

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: University of Latvia

Study field: Religion and Theology

Experts:

1. Trygve Wyller (Chair of the Experts Group)
2. Uģis Sildegs (Secretary of the Experts Group)
3. Šimo Šokčević
4. Elīza Zikmane (Employers' Confederation of Latvia)
5. Marta Viļuma (Student Union of Latvia)

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

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The study field and the 3 study programmes at the Faculty of Theology (FT) at the University of Latvia (UL) have reestablished themselves as both ambitious and promising in the 30 years of regaining Latvia's independence. The FT was closed down during the many years of Soviet occupation. In their visit the expert committee has studied and met dedicated UL leaders, FT scholars and students, who all strive to develop and improve the traditional faculty of theology into years of new challenges and competences.

The expert committee enjoyed the hospitality and willingness on all UL and FT levels. The expert committee has received all information needed and experienced open dialogues on present and future challenges.

On a general level one might say that the FT has achieved significant results in their efforts to reestablish the faculty. One challenge is, of course, on an organizational level, to build all structures needed. Even more challenging is the academic level of high quality research and study programs. Theology and religious studies are disciplines on a very strong international level. The disciplines are pursued in all continents and in most countries. It takes time and patience to reach the top level in these fields.

On the background of decades of being non-existing within the UL context, the expert committee concludes that the FT has achieved impressive results. The 3 study programmes are generally well functioning, the FT scholars good to excellent qualifications and they gradually expand their cooperation with international colleagues and institutions.

In Europe (both in areas of Protestant and of Catholic majorities) many national universities still have visible and significant faculties of theology (sometimes combined with religious studies). Today some of these faculties have merged within larger faculties of Humanities (or social science). Nevertheless, the competence of theology and religious studies is still having visible and strong organizational positions among many of the best European universities. One reason is, of course, the historical background where the education of Christian ministers was one main task for national universities in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.

Today, one sees that a good number of universities keep their faculties of theology, even if the religious situation has changed. The expert committee interprets this as an interest to inspire knowledge development of values, traditions and faith challenges also for the building of future societies. Also in the Latvian situation, experts think this to be an important perspective for the quality of knowledge and societal development.

On this background, the expert committee is impressed by how much is achieved by the FT in the last period. Experts have, of course, also discovered challenges and weaknesses, which need to be addressed in the years to come. Among the most visible is the low number of students, a too high number of dropouts, the need to (re) open dialogue with more denominations and societal institutions and the importance of developing stronger and more internationally robust research projects in the European competition.

The expert committee regards the present situation for the FT to be a period of transition. This implies both the concrete plans to move into a new and modern campus, organizational challenges within the UL and long-term challenges to develop study programs even more relevant for both denominations and society.

The expert group has strong confidence that the FT, its leadership, faculty and students, have the competence and dedication to address these important issues in a very good way. Experts do hope they will have good support also from the UL in the interest of national competence and future dialogues.

# I - Assessment of the Study Field

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### 1.1 Management of the Study Field

#### Analysis

1.1.1. The 3 programmes in the study field "Religion and Theology" correspond to the thematic area of the Latvian classification of education Religion and Theology:

1. Academic Bachelor's study programme "Theology and Religious Studies" (programme code 43221)
2. Academic Master's study programme "Theology and Religious Studies" (programme code 45221)
3. Academic doctoral study programme "Theology and Religious Studies" (programme code 51221) . (SAR p.18).

According to SAR (p.18) "it can be concluded that the objectives of the study field and the strategic and operational management of their implementation are in line with the sustainable development strategy of Latvia until 2030 (<https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/191187>). The aims of the study field are clearly defined in the Strategic Plan (SAR18ff) and deepened into detailed topics in Annex 3. The overall aim is that "Students of the study programmes at all levels are offered the opportunity to acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for independent research" (SAR 18). Thematically, the main topics in the study fields on all level (bachelor (BSP), master (MSP), PhD (DSP)) are Bible studies, anthropology and psychology of religion, world religions, the role of religion in modern society, the identification and study of religious groups, relations between different religious and non-religious (atheists, agnostics) groups, inter-religious interaction and dialogue with society belong (SAR 18). The thematic topic and the aims of the Study Field "Religion and Theology" correspond to the thematic area of the Latvia classification of education Religion and Theology (BSP programme code 43221, MSP programme code 45221, DSP programme code 51221). It is also clear that the study field is in line with the sustainable development strategy of Latvia until 2030 (<https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/191187>), and in this way meets the needs of the Latvian society (Strategic plan UL / SAR 18, confirmed through meeting with graduates on both MSP and DSP programmes). According to SAR 20-21, the three study programmes (BSP, MSP, DSP) are organically building on each other. This means that there is a well defined interconnection between the programmes. Good plans for deepening the interconnections between the programmes in the years to come are presented in Annex 3, 2.1.

1.1.2. The higher education institution has identified strengths and weaknesses (SAR 2.1.2, page 21 ff). The SWOT analysis builds on the five topics in the strategy of the University of Latvia (human resources, finance, competitiveness, scientific activity and internationalisation). For Internal factors the category Human resources the strengths are the motivation of applicants, good interpersonal relationships, gender balance and updated composition of the academic staff. The weaknesses are a small number of students and a large student dropout. Regarding the category Finances, the strength is that the financing for scientific projects has increased. The weaknesses are a relatively small general funding. In the field of Competitiveness, the strengths are study programmes for all three levels, an interfaith / interdenominational approach, the prestige of the University of Latvia and the FT communication. The weaknesses are underdeveloped direction, small, fragmented workloads among the academic staff and lack of some specialists. The weaknesses are a small number of experts of the Latvian Academy of Science and that the FT journal is, so far, not included in the Scopus or Web of Science database. Regarding scientific activity, the strength of research in specialised fields is profiled. There is also a parallel list for external factors (SAR p23ff). Among them the SAR (p25) identifies the decrease in the number of students, other factors are possibilities for funding from organisations and denominations. The FT has presented a development plan of the study field of Religion and Theology (SAR 26ff, Annex 3). This plan gives a detailed presentation on

how the different weaknesses and challenges shall be addressed in the years 2021-2027. The experts group finds this plan to be a good instrument to develop the quality of the study field. The plan gives detailed goals (numbers, persons, cooperation etc) for each of the categories during the coming years, and it will be a good instrument to assess what happens in the next time period.

The FT (SWOT analysis and Annex 3), highlights that the number of students is one of the most demanding challenges for the FT. According to FT the low number of students comes from two sides: a low number of applicants, but first of all, from a too high number of dropouts during the first years of studies. The experts group thinks that there is a stronger potential for recruitment if focus is put more on the job possibilities in general society. In Europe (both in areas of Protestant and of Catholic majorities) many national universities still have visible and significant faculties of theology (sometimes combined with religious studies). Today some of these faculties have merged within larger faculties of Humanities (or social science). Nevertheless, the competence of theology and religious studies is still having visible and strong organizational positions in the best European universities. One reason is, of course, the historical background where the education of Christian ministers was one main task for national universities in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.

Today, one sees that most universities keep their faculties of theology, even if the religious situation has changed. The expert committee interprets this as an interest to inspire knowledge development of values, traditions and faith challenges also for the building of future societies. Also in the Latvian situation, we think this to be an important perspective for the quality of knowledge and societal development.

The gradual transformation of the FT from being a faculty where ministerial education and training (especially for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL)) was implemented to a faculty where graduates find jobs in a number of denominations and also in a wide variety of responsible jobs in the Latvia society might be an asset for a more ambitious recruitment policy of the FT. This process of transformation should be organized with a stronger involvement of academic staff, administration and students in a chaired, democratic process. The process needs to assess whether transforming the FT to a School of Theology and Religion is the best solution to increase more time for research and better facilities is the best solution for future challenges or whether there are other solutions inside the present organizational structure.

