modules and topics of qualification papers). Reasoning behind additional study specialisations in Sales Management and/or Tourism is unclear.
4. Study process is dominated by traditional and passive learning and assessment methods. Teaching staff seems not well acquainted with active, practice oriented and engaging learning and evaluation methods
5. Incoming and outgoing mobility opportunities are not used very much by the students (except for the full-time international students).
6. RMC does not have specific course description for part time extramural distance learning form of studies.

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

#### **Analysis**

Based on the Information provided in SER and collected during the visit as well as after the visual verification (by actually visiting the premises, library, etc.) the expert panel was assured that premises, laboratories, library and other material provision comply with the needs of the Study Programme. They also are sufficient for the achievement of the LOs. However the experts do not agree that they indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process in the future. RMC had made arrangements with Baltic International Academy for the infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision required for the implementation of the Study Programme. Therefore long run sustainability of the Study Programme is not guaranteed. Yet, with a low number of students in the Study Programme such arrangement is an efficient way to run the Programme at all. RMC has well developed e-learning resources which are sufficient for different forms of studies. As each form of studies (full time, part time and distant) has its own peculiarities, the student composition is also different, e-learning resources are also developed on a different level. The Moodle environment contains materials for all study courses included in the programme, but they differ from one study form to another. The expert panel learned that for distance learning study form the teaching staff of the Study Programme had developed not only lecture materials and tasks, but also video-lectures and examination online. Since distance learning materials, links to electronic resources, video, etc. are available in each course, there is no difference between students living abroad and students living in Latvia. Workshops, tests and exams take place online (Skype, Zoom, BigBlueButton) whereas students have to present their personal identification document to the lecturer. Teaching staff have the opportunity to diversify their tests, to divide students into groups, to develop testing options and sample-type questions, preventing students from violating the principles of honest academic action. It is possible to take the exams in Skype after verifying the identity of each student.

Independent learning of material is of the great importance in the study process, so attention is paid to ensuring that students of the Study Programme have an access to electronic resources storage in the Moodle course system called "Library Catalogues and Databases", a comprehensive list of books, scientific journals, electronic catalogues and academic terms with links in Latvian and English.

Sources of financing of the Study Direction and the Study Programme are: tuition fee, income from the economic activity of the College, funds of the founders. Since the academic year 2018/2019, RMC has started to implement and plans to develop a socially responsible approach in work with student attraction. As the number of foreign students increases, RMC partially utilises the funds raised, enabling local students from groups at risk of social exclusion to study on the founder's scholarships, most often these are people with insufficient education to compete in the labor market, for example, single-parent family providers who have no means to study, and so on.

Currently, 15 students finance their studies with scholarships provided by the founders. Yet, as the total number of Study Programme's students remains low, the expert panel raises concerns about financial stability of the Study Programme.

As the Study Direction consists of the only Study Programme under the assessment, the resources are described in Section I. Assessment of the Study Field part 3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field.

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

RMC premises, laboratories, library and other information, material and technical provision comply with the needs of the Study Programme and are adequate for the achievement of the LOs of the Study Programme. However the experts believe that current arrangements with BIA regarding use of resources do not ensure a high-quality study process in the future. RMC has well-developed and functioning e-learning system and resources efficiently adapted to full time, part time and distant forms of studies. With the increase of number of foreign students, RMC partially utilises the funds raised, enabling local students from groups at risk of social exclusion to study in the founder's scholarships.

#### **Strengths**

1. Well-developed and functioning e-learning system and resources efficiently adapted to full time, part time and distant forms of studies.
2. Premises, information, technical and other provisions are in line with the needs of the Study Programme.

#### **Weaknesses**

1. Premises, information, technical and other provisions are used based on the agreement with BIA, therefore their long-term sustainability is under consideration.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

Teaching staff involved in the implementation of the Study Programme in general is highly qualified and competent in order to ensure the acquisition of the necessary research skills, theoretical knowledge, skills and competencies. The qualification of the teaching staff complies with the criteria specified in Sections 32, 36, 38, 40 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the requirements specified in Paragraph 16 of the Cabinet Regulation No. 569 of 11 September 2018 "Regulations on the Education of Teachers and Professional Qualifications and Procedures for Improving Lecturer's Professional Competence" are observed.

The qualification of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements and is constantly improved. RMC teaching staff has the opportunity to attend trainings on Moodle innovations, and innovations in other information technology tools, such as copying courses, assigning tasks, using the Grade Me block, Moodle session calendar, Office 365, use of the College's work site (SharePoint). RMC also organises educational seminars with guest lecturers, such as seminar Academic Honesty and Plagiarism Control. Also, teaching staff regularly attends professional development seminars – during the reporting period, for example, they attended seminars organised by the State Language Agency, the Training Center Personals, SIA Funditus, Riga Methodological Center of Education and Information, SIA Partneri M.G., SIA Partneri un pakalpojumi, etc.. Despite the fact that RMC gives its teachers the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills in working with technical equipment, regularly provides the necessary instructions for the implementation of the learning process, support for their qualitative growth is not provided

here. By carefully selecting the teaching staff, the college tries to obtain well-trained specialists who can maintain their qualification level in other educational institutions where they work in parallel. There is a lack of specialists with practical knowledge and experience in social entrepreneurship and other business areas that are related to the target markets of the Study Programme.

During the visit members of teaching staff verified that management of RMC ensures continuous development of teaching staff competences. However, the expert panel noted training on the learning and assessment methods might be relevant and required. The experts also suggest that coordinated training of English should be made available to the teaching staff, especially taking into consideration internationalisation strategy of RMC.

In the academic year 2017/2018, 17 academic staff members, 13 of whom are elected academic staff members, participated in the implementation of the Study Programme. Based in the data provided in table in the SER, the expert panel concluded that the qualitative composition of teaching staff had increased. In the academic year 2019/2020, the implementation of the Study Programme is ensured by 25 lecturers, of which 6 have a doctoral degree in an appropriate sector, i.e. more than 50% are scientific degrees in science (Dr. oec., Dr. math.). 7 lecturers are doctoral degree students, as a result, they will acquire doctoral degree in economics or management sciences.

In accordance with RMC development strategy and Study Direction development plan, academic staff is required to carry out scientific research activities to ensure that the study area is kept up to date with developments in the field of their courses taught. When directing study works, research works, and qualification works of students, teaching staff engages students in research. Teaching staff of RMC participates in Latvian and international scientific conferences, using the acquired information and experience to update study courses. There is a gradual increase of numbers of scholarly articles published in international peer-reviewed journals.

Also, the qualification of lecturers stems from their ability to create and use various computer technologies in the teaching process; to develop study -methodological materials that provide students with independent acquisition of knowledge, such as electronic books. This, in turn, will provide an opportunity to expand the distance learning environment, access to European national and international integrated education systems in the near future.

According to the Statute of Methodological Commission at the RMC Council meeting, not less than twice a year, one month before the beginning of the semester, the study modules and their course descriptions are updated at the Commission meeting, inviting the lecturers of relevant courses and thus stimulating discussion on the content and avoiding overlapping of topics. According to the Statute a study hospitation plan is developed every semester, where not only Commission members but practically all lecturers of the study program are appointed as experts, thus ensuring mutual hospitation and facilitating exchange of experience.

In general, the qualification of the teaching staff is assessed as appropriate, and its effectiveness is regularly assessed in the annual student surveys.

At the same time, there is a feeling that RMC, as an educational institution, does not have a deep root system. Many members of the teaching staff lack practical experience. Being very busy with teaching, they cannot devote enough time to developing their scientific and research qualifications. During the visit, it seemed that most teachers, like students, at the RMC feel more like guests than hosts, because practically everything, from the premises, technical equipment, library equipment, etc., does not belong to the educational institution, but is hired from BIA. As the majority of teaching staff work in multiple higher education institutions, their involvement in activities of the Study Programme seems limited.

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

Teaching staff involved in the implementation of the Study Programme in general is highly qualified, competent and sufficient in order to ensure the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and

competencies to reach aims and LOS of the Study programme. However, the academic competencies of teaching staff could be further strengthened to empower them using more active and practice-oriented learning and assessment. Considering the fact that the premises where the study process is implemented belong to another higher education institution, there are difficulties in organising cooperation between students and lecturers outside the study classes.

#### Strengths

1. Teaching staff representatives are good professionals in their teaching field.
2. The college has well-developed and functioning e-learning resources, which the Study Programme and the teaching staff are able to professionally use in the study process.
3. RMC provides support to professional development and the scientific research activities of academic staff.