1.1.3. The management structure is well presented in SAR p. 27ff , also in the Annex 3, p. 4 and in Annex 4, p. 2 regarding the responsibilities for study field development. Fig 4, (SAR p. 26) shows the formal structure given by the UL management system. The UL council and Senate are the two top responsible bodies, which govern together with the Rector. On the faculty level, there is a parallel system with the Faculty Council and the Faculty Dean as the responsible bodies. The political responsibility for the whole study field is given to the Head of the Study Field. The strategic and general political planning of the study field are decided within three bodies. The key role, however, is with the Head of the Study Field, who communicates with colleagues, is responsible for an annual report and represents the FT in different UL meetings and decision making committees regarding study field issues (SAR, p. 31). The concrete responsibility for both strategic and political planning and implementation of the study field is done by the Study programme directors. The FT has two study programmes directors, one for the MSP and DSP and one for the BSP. Both directors are accountable for their activities to the faculty dean (SAR, p 27). The study field management is ensured in accordance with the "Regulations of study programmes and continuing education programmes of the University of Latvia" (approved by the Decision No. 102 of the Senate of the University of Latvia of 24.04.2017) (SAR, p. 30). In addition to this formal aspect of the study field management, there is the more collegial aspect of the study field management. The central body here is the The Council of the study field. It consists of the head of the study field, the directors of study programmes, the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study field, two representatives of students (20% of the composition of the study field council), one representative

of employers (SAR, p. 30). The most important instrument for implementing policies in the study field is the plan of the development of the study field of religion and theology, 2021-2027 (Annex 3). This plan gives a detailed overview of the different aspects of the study field management and responsibilities for the given period. During the onsite visit and meetings with both head of study field, programme directors, staff representatives and students from all three programmes, the expert group found the study management system well-functioning. The important challenge is to get the formal and the collegial/student involved relations working. Discussions with both staff and students confirmed a positive interpretation of the content of the different programmes and courses. Critically, one might add that the relation between the Dean, the Head of the Study Field and the FT Council is not self-evident in Annex 3. It is not totally clear which of the roles has the specific responsibility for assessing content quality of the courses and innovation within the study programmes. The model, p. 4 in SAR, gives a clear overview of the distribution of political/strategic power in the study field. On a formal level, there is clarity, however, on the more concrete and practical level, the distribution of power regarding developing quality content and innovation is not obvious. However, the distribution of roles became clearer in an experts interview with the dean during the onsite visit (meeting with the FT leadership). The role of the Council and the collegial/student participation in this council has a significant role in the development of the quality of the study field. The communication between the Head of the Study Field, the programme directors and the Council of the Faculty is decisive for how the quality of the Study Field develops. The decision-making takes place efficiently.

The issue of management of the study field also relates to the organization of the FT within the UL. The experts committee has been informed during the onsite visit (meeting with the UL leadership) of the UL plan to reduce the number of faculties from 13 to a significantly lower number. The committee finds this to be an interesting future policy. In experts opinion the low number of students and the difficult budget situation takes too much time for the FT leadership. There is a kind of overload in the leadership structure when the student numbers and budget are on the level, as they are. It might have been a much better solution if the FT became a School of theology and religion with a specific autonomy within a larger faculty of Humanities and maybe Social Sciences. It is decisive for the FT (new School of Theology and Religion) to recruit a higher number of students and to reduce the number of dropouts. To achieve this, more colleagues and leadership roles need to be activated to address these challenges. If more general management responsibilities could be taken by bodies in a larger faculty (the Dean of a large faculty, the Head of the Study and administrative personnel), more focus can be used for recruitment and quality development on the level of studies. The FT is in a period of transition where future students need to be recruited for jobs and positions in different sectors of the society at large. The historical role of recruiting students for ministerial positions seems not to be the most important. To inspire potential students to study at the FT in order to pursue jobs and positions in the society at large is very important for the future of the FT. Therefore more time should be given to this topic. Therefore, it might be a good idea to merge the present FT to a larger faculty of humanities and become a School of Theology and Religion. This would also require a more visible number of social / cultural stakeholders in the advisory committees etc.

Regarding the support given by the administrative and technical staff to the FT leadership and programme management, there are administrative systems both on UL level and on FT level (SAR 27-40). Both the Faculty council and the faculty Dean has administrative staff connected to the office. One interesting aspect on the UL level is that there has been an integration of the Departement of Studies and the Departement of Science. According to SAR this secures a stronger and unified focus on the administrative quality management of the UL. The expert group (meeting with UL leadership group and meeting with FT dean and the different study programme directors) had the impression that the cooperation between academic and administrative level in the FT is good. This means the administrative support for the study programs is working well.

1.1.4. Issues concerning admission are well presented in SAR 2.1.4 (p. 34ff). The system for admission of students to the three different programmes follow the Terms of admission at University of Latvia decision No. 2-3/68 of approved by the meeting of the Senate of the University of Latvia 31.05.2021 and issued in accordance with Section 46, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Cabinet Regulation No. 846 of 10.10.2006 "Regulations Regarding Requirements, Criteria and Procedures for Admission to Study Programmes". There is also a system for the recognition of previously acquired formal and non-formal education within the study field.

The admission to the different study levels varies. Admission to undergraduate studies is based on the results of the centralized examinations or the secondary education certificate grades (SAR, p. 35). The enrollment to master level is based on the grades obtained during undergraduate studies. Admission to doctoral studies presupposes an application, which included the topic of the promotion theses and the name of the approved supervisor.

There is also a system for deciding what kind of education can be recognized as already done in other programmes, other universities or learning institutions, in Latvia and abroad. This follows the "Regulations regarding recognition of the competences acquired outside formal education or in professional experiences and study results achieved in previous education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301013-arpus-formalas-izglitiba-apguto-vai-profesionalaja-pieredze-ieguto-kompetencu-un-iepriekseja-izglitiba-sasniegta>) (SAR p. 35).

In the meeting with stakeholder representatives from different denominational churches and organizations, the expert group had the impression that these stakeholders appreciated being informed and involved in recruitment and admission policies. (meeting with stakeholders). Based on the analysis of the need to increase activities to recruit more students from the society at large, the expert group holds the opinion that more stakeholders from other societal branches, culture, museums, media, public and private institutions, could be more involved regarding competence which should be recognized for being admitted to the different study levels.

1.1.5. According to SAR p. 38, the organization of the study course examinations and the assessment of the students' achievements is performed in accordance with the "Law on Higher Education Institutions" and the "Procedure for Organizing Study Course Examinations at the University of Latvia" (University of Latvia Senate Decision No 211 of 29.06.2015). An important aspect of these principles is that the UL has formulated learning outcomes for each study programme and for each study course as a set of knowledge, skills and competences. There is a strong transparency for students of the principles of the assessment procedures because students are informed about the organization and process of studies in the relevant study program and about the learning outcomes, examinations and evaluation criteria from the first course hours.

There are two types of assessment methods in each study course (SAR p. 38ff): the interim assessment or so-called semester examinations and the final examination. The interim assessment must not be less than 50% of the total score. The final examinations are not less than 10%. The learning outcomes are evaluated on a 10-point scale (SAR p. 40). There are also courses, which can have a "passed" / "failed" assessment, given a permission by the UL Vice-Rector.

At the FT, most study courses have a mandatory research paper as an assessment method. The aim of the mandatory research paper is to introduce students into independent scientific research and discussion. The interim assessment methods also include, quizzes, individual work, practical work, reports and other types according to the profile of the study course (SAR, p. 39).

Principles, methods and procedures for assessments of students are transparent and well-formulated. Substantially, the mix between research papers and more knowledge remembering assessment methods is a relevant mix in these study fields. They all require a competence of independent reflection and creativity in combination with cognitive knowledge.

1.1.6. The most important tool to keep the principles of academic integrity is the UL developed

Unified Computerised Plagiarism Control System (SAR, p. 43). This System is constructed in order to meet the principles of fair and responsible conduct presented in The Academic Ethics Code of the University of Latvia (UL Senate decision No. 2-3/46 of 26.04.2018) and in the Regulations on Academic Integrity at the University of Latvia, (UL Senate decision No 2-3/48 of 26.04.2021).