#### Weaknesses

1. The methods used by academic staff in education process need further development to bring active and practice-oriented methods into the teaching process.
2. As the majority of teaching staff work in multiple higher education institutions, their involvement in activities of the Study Programme seems limited.
3. There is a lack of specialists with practical knowledge and experience in business areas that are related to the target markets of the Study Programme.

### 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Business administration"

#### 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

The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with 16.04.2013. Regulation No 202 of Minister Cabinet "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinājošus dokumentus / Procedures for Issuing State Recognized Higher Education Documents"

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

Agreements about possibilities to continue the education in case the implementation of the Study Programme is discontinued is signed with: Baltic International Academy and ISMA University of Applied Sciences. In the event that RMC cannot provide training for students in a licensed or accredited professional study programme or the Study Programme is closed, the Baltic International Academy and ISMA University of Applied Sciences shall accept RMC students and ensure the acquisition of a quality study programme in accordance with the requirements specified by RMC. Yet the above mentioned agreements guarantee students' graduation within 3 years. See SER annex "Agreements with HEIs on the opportunity to continue studies.docx" The expert panel draws attention that RMC should have agreements with institutions who offers similar 1st level study programmes and provide students with opportunity to continue studies in 1st level programme.

- 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

Letter on the performance of obligations 21.02.2020. Nr.1.-18.1./17 to Academic Information Centre (as presented in SER annex of the Study Programme description)

- 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

Letter 20.02.2020. Nr.1.-18.1./15 to Academic Information Centre "On the knowledge of the state language"

- 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:** Partially compliant

RMC 20.02.2020 letter No.1.-18.1./16 "On the knowledge of the English language" states that the knowledge of the English language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study direction "Management, Administration and Real Estate Management" study programme "Business Administration" complies with the rules on the extent of the knowledge of the state language and the procedures for verifying the proficiency of the English language for the performance of professional and position duties (see Annex 5 to the self-assessment report). Yet, during the visit teaching staff was not able to communicate in English. The expert panel was not able to verify that 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.

- 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

- 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

- 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 study agreement provided in the annex of Study Programme description. It has all mandatory provisions to be included.

- 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

The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials are prepared in Latvian and English. Yet specific course description for part time extramural distance learning form of studies should be provided.

- 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

As a result of the program, student obtains the 1st level higher professional education and the qualification of a Business specialist (5th level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework). The Study programme complies with the professional standard "Commercial/ Business specialist" (approved on 10.06.2020)

- 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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Study Programme complies with the Regulation No. 141 of Cabinet of Ministers of 20 March, 2001 "Regulations on State Standard for the First Level Professional Higher Education". Compliance with the national education standard is analysed in annex 17 of the self evaluation report.

- 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

- 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

Among 25 teaching staff members 16 have publications (Annex 8), other 9 have practical work experience from 5 to 34 years ( Annex 6, CVs).

## 15 R5 - Overall rating

### **Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Mostly all formal requirements are fully compliant (as presented in assessment of the more detail criteria). Yet, RMC should create specific course description for part time extramural distance learning form of studies and improve the level of English language proficiency of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the Study Programme, ensuring that teaching staff is able to implement studies in English.

## **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:** Partially compliant

Premises, laboratories, information, material and technical provision comply with the needs of the Study Programme and are adequate for the achievement of its LOs. Yet, the current arrangements with BIA regarding use of their resources (therefore full reliance on the other HEI on the resources) does not ensure a high-quality study process in the future.

- 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:** Partially compliant

Teaching staff involved in the implementation of the Study Programme is qualified, its composition is sufficient to ensure the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies, to reach aims and LOs of the Study Programme. Incoming and outgoing mobility of teaching staff is very low and needs attention. `Majority of teaching staff work in multiple higher education institutions, their involvement in activities of the Study Programme seems limited. English language proficiency of the teaching staff should be improved.