The System is a cooperation between seven higher education institutions in Latvia. The main principle of the System is that all students must upload the BA, MA or PhD thesis electronically. Within a few days, the System then reports if there are tendencies of plagiarism. The results will then be handed over to the programme director and from him / her to the supervisor and the reviewer. The director of the Study programmes at the FT gets regular reports from the system and will act if there are any suspicions of plagiarism in a concrete thesis. A student failed due to plagiarism, might resubmit a thesis after a certain amount of time, but then in another topic than the first one (SAR, p. 43-44).

The UL as the developer of the System and its operator constantly updates the System and provides other higher education institutions with the opportunity to use the System on the basis of a cooperation agreement. Currently, based on the cooperation agreement, seven higher education institutions in Latvia, Daugavpils University, Liepaja University, Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Riga Stradins University, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, University College of Economics and Culture and Riga International School of Economics and Business Administration use the System. The System automatically compares the final theses uploaded to these university systems, incl. material available on the Internet, and in the event of a certain percentage match, the study programme directors are sent an overview of these test results, whereby the same text snippets from different authors are simultaneously viewed. (SAR 43)

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

The aims of the study field, the compliance of the relevant study programmes with the main directions of the strategic development, the needs of society and the interconnection of study programmes are all, formally, on a very good level. There is a clear connection between the general legislation of the UL and the FT study field organisation and implementation. The SAR and the SWOT analysis have clearly identified strengths and weaknesses within the study field as a whole. The management structure is good. The best tool to develop a higher quality in the years to come is the Study Development Plan. The system for admission of students is good and well-functioning. Methods, principles and procedures for assessing achievements are good and well-functioning. The system to avoid plagiarism is well established.

#### **Strengths:**

1. A solid and thorough formulation of aims and societal needs in all study programmes.
2. A good interconnection between the three different study programmes.
3. A good overview of the weaknesses connected to a too small number of students and too high number of dropouts.
4. Very good development plan with concrete goals distributed among the 6 years ahead.
5. Well developed systems and procedures for admission.
6. A very good and relevant plurality of interim and final assessments practices.
7. The anti-plagiarism system works well and is integrated with other main education institutions in Latvia.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. A difficult transition time between a history as an institution for ministerial education to a non-denominational institution aiming at a plurality of positions in both churches and society.
2. The tension between top down formal leadership and a more collegial / student involving

leadership model.

3. The number of stakeholders involved in the admission process is too narrow for the viewpoint of societal needs.

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

### **Analysis**

1.2.1. According to the SAR p. 44, the UL has established a quality policy that can be accessed here: <https://www.lu.lv/en/about-us/documents/>. It has been stated in the SAR p. 44 that the quality policy is publicly available and can be seen through the link provided: <https://www.lu.lv/studijukvalitate/saturs/kvalitates-nodrosinasanas-politika-un-pasakumi/>, but the link is empty, and no document and no information is published there.

According to the Quality Policy document that has been approved by the Senate of the University of Latvia, the quality policy is in line with the values and principles of the university such as ethical and equal attitude, continuous science based development, promotion of prosperity, scientific development and involvement in research. The UL focuses on specific activities that improve implementation measures for quality assurance and those are specified in the SAR p. 45. The key activities are monitoring of the quality assurance system, procedures and documentation quality audits and quantitative and qualitative indicators of students' academic, scientific and creative activities which are regularly evaluated. According to the opinion of the expert group, the aims of the UL are in compliance with the learning outcomes of the study field and in direct relation to the relevant study programmes.

According to the information gathered during onsite visit, responsible people of QA matters stated that a crucial part of the internal quality assurance mechanism is analysis of students' opinion which is received on a regular basis once per semester at the end of the study courses. These opinions are gathered through the use of surveys that are electronically sent out to the students by the end of the course. When asked during the onsite visit, what is the overall student activity in participating in the surveys, it was stated that students are not able to get enrolled in the next study semester without filling the surveys, so it is mandatory for all of the students to fill them otherwise they cannot proceed to study in the next study semester.

Experts believe that this system established continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes.

1.2.2. It is clear from the onsite visit that students are actively involved in the procedure of study programme development and the quality maintenance. As already mentioned in 1.2.1., students are participating in surveys twice per study year. According to the information gathered from onsite visits, employers and graduates are also involved in the inner quality assurance processes. As stated by the responsible people of QA, alumni are involved in many levels of quality assurance maintenance. It has been indicated that alumni representatives are a part of the Study Field Commission and Quality Commission. UL has an Alumni Association established which takes part also in the development of the strategy of the UL. In the main organ of the UL which is known as the Council, also Alumni Association members are part of. During onsite visits, graduates were asked whether they have received any form of graduate survey after graduation. 3 students do not remember receiving it and 2 students remember that they have received some survey to fill in. One person remembers a received offer to participate in a research project connected to UL. As stated by one of the graduates, as the faculty is small, lecturers, professors, students, graduates know each other very well and have contacts of professors, and they contact and meet each other informally and exchange opinions, views and ask of matters of interest when necessary. From an expert point of view, it seems great that there is such a close connection between graduates and lecturers while



for the QA purposes, it is of importance to have formal proofs of that as well. Taken into account that some of the graduates did mention surveys as a tool of QA, it is assumed that such actions take place.

In regards to employers, according to the onsite meeting with the QA management, they are also involved in the QA mechanisms on various levels. There is a representative of employers in the Study Field Commission that has meetings once a month. There are also surveys conducted once a year, as well as guest lecturers coming in from the labor market. When asked to the employers what kind of questions are usually included in such surveys one of the employer representatives mentioned examples as: What should be improved in the study courses? What kind of study courses could be implemented or covered in the future? One of the employers that works in the hospital outlined that for her interest it would be that pastors are educated in working with children in the hospitals. To her mind the best feedback is children and their families. In the opinion of the experts, it is believed that the procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programmes of the study field and the feedback mechanisms are logical, efficient, and available for all stakeholders. According to the information provided during the onsite meeting with QA, there are summaries made of the survey results, and these results are analyzed. It was stated that the feedback to employers is provided and thoughts are exchanged during the Board meetings while for graduates the exchange is done informally as they have a close cooperation, and everyone in the field knows each other very well.

1.2.3. During onsite visits with the QA and management representatives experts found that, in cases of student complaints and/or proposals, students usually use surveys of the study courses as the main tools to express their concerns which are always taken into account. In rare cases, there are direct complaints that are made to the study programme director or the Dean. In cases such issues arise, it is advised by the Dean or anyone else the student decides to reach out to, for the students to manage the issue with the specific lecturer directly, if it is related to a question of studies. If it cannot be solved in such a manner, then usually the procedure is as follows - the Study Programme Director meets with the student or group of students and they discuss the problem onsite. Then the lecturer is invited to the meeting and also the Dean sometimes participates in the conversation to discuss the issue in place. There are also cases that have reached the Council of the UL, and then lecturers have even been forced to take courses in pedagogy to educate themselves to develop teaching skills.

According to the SAR p. 56, during the reporting period (2015-2021), no written complaints have been submitted about the faculty or its academic staff. In 2015, there was an oral complaint about the discussion style and statements of one lecturer during the lecture. The Dean of the TF has discussed the case with the lecturer, the situation has been eliminated, there have been no repeated complaints.

During the onsite visit with students, experts asked if they were aware of such a system and students stated that they were aware of it but never used it. Instead, they usually use surveys which are anonymous and express their views on specific questions there. In the expert opinion, the mechanism developed for submission of student complaints and suggestions is effective, promotes the implementation of improvements. It seems that students are aware whether their complaints are taken into account and in cases of the problem receive an update and a feedback from UL.

1.2.4. According to the information outlined in the SAR pp. 57-59, the UL ensures regular collection and analysis of different types of data. One of the data the UL collects and analyses is the dynamics of the number of students. More specifically - the number of students admitted for the study year as well as their study levels, study year, form and type of studies, source of financing the studies, age, gender, previous higher education, number of applicants for admission, students of academic leave. Second type of data collected regards the implementation of the study programme and student

progress of studies such as their final results of exams, weighted average mark, completion of the study programme. Third type of data collected is regarding use of resources which regards the data on financing study places (state funded, self-funded) and the number of study loans and received scholarships.