- 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

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

The 1st level professional higher education study programme "Business Management" provides graduates with the 1st level higher professional education and the qualification of a business specialist. The programme follows the official requirements. The title of the Programme and level of the studies indicate that this is a broad profile study programme. The programme is implemented in 4 forms and 2 languages, yet its curriculum and content of the courses is the same across all forms. The goal and the tasks as well as the results (learning outcomes) of the Study Programme are very detailed and should be condensed and summarised. Rationale behind formulating the tasks of the Study Programme and their interrelationship with LOs are not clear. LOs of the Study Programme are too numerous, complex and not in accordance to the level of the studies. The structure of the Study Programme is balanced towards general management; specialisation/orientation in social entrepreneurship, languages and/or sales management is not clearly visible in either the aim or

tasks/LOs of the Programme and focus of the Study Programme is unclear. Teaching staff seemed to be unaware about the LOs of the Study Programme. Content of the study modules/subjects, literature sources is too complex for the level of studies. The study process is dominated by traditional, passive learning and assessment methods, therefore there could be some room for improvement in the diversity of the teaching and learning methods. The outcomes of students, teachers and employers feedback are used to improve the quality of studies. Teaching staff involved in the implementation of the Study Programme is qualified, its composition is sufficient to ensure the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies, to reach aims and LOs of the Study Programme. Incoming and outgoing mobility of teaching staff and students is very low and needs attention. Premises, laboratories, information, material and technical provision comply with the needs of the Study Programme and are adequate for the achievement of its LOs. Yet, the current arrangements with BIA regarding use of resources does not ensure a high-quality study process in the future. RMC has a well-developed and functioning e-learning system and resources efficiently adapted to full time, part time and distant forms of studies.

#### Strengths

1. Well-developed and functioning e-learning system and resources efficiently adapted to full time, part time and distant forms of studies
2. Teaching staff are professionals in their teaching field.
3. Broad profile of 1st level study programme balanced towards the general management knowledge and skills.

#### Weaknesses

1. Title, aim and LOs of the Study Programme do not reflect existing specialisation/orientation of the Study Programme in social entrepreneurship and the specialisations/orientations under the development towards the language studies, tourism and/or sales management. Focus of the Study Programme is unclear.
2. Learning outcomes of the Study Programme, objectives and content of the study courses are too numerous and complex for the first level HEI. Objectives of the courses are formulated towards the teaching process rather than students' learning.
3. Limited knowledge of the teaching staff of the tasks and LOs of the Study Programme and study process related internal regulations; low general involvement in the daily activities;
4. Very low incoming and outgoing mobility of teaching staff and students.
5. The expert panel was not able to verify that 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.
6. There are no specific course description for part time extramural distance learning

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Business administration"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

### **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business administration"**

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

1. LOs of the Study Programme have to be clarified, simplified and become more focused to comply with the level of studies and to match the content of the Study Programme.

2. Specialization/orientation towards social entrepreneurship, language studies and/or sales management have to be clearly indicated in the aim and LO's of the Study programme.
3. The aim, tasks and LOs of the Study Programme shall be explained to the stakeholders (especially to the teaching staff); stakeholders shall be continuously engaged in their development and revision.
4. In the content of the study courses and their descriptions the approach "less is more" shall be applied; the content and descriptions of the study modules and courses, literature sources used shall be simplified to comply with the level of studies.
5. Specific course description for part time extramural distance learning form of studies should be provided.

### Long-term recommendations

1. Shift the study process towards active and practice oriented learning methods; balance content of the study modules and courses (in terms of theoretical material and practical skills) to match the international best practices of the 1st level professional higher education.
2. Strengthen internationalisation of the programme as well as incoming and outgoing mobility of the teaching staff and students.
3. Strengthen identity of the Study Programme among teaching staff, students and employers as the independently provided study programme; as the number of students grows, decrease dependence on material and information provisions of the other HEI.

## 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:		Partially compliant	Elements of QA system are not systematically developed and implemented, they do not correspond with each other. The expert panel was not able to collect sufficient evidence on how elements of QA system systematically and comprehensively contribute to the achievement of the aim and LOs of the Study Direction and Study Programme under the assessment.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
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.		Partially compliant	Cooperation with local partners in areas of social services and social entrepreneurship is at a good level. Engagement of social partners from other businesses and organizations into activities of the Study Direction is underdeveloped and not efficiently managed. With a strategic goal toward internationalisation, international cooperation is currently underdeveloped.
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).	Fully compliant		RMC has clearly defined priority topics of the scientific activities which are in line with its strategic development directions. The overall level and scope of scientific research and publications is in line with what would be expected from the first level HEI and even exceeds expectations of the expert panel.
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.		Partially compliant	Despite what is claimed in the SER only 4 of 11 recommendations were fully accomplished. For the remaining 7 recommendations RMC has taken proactive approach towards the required changes and improvements; yet issues identified by previous experts remain unsolved.

#### 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	Business administration (41345)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Not relevant	Average

## **The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts**

The experts did not have dissenting opinions