As outlined in the analysis of 1.2.2., there are different forms of feedback implemented in the study field and inner quality assurance. This mechanism and provision of feedback includes students, graduates and employers with a focus on improving the study field. In addition to the aforementioned information, according to the SAR p. 58, there are also surveys that are conducted at the beginning of the study year called freshman surveys. This survey is focused mostly on the first year students to find out why they chose the UL and the study programme, how did they find out about this programme. There is also a survey in place for students who have decided to discontinue their studies with questions of clarification - what are the reasons and motivation to discontinue.

According to the SAR p. 59-60, each year the head of the study field in cooperation with the study programme directors prepares a report on the operation of the study field and the programmes therein during the academic year. The report includes the data of number of students in programmes, showing the total number, number matriculated in the first academic year, number of graduates, drop-out rate, separately identifying different forms, types and languages of studies, composition of the teaching staff, indicating the position, number of academic staff with a doctoral degree, mobility of the teaching staff, outcoming and incoming mobility of students, their participation in exchange programmes, summary and analysis of the results of a survey of students about the courses and the programme as a whole and others. The mechanism for obtaining and providing feedback, including from students, graduates and employers, is effective and focused on the improvement of the study field.

1.2.5. The UL has its official website which is <https://www.lu.lv> which provides detailed information on the higher education institution and the existing study programmes within each of the study fields. The home page is available in both languages - Latvian and English. All the relevant study programmes of the study field can be found in the webpage of the UL under "Studijas" finding "Studiju programmas" where anyone can find the level of studies and from there find the study field of interest and following from there the descriptions of the study programmes with the necessary information - study length, budget places, study fee and other.

The provided levels of studies by UL are - College study programmes, Bachelor's study programmes, Master's study programmes, Doctoral study programmes, Residency. Information specifically regards to the faculty of Theology can be found in Latvian here: <https://www.lu.lv/studijas/fakultates/teologijas-fakultate/> and in English here: <https://www.lu.lv/en/studies/faculties/faculties/faculty-of-theology/>. According to the SAR pp. 61.-62, the website also contains a study guide, a list of lectures, an academic calendar, instructions for the development of research papers, reception times for administration and lecturers, study procedures and organization, etc., as well as the information related to students' everyday issues: student life, hostels, meals. There is information about the Student Council of the faculty, the University of Latvia, the list of services provided by the Career Centre and psychological support.

The information published on the website of the higher education institution about the study programmes of the study field of Theology (<https://www.lu.lv/studijas/fakultates/teologijas-fakultate/>) corresponds to the information available in the official registers (VIIS and E-platform).

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

The UL has an effective quality assurance system established. The quality assurance system is publicly available through a specific link. Students are actively involved in the quality assurance

processes. The UL regularly monitors student satisfaction on the study courses and lecturers. Graduates and employers are a part of QA processes. Complaint and proposal system is in place and students are aware of it, meanwhile it is rarely used. The UL summarizes the data collected regularly. An effective statistical data collecting system has been established. It is unclear how often and how graduates fill the surveys as some of them do not remember filling or receiving them while others do remember outlining that more informal communication is established between lecturers and graduates. Information about the study programmes is accessible on the UL website in English and in Latvian.

Strengths:

1. Active student involvement in surveys.

Weaknesses:

None.

### **Assessment of the requirement [1]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The UL has managed to establish an effective, continuous improvement type of internal quality assurance system that fulfills all its functions towards students and their satisfaction according to the quality assurance policy

[https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/2/Kvalitates\\_politika\\_majas\\_lapai\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_politika_majas_lapai_ENG.pdf), surveys used as monitoring mechanism on regular basis.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The UL has established quality assurance policy -

[https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/2/Kvalitates\\_politika\\_majas\\_lapai\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_politika_majas_lapai_ENG.pdf) and UL quality management system. According to the SAR p.15, the quality management system is performed by the management and heads of core structural units (deans of faculties) and their delegated employees. The Academic Department is responsible for the establishment, implementation and improvement of the study quality assurance system, in close cooperation with the heads of study fields and directors of study programmes.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

According to SAR p. 15, periodic quality review of study programmes is stipulated in the "Procedure for Preparation of Annual Reports on UL Study Fields" (UL Order No.1/290 of 14.07.2020). The establishment and internal approval of study programmes are stipulated in the Regulations of the University of Latvia on Study Programmes and Continuing Education Programmes (UL Senate Decision No 102 of 24.04.2017).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The UL has established a criteria that it follows for evaluation of students' results according to Cabinet Regulations No 141, 512, 240 and the UL Senate Decision No 211 of 29.06.2015. More detailed information has been given in SAR p. 40. and No 240 Regulations on the state standard of the academic education of 13.05.2014 is considered. Overall, according to the SAR p.16, Information related to learning outcomes, including assessment, is contained in course descriptions, the preparation and updating of which, as well as the rules for their publication, are stipulated in the UL course development and updating procedure.

- 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

According to SAR p. 16, internal procedures and mechanisms are in place to ensure the qualifications and work quality of academic staff. The principles of personnel management at the UL in the areas of personnel selection, labor relations, motivation system and personnel development are defined in the UL Personnel Management Policy. The qualification requirements of the staff are defined in the internal regulatory enactments of the UL in accordance with the external regulatory enactments, and the requirements for ensuring the quality of work.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There are different types of mechanisms implemented for the purpose of monitoring and gathering the data and analyzing them. One of the most important indicators of quality is the survey results of the students and their feedback provided by the study courses. Such surveys are conducted twice a year. There are also other types of surveys in place such as employer surveys, discontinuation surveys which allow monitoring of the situation on various levels. More detailed information is outlined in the analysis of paragraph 1.2.2. and SAR p. 46. According to SAR p. 17, information on students' achievements is accumulated in the information system LUIS of the UL and analyzed in the framework of study course implementation (including student centered approach) and study programme improvement.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

According to SAR p. 44, the quality assurance system is the main basis for ensuring continuous improvement and efficient performance which can be accessed here:  
[https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/2/Kvalitates\\_politika\\_majas\\_lapai\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_politika_majas_lapai_ENG.pdf) According to SAR p. 76, there is a requirement of academic staff continuously improve their scientific skills and academic qualifications according to the needs of market.

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

## Analysis

1.3.1. According to SAR 1.1. the vision the UL envisages itself as “space for excellence and environment for development as well as creates an interdisciplinary, open and innovation-oriented, excellent work and study environment, with infrastructure for excellence in studies, research and innovation.”

There is an established and evolving system in the UL for determining and redistributing the financial support required for the implementation of the study field and the corresponding study programmes. In 2022, according to the Higher Education Reform a new governing body of the University has started its work - the Council of the University, which is responsible for the sustainable development, strategic and financial supervision of the University, as well as ensures the operation of the University (SAR 1.2.); approves the University's budget and financial plan; monitors the functioning of the cooperation and financing agreement between the University and the State; approves policies defining the University's management processes and general principles of their functioning; decides on the remuneration policy of the University's staff. The Senate determines the requirements for election to academic positions and the evaluation criteria for the academic staff; The Rector is responsible for the successful implementation of the University's personnel policy. (SAR 1.2.)

According to (SAR 1.1.) 40% of the UL students are financed from the state budget, this proportion does not apply to the FT, where the overall majority (SAR 3.3.3.) of students are financed from the state budget. Moreover student fees (both paid by government funding or the UL and by students themselves) do not cover the cost of the study programmes in the study field and that additional resources from the UL common fund and Mission and Ecumenical Centre of the Northern Church of Germany are used to cover the shortfall and to support the study programmes (SAR 3.3.3.) In order to break even all study programmes, the FT has to attract more students, especially those who pay fees themselves. There are plans for life learning courses to generate more income, but there is no information on details of those plans (SAR 3.3.3. and onsite visit). There are several scholarships which are awarded to the FT students in particular (2 <https://www.fonds.lv/en/for-students/for-ul-bachelors-students/scholarships-by-faculty/ul-faculty-of-theology/scholarship-of-latvian-evangelical-lutheran-church-in-willimantic/>, 2 <https://www.fonds.lv/en/for-students/for-ul-bachelors-students/scholarships-by-faculty/ul-faculty-of-theology/vereins-der-pastorinnen-und-pastoren-in-nordelbien-ev-scholarship/>, 3 <https://www.fonds.lv/en/for-students/for-ul-bachelors-students/scholarships-by-faculty/ul-faculty-of-theology/karlis-ozolins-emils-mednis-charitable-trust-scholarship/>) as well as scholarships available to students of all faculties. The rule is that, within a single academic year, the applicant may receive only one scholarship financed by the patrons of the University of Latvia Foundation. This ensures a wider distribution of scholarships but limits the support one student receives.

To a large extent, each faculty is given resources according to its size and being the smallest faculty in the UL, the FT receives limited funding. The issue of a small number of students is holding back greater financial investment in the study field. There are plans of merger of several faculties to create a large Faculty of Humanities (meeting with the Vice Rector and Dean) which may help to consolidate, use and share resources more effectively.

Funding of scientific research is included in the remuneration of the teaching staff (SAR 2.3.1.). Research funding sources for academic staff are also indirectly channeled to the development of study programmes, e.g. for research activities, participation in international projects, publication of scientific articles, preparation of international project applications, implementation of research development projects and fulfillment of long-term commitments (SAR 2.3.1.) During the onsite visit (on 15.11.2022.) teaching staff described their participation and involvement of students in Erasmus and other international programmes and research projects and the funding they received from grants (for example EEA

<https://www.tf.lu.lv/en/petnieciba/projekti/religion-and-gender-equality-baltic-and-nordic-developments/>,  
Oxford University  
<https://www.tf.lu.lv/en/petnieciba/projekti/zinatnes-un-religijas-saderiba-pecpadomju-konteksta/>).  
However, a robust and reliable system for continuous funding of scientific research, which allowed sufficient independence from reliance on limited international projects, was not presented.

1.3.2. The infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study field have been identified and made available to students and teaching staff in the UL. There is a unified system for purchase and improvement of material resources in the UL.

In its strategy the UL aims at having Environment and governance that is “green thinking, attractive, sustainable university environment and effective administrative support” ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/1.\\_VISPAREJIE\\_DOKUMENTI/LU\\_strategija\\_buklets\\_2021.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/1._VISPAREJIE_DOKUMENTI/LU_strategija_buklets_2021.pdf) )

In 2020 annual report, the Rector of the UL assured that the UL Academic Centre development continues steadily and that the building and equipment of these new premises in the House of Letters should be completed by the end of 2023, providing a modern work and study environment for lecturers, researchers and students of social sciences and humanities. [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/5.\\_DAZADI/LU\\_2020\\_gada\\_paskats.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/5._DAZADI/LU_2020_gada_paskats.pdf). According to those plans, the FT will move into those shared premises, but the exact time is not clear yet as the building has not been built yet (meeting with the Dean).

While the FT hopes to make the transition from the old premises to a new building in the foreseeable future, the premises currently used are very basic. 2 of the rooms at FT disposal for studies are located on the first floor, in the basement there is only one auditorium and a student self-government room. In addition, if necessary, if there is a student with mobility impairments in the program, it is possible to use other rooms in Raina blvd. 19 with elevator access. The overall impression was of an old building adapted to new ways of learning in a makeshift fashion. The same applies to the staff and student rooms. The premises the FT occupies are not adapted to use by people with special needs (onsite visit). When asked, students told, that they themselves helped somebody who had special needs and didn't see it as the responsibility of the management of the FT (meeting with BA and MA students) .

The basic needs for teaching and learning are met. There are boards and projectors in every auditorium, as well as a computer in each. The access to internet, e-learning environment, e-mail, as well as LUIS are provided in all premises (SAR 2.3.2.). There is working equipment for organizing a video conference in the auditoriums (the onsite visit) In the TF, there are provisions in classrooms to enable the use of technologies for doing hybrid or distance learning. However, as experts' visit showed, internet connection wasn't always stable, there was a lack of a proper screen, and sound was patchy at times. (Visit to the FT premises).

Infrastructure resources of the TU (library resources, online meetings) are available only to doctoral students of FT, and in a very limited way, because joint seminars happen only once a year (meeting with PhD students)

The unified system for purchase and improvement of material resources in the UL is overseen by the Council of the University. The department of Finance and Accounting carries out the UL financial record management and accounting, its Financial Planning Division prepares the budgets of the University of Latvia and its structural units including FT , controls the use of financial resources in projects and structural units, and the Accounting Division in turn records all the UL economic transactions

(<https://www.lu.lv/en/about-us/administration/departments/department-of-finance-and-accounting/>).

The Technology Department (ITD) defines and implements the modern IT infrastructure strategy at the UL, ensures its functioning, as well as the development, operation and maintenance of the UL

information system LUIS, the UL portal, the e-learning system MOODLE and other e-applications. LU ITD Help Desk provides user support, resolving IT issues (Annex 1 <https://www.lu.lv/en/about-us/administration/departments/departments-of-information-technology/>) . The norms of the formation of the remuneration of the teaching staff (norms of the planning and accounting of the workload of the academic staff) are determined by the order of the Rector for the whole university. The Department of Human Resources ensures implementation of the UL strategy, plans, rules and regulations in relations to personnel and teaching staff. (Annex 1 <https://www.lu.lv/en/about-us/administration/departments/departments-of-human-resources/>). Within the FT, the Dean is responsible for the management of the use of the financial resources and property which is in the use of the FT. (Annex 1 [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/1/Constitution\\_of\\_the\\_University\\_of\\_Latvia.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/1/Constitution_of_the_University_of_Latvia.pdf) and the practical aspects are dealt with by the Finance director of the FT (onsite visit 15.11.22.). During the onsite visit, there were no issues raised on the system of purchase of material resources, the processes work well, but the challenge is the amount of resources available to the UL. The priority is given to the enabling teaching and learning process, resources allocated to the research are not prioritized in the system and are largely funded by grants given by other bodies.

1.3.3. The UL has developed a system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of methodological and informative provision. Library resources and databases are available to students and meet the needs of the study field. There is good collection of books available to students covering varied subjects in the study field of Theology and Religious Studies, the greatest proportion of those are in English, followed by German and Russian. Due to historic reasons there is a very limited amount of published resources on Theology and Religious Studies in Latvian (on site visit on 14.11.22.).

The budget for library resources is allocated in accordance with the number of students in a given faculty (visit to the Library). "Due to the low funding, the books purchased for the library are mainly intended for studies, not for detailed research." (SAR 2.1.2.). The books and resources for purchase are suggested by teaching staff and submitted through the LUIS system, and the Dean approves, decides on the purchase in accordance with the allocated budget of the FT (onsite visit 15.11.22.).

Doctoral students mentioned that their supervisors occasionally bring them required books from their trips abroad (meeting with PhD students). In the Student Survey Library resources scored lower than other aspects of study provisions (Annex 8), but in the interviews and visit to the FT library no complaints were expressed.

Currently, across the 8 branches of the UL, Library access differs (opening hours and opening periods in summer). In the new premises in the House of Letters, the FT library will be open 24/7 which would enhance the availability of information resources (visit to the Library).

A good number working and reading places are available in all branches of UL library. In the branch in Raiņa Bulvaris, where TF library is situated and facilities shared with the Law and Computer science faculties, in addition to ordinary reading rooms there is a special and spacious Quiet reading room for those students who do not want to be interrupted while reading. During the on site visit the experts observed that many working places in the library were vacant and students were not struggling to find space.

There are a number of online resource platforms (e-book platforms - VLeBooks, ProQuest Ebook Central, e-journal databases - Cambridge Journals Online (archive available until 31.12.2018), Emerald eJournals Premier (archive available until 22.04.2020.), JSTOR I-XII, XIV, XV and Life Sciences Collections, HeinOnline, Oxford Journals Online, Sage Journals and others, reference resources - LETA online news, LETA Archive and Nozare.lv, Letonika, tools - SAGE Research Methods, Passport, Orbis, Overleaf Commons, MarketLine ,174 verified open access databases with multi-format materials ) and training is provided (presentations by the Library staff, classes in classrooms

as well as online. Tours on site in the Library for users are organized to enable them to work with open access collection and technical equipment SAR 2.3.3., onsite visit 15.11.22.). Doctoral students pointed out that there has been a positive development on consolidation of several platforms into one PRIMO platform which made the search process more efficient (meeting with PhD students).

The UL library provides free support (Electronic ordering/reservation/extension of the loan term in the National Library Union Catalog, obtaining information resources for use on-site in the library's reading room or to take home; delivery of information resources to the branch of one's choice; self-service scanning; use of open access reading rooms, computers and the Internet, night subscription, booking of information resources; delivery of information resources out of term-time; inquiries and consultations SAR 1.3.3. onsite visit 15.11.2022), as well as additional services for which fees are paid (Compilation of a list of information resources, Interlibrary Loan and International Interlibrary Loan, SAR 2.3.3). Of those there have been approximately 40-50 requests made annually from FT staff and students for loans from libraries abroad (the visit to the Library 15.11.22.). Opening hours of TF library are 10-20 on workdays and 9-17 on Saturdays (<https://www.biblioteka.lu.lv/par-mums/darba-laiks/>). Doctoral students have used their access to the TU library resources (meeting with PhD students).

1.3.4. Related to 1.3.3. There are a great number of resources available online through the UL Library. There are the UL information systems (LUIS and MOODLE) in place, which enables teaching staff to share their course programmes and teaching materials with students in an effective way. There is a transparent notification and assessment system in place within these systems. English language skills are also important for teaching local students as the majority of books and online resources available to students are in English, and even a student studying in Latvian would find it very difficult if not impossible to do study work without using resources in English. Teaching staff should be able to guide and direct them to those resources. LUIS is operational in Latvian and English and all course descriptions are available in both languages. Moodle operates in Latvian, however the course materials are in different languages, depending on the subject of course. (onsite visit and information from teaching staff CVs ) Foreign students would have no difficulties using LUIS, but may have a difficulty navigating Moodle.

The period of Covid pandemic forced the UL to make more provisions for online and distance learning. The FT uses different online platforms such as MS Teams, Zoom for different purposes. The student survey and interviews indicated a mixed response to online teaching (Annex 8 and meeting with BSP students and MSP), some prefer face to face learning, others embrace possibilities offered by learning online. The UL also offers students and its employees the possibility to use Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus free of charge. There are IT specialists in the UL who can be asked to help if necessary (SAR 2.3.2.).

1.3.5. The UL strategy states that "The UL is going to create a performance-based personnel management system, which also includes competitive and motivating personnel remuneration. The UL will improve career development opportunities for academic staff. In addition, the UL will establish a system for attracting national and international academic staff, as well as new talents, and promote international mobility" (4. [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/1\\_VISPAREJIE\\_DOKUMENTI/LU\\_strategija\\_buklets\\_2021.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/1_VISPAREJIE_DOKUMENTI/LU_strategija_buklets_2021.pdf)). There are procedures set by the UL in place for attracting qualified teaching staff. "The human resource management policy of the University of Latvia is closely related to the general objectives of the University of Latvia and the quality management policy of the University of Latvia and as such is based on the laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia 1.2." [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/3/264\\_personala\\_vadibas\\_politika-en.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/3/264_personala_vadibas_politika-en.pdf). The selection of academic and administrative staff at the UL is regulated by



the Regulations on Academic and Administrative Positions at the UL ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/3/264\\_personala\\_vadibas\\_politika-en.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/3/264_personala_vadibas_politika-en.pdf)). FT fully complies with the UL requirements ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/5\\_DAZADI/SL\\_2-3-11-2022\\_Nolikums\\_par\\_akad\\_l\\_1.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/5_DAZADI/SL_2-3-11-2022_Nolikums_par_akad_l_1.pdf) and the Section 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (for example in the implementation of BSP ,21 lecturers (13 with doctoral degree, 8 with Master's degree; 6 are professors and 4 are assistant professors) are involved; of MSP 14 lecturers (5 professors, 5 assistant professors, 2 assistants, 1 lecturer, 1 researcher); of DSP 12 lecturers (7 professors, 1 associate professor, 1 assistant professor, including 3 leading researchers) (SAR 3.4.1.).

The UL staff selection process is open, any person who conforms to the requirements specified by the Law on Higher Education, as well as the requirements for the position specified in the terms of reference may apply for the position (SAR 2.3.5.). The FT abides by the UL regulations, the UL teaching staff recruitment is transparent, vacancies are published on the UL homepage and in accordance with the job requirements in the "Latvijas Vēstnesis", the official publisher of the Republic of Latvia and/or with the most popular job advertisement portals in Latvia; the selection process offers equal opportunities for all applicants (SAR 2.3.5.). This, however, does not necessarily reach qualified academic staff abroad.

The UL students and graduates are an essential resource for the UL's future development. The FT employs several of its doctoral students (SAR 3.4.2.) However, there are not many specialists in the study field of Theology and Religious studies, therefore several of the teaching staff of the FT cover a wide range of subjects. Attracting teachers from other faculties, institutions or from abroad helps to improve the quality of teaching and the choice of courses. The FT has teaching staff from the TU and guest lecturers from other universities (SAR 2.3.5., annexes basic information teaching staff, Teaching staff CVs). There are plans for closer cooperation with other faculties of the UL especially in the field of Religious studies (meeting with the Dean).

Publishing vacancies in UL homepage and in "Latvijas Vēstnesis" complies with the requirement of information being publicly available as those websites are accessible by public. They are in Latvian and would be difficult for foreigners to access and navigate. On the on site visit (14.11.22.) the expert group gained an impression that involvement of foreign teaching staff stems from cooperation and relationships formed with the "local teaching staff" while working on shared or exchange projects (for example, Erasmus+) on certain subjects, for example Church history in the Baltic region.

UL academic remuneration regulations I. 2. state that salaries paid for the teaching, the organizational work and the research financed from the study funding, according to the study program planning, shall be ensured within the framework of the Faculty's current annual budget calculated according to the current principles of budget formation of the UL. To finance the salaries of academic staff of the UL, the following are used: study income (budget grant, study fee revenues, grants and donations); project revenue.

- The workload of the academic staff is planned on the load card according to the order in the UL and controlled by the Faculty Dean and the Academic Department, comparing the plan with the actual completion of the work at the end of the period:
- The material stimulation of the academic staff for the quality of work and the achievement of measurable results, incl. publications is paid in accordance with the criteria, amount and order of the Faculty budget or the development budget of the University of Latvia in accordance with the UL's order. The same applies to the development of new study programs and lecture courses, incl. online environment and in foreign languages. As there is a shortfall in income from student fees, the development budget of the UL is used to cover the shortfall on a regular basis.
- Academic leave (sabbatical) of the academic staff - six months every six years - is paid according to the order of the University of Latvia Rector providing a monthly salary equal to the monthly salary

received for the previous calculation period ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/5/nr\\_14\\_akad\\_\\_amatu\\_atalgojums\\_eng\\_01.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/5/nr_14_akad__amatu_atalgojums_eng_01.pdf)) .

There wasn't much information provided on how the FT is open and how the stakeholders involved are informed about the processes of attracting qualified staff. Meeting with employers did not show that they had much knowledge and involvement in the process of attracting qualified staff or planning the study programmes according to the needs of the labor market.

1.3.6. The needs of professional and didactic development of the teaching staff are determined in response to feedback from students and also on the initiative of the teaching staff itself. A number of teaching staff have attended training to improve their teaching performance. (meeting with the BSP director). In the surveys there were a few courses which by students were ranked below average and the explanation given that the courses had issues with methodology or assessment process.(Annex 8) In the interviews it transpired that in response to a negative feedback from students some of the teaching staff have taken additional training provided by the UL to enhance their teaching performance (meeting with the BSP director). There is a lack of information on the English language skill of some staff (Annex teaching staff CVs), which may imply that they potentially won't be able to teach foreign students or will have limited capacity in working on international projects. The overall majority of teaching staff scored average to high, but none exceptionally high in the students' survey (Annex 8). At the meeting with the teaching staff it was pointed out that many of them deal with many courses and responsibilities and sometimes the didactical development is not the priority (meetings with the BSP director and teaching staff). The results and effectiveness of the implemented measures for professional and didactic development of the teaching staff are measured by regular student surveys. The courses organised by UL for professional and didactical development of teaching staff have a built in assessment system and appropriate certificates are issued. The Dean also meets professors once in two years for an assessment of their performance, and this kind of assessment is offered to other teaching staff too.

1.3.7. Small, fragmented workloads that force the academic staff to maintain employment relationships in other organizations, posing a risk of "burnout" (SAR 2.1.2.). Most academic staff are involved in several or all FT Study programmes teaching different levels of students. Moreover, some of them teach in other institutions, or do part time work elsewhere to make ends meet. Information on staff/student ratio in each of the programmes show that student groups are small, which enables a more individual and personal approach, which is appreciated by students (meeting with BSP and MSP students). The downside of a small number of groups and students is that teaching staff cannot specialize only in one subject and have to do more different courses and become broader experts, which in turn is more time and energy consuming (meeting with teaching staff), and at the same time the staff are involved in research programmes. Teaching a wider range of subjects has a positive side too, being competent in different subjects enables teaching staff to join several networks of specialists and engage more deeply in interdisciplinary research. They can pass on these skills to their students, and offer them a broader perspective and choice of research subjects. At the meeting with the teaching staff it was noted that there was no policy at the FT on how to divide time between teaching and research, and research sometimes is done as a hobby in spare time. Scholarships and sponsors like The Theological Society Fund help teaching staff to take up research, if other work commitments allow (meeting with teaching staff). A number of teaching staff are involved in small research projects (the onsite visit 15.11.22.). However, many found committing to research and development of teaching skills challenging amid managing several teaching jobs and family responsibilities.

Some of the teaching staff are involved in/work in related industries e.g. church, however it seems to have little impact on the content of their teaching apart from Practical Theology course. Their

involvement in related industries, however, enabled relationships with some relevant stakeholders. Those relationships are maintained largely on a personal rather than formal and institutional level. (meeting with the MSP and DSP director, meeting with employees). Overall the teaching staff manage to balance their workload. Although having more time and resources available for the research and development, would increase the quality and sustainability of their performance.

1.3.8. Student support system has scored high in the student survey (Annex 8). At the meeting with students (BSP, MSP and PhD students), they confirmed that they appreciated approachability and helpfulness of the staff, and that the small size of the FT makes it possible to deal with issues quickly and directly. Face to face, individual and personal communication is a strength of the FT. In solving day to day issues, more formal or remote solutions have not been necessary.

Extracurricular activities have not been assessed in SAR, neither featured among issues pointed out by students, most of whom deal with studies, work and family responsibilities. Those who don't work and only study full time are either receiving a scholarship, are supported by their family, or are living on their savings (BSP, MSP and PhD students). Some students found online learning helpful as it allowed them to save time and resources (onsite visit 15.11.2022)

There is a high dropout rate because of financial reasons and also due to change in one's circumstances and lack of motivation (SAR 3.1.4.). As the FT does not offer a professional study programme ('theologian' is not included in the list of professions in Latvia), many students take up studies at the FT for personal development or as second education (BSP, MSP and PhD students) in addition to other commitments. If students have difficulties in managing their studies, the FT tries to find support on a case by case basis. The current facilities do not provide easy access to people with special needs (visit to the FT). In the meeting with students, they recalled helping a fellow student in a wheelchair and expressed a view that it was up to fellow students to help the person, not that it would be the responsibility of FT (meeting with BSP and MSP students).

Although internationalization is a part of the UL strategy, the FT has not taken in foreign students apart from Erasmus exchange programme. It is to be noted that only PhD study programme is meant for implementation in English.

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

The established system for determining and redistributing the financial support for the implementation of the study field is in place in the UL and functioning well in the FT. A system for funding scientific research is working within the new framework of the UL governance structure in place. It is both robust and flexible enabling the FT to cover shortfall of financial resources due to not having enough students to make the study programmes profitable. Through participation in projects the FT managed to get additional financial resources for scientific research, which come from other sources than the UL. The infrastructure resources have been supplied by the UL. A unified system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of provision is functioning well. The information and communication technology solutions (LUIS, MOODLE) developed and used by the UL ensures smooth running. The FT follows procedures established by the UL in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia for attracting qualified teaching staff. Library resources and databases are available to students and meet the needs of the study field. The UL offers courses for professional and didactic development of the teaching staff and assesses their results. The development of the performance of the teaching staff is assessed by the Dean and in student surveys. The balance of the workload is manageable but not perfect and would benefit from more involvement of the teaching staff in the scientific research. The FT provides necessary support for students, the faculty staff is accessible and students appreciate a personal approach offered by both teaching and administrative staff. There is a high dropout rate at the FT, which is related to the fact that many students have to deal with work and family commitments. There are several

scholarships available, but most of those are not fully covering the financial needs of students. Current premises and equipment are not very friendly to students with special needs. The purchase of provisions is done within the limitations and priorities of the UL budget, and according to the plans of FT moving to new premises in the House of Letters the learning environment will improve there.

#### Strengths:

1. The FT is part of a well established UL structure in which systems and procedures for allocation resources for Study Fields are worked out across all departments.
2. The FT is the smallest faculty in the UL, which enables individual and personalized approach to students and their needs as well as good teamwork.
3. The UL framework enables sharing administrative, financial and other capacities and ensures high quality professional legal, IT and other services to TF. The UL structure provides stability and sustainability, within which TF has managed to attract additional resources for scientific research from other sources.

#### Weaknesses:

1. Being the smallest faculty, the FT has rather limited resources allocated in the UL budget.
2. Current premises and equipment in the FT are very basic and worn out.
3. The FT teaching staff covers a broad range of subjects, and their workload is fragmented, and not much time is left for in depth research.
4. The FT is struggling to attract enough students to make the programmes profitable.

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

#### **Analysis**

1.4.1. In its SAR, the FT states that the scientific research directions of the FT are in line with the objectives of the UL and the study field, as they result from the strategy of the UL and correspond to the specifics of the content of the study field programmes (p. 87-88, SAR; meeting with the HEI management). According to the study field's development plan, however, scientific research activities have space for improvement. This space is opened in the context of numerous plan-affected objectives, among which experts would highlight: scientific excellence of the content and academic staff, efficient management and administrative structure, interdisciplinary research, study programmes based on science and practice, international cooperation, a student-centered approach, contributing to social and economic development, value creation, dissemination of knowledge, shaping skills, contributing to environmental protection, innovation and creativity (SAR Annex, Plan\_study\_field\_development.docx). Some opportunities for advancement have been identified by experts and those are described in this analysis.

Even beyond the borders of Latvia, the FT is recognised for its scientific excellence, as evidenced by the number of international publications produced by its teachers. Since the 2015-2016 academic year, this number has been in the double digits, which is positive; however, there is still a small number of scientific papers in prestigious scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, where there is undoubtedly room for future growth (p. 95-96, SAR). In the subsequently submitted documentation, it is evident that UL encourages papers to be published in Scopus and Web of Science databases, but only in Q1 journals (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx). The analysis of international scientific papers written by FT teachers reveals an interest in a broad range of historical, religious, philosophical, and sociological topics, as well as some contemporary ones such as the relationship between religion and feminism (issues of gender equality), the relationship between religion and LGBT culture, etc. Scientific publications in the Latvian language contribute to

the preservation of national identity, culture, and the growth of Latvian theological terminology. FT teacher's contribution to the national encyclopedia is notable, as are the numerous articles that touch on Protestantism, Anglicanism, and other religious denominations, as well as those that contribute to interreligious dialogue, among which several works dealing with Islam deserve special mention (SAR Annex, List\_scientific\_publications\_teaching\_staff.docx). Since 2015, the FT has organized scientific conferences on a variety of topics, such as theological education in the Baltics and post-Soviet states, the interaction of tradition and innovation, the relationship between spirituality and theology, the role of the Lutheran Church in Latvian society, the Reformation, and dialogue between science and religion, etc. (p. 93-94, SAR). FT students and teachers also benefit society through a variety of activities that contribute to the significance of popularizing science in general. The interactive discussions at the Lampa festival are worthy of note. Additionally, the FT organizes think tanks in which lectures on a variety of popular-scientific and scientific topics are broadcast via Facebook (p. 94-95, SAR).

The participation of faculty teachers in international projects also contributes to scientific excellence. The number of projects has grown over the years, and the FT intends to establish networks of interdisciplinary cooperation and knowledge exchange within these projects. Of these project activities, the international and interdisciplinary project Religion and Gender Equality: Baltic and Nordic Development (with partners from Vilnius and Oslo) demonstrates the alignment of FT's strategic goals with the study field and the UL's strategic goals. The planned continuation of cooperation with the University of Tartu School of Theology and Religious Studies is also an essential component that contributes to FT's scientific excellence, international recognition, and growth as an institution of higher education (SAR Annex, Plan\_study\_field\_development.docx).

The 13 awards received by faculty members between 2014 and 2021 also demonstrate FT's international and national presence. These are important awards, scholarships, and recognitions (e.g., researcher of the month, European Person of the Year in Latvia, etc.) that recognise the scientific, institutional and social contributions of teachers (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx).

It is planned to create study modules in theology and religious studies and expand cooperation with potential employers within the context of study programmes in an effort to advance studies and increase the competitiveness of graduates. In this sense, there is still room to shape FT's planned lifelong learning programme, but implementation is proceeding slowly (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx; SAR, Annex, Plan\_study\_field\_development.docx).

The alignment of strategic objectives is also apparent in the context of the international and interdisciplinary scope of studies, where the FT intends to enhance its doctoral programmes and continue to recruit guest lecturers for all study programmes. In this context, the FT places students at the center of the educational process and intends to develop study modules and courses in an e-environment in the near future to enhance students' competitiveness. Both the improvement of the study environment for students with special needs and the improvement of study conditions in general are planned (presentation of the e-studies system, and tour of the facilities during the experts visit; SAR Annex, Plan\_study\_field\_development.docx).

Modern industry is based on eco-friendly systems and practices, which the FT attempts to harmonize by reducing the use of paper in classrooms by 50% by 2027, encouraging the use of recyclable materials in scientific research, and implementing intelligent waste storage.

In this context, the FT plans to develop eco-theological awareness in the future, which will include conferences on this subject and student papers that were not present in the past (SAR Annex, Plan\_study\_field\_development.docx; List of student scientific papers: Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx). Also, modern industrial efforts are focused on innovation and creativity, which FT follows with its most recent strategic plan (2021-2027), which includes promoting the progress of students and teachers who lead to original ideas and their realization through the exchange of experience with the industrial sector through seminars,

conferences, and discussions with external stakeholders from the industrial sector. However, it is difficult to determine the extent to which FT's development goals in the past period were related to industry because there are no annual reports on the achievement of this goal, and the FT does not specifically mention this aspect in its SAR.

The significance of FT's doctoral study programme stems from the fact that it incorporates the stated objectives, which is visible in the analysis of the criteria of this standard (p. 88-89., SAR). The significance of doctoral studies to the attainment of FT's objectives is reflected in the selection of topics for doctoral dissertations, where scientific originality and social relevance are present (e.g. "Religious Education in Public Schools in Latvia and Europe", "Verbal inspiration as a response to the theological crisis - implications in Latvian theological discourse", "Covid-19 pandemic and sacramental fellowship in the Lutheran tradition in Latvia" etc.). More about that: SAR, Annex , TF\_promocijas\_darbi\_2013\_2022\_garais (PhD theses themes).docx) Religious studies, the history of the Church and religions, biblical theology, philosophy of religion, and practical theology are among the many topics covered in the scientific works published by doctoral candidates (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx).

In order to fully monitor and ensure the quality of the FT, it is essential that the plan for the development of the study field (2021-2027) would be accompanied by annual reports on the strategic plan's implementation and based on that, in the self-assessment, it is necessary to analyze whether this criteria was met in the reporting period. In any case, there should have been annual reports on the implementation of strategic plans for the period to which the SAR primarily refers, and it would be beneficial for the SAR to be based on these reports. In experts opinion, this would allow for a clearer assessment of not only this criteria, but also the other criteria of this standard. The additional documentation does not demonstrate this clearly (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx).

Experts also believe it is important to note that the SAR is not based on regular and comprehensive monitoring of student participation in scientific research and monitoring of teachers' national and international accomplishments. In the document that was added later, it is evident that these data exist; therefore, it would be beneficial if they were recognised and evaluated according to the criteria that this standard specifies (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx).

1.4.2. Through the creation or modification of existing courses (e.g., Christian-Pagan dialogue in the I-III century), the participation of teachers and students in conferences (especially the annual student conference), the publication of papers (students participated in writing 20 scientific papers - additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx), and the participation in projects (14 different project activities), the connection between scientific research and the study process is evident in all study programmes. Understandably, it is the most emphasized in the doctoral study programme. A significant contribution in this context was made by the doctoral school, The Topical Problems of Theology and Religious Studies, whose activities include local and international readings, debates, and the creation of foundations for the development of new and innovative doctoral theses (p. 90, SAR). Thus, 8 doctoral theses were developed or are being developed within the framework of projects, which is perhaps the best example of the connection between scientific research and the study process (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx).

1.4.3. Within the framework of the doctoral study programme, international cooperation is established with the doctoral study programme in Theology and Religious Research at the University of Tartu, in accordance with the university's and study field's strategies. This cooperation is beneficial as it allows the region to produce the best scientists in their particular fields (SAR Annex, Plan\_study\_field\_development.docx). According to the SAR, the FT organized lectures given by teachers from the Vanderbilt Faculty of Theology. The majority of doctoral students attended these lectures, which were part of the study process and open to all interested students. The collaboration

with the Vytautas Magnus University of Lithuania and the Oslo Faculty of Theology on the joint project Religion and Family: Development in the Baltic and Nordic Countries must also be highlighted. This collaboration led to the co-authorship of a number of scientific papers by faculty teachers and teachers from the aforementioned institutions. Within the framework of that jointly implemented project, joint publications are being created, for example, on biblical hermeneutics among Latvian church Members, on Muslim converts in the Baltics, on the interaction of religion and gender in school books in the Baltics, on the attitude of Catholic and Lutheran women towards women's ordination in the Baltics. In addition, financing for the project Religion and Gender Equality: Baltic and Nordic Development were secured in collaboration with colleagues from Vilnius, Tartu, and Oslo (p. 91., SAR).

Individual faculty members contribute to international cooperation through participation in international conferences, invited lectures at other foreign universities, and participation in the editorial boards of international scientific journals (p. 91, SAR).

It is important that theological and many other scientific research projects have an international dimension, but this is difficult to achieve without the mobility of scientists and personal contacts, which are prerequisites for the creation of quality networks of scientists, which is a necessary condition for launching scientific research projects and other scientific activities. Therefore, based on the SAR for the development of the international dimension of scientific research, the faculty recognises the need to emphasize increasing the outgoing mobility of teachers (because it is low: statistics outgoing incoming mobility teaching staff.docx) and students (p. 90., SAR).

The number of international papers in the FT scientific journal The Way is also low (p. 90-91, SAR). This is not surprising given the journal's near-invisibility in international circles. In contemporary scientific publishing, international visibility is of the utmost importance; this is achieved, in part, by indexing journals in prestigious international databases. The Way journal is not included in any of these databases, which affects its already low scientific impact factor. In a meeting with the editor-in-chief of the scientific journal The Way, the expert team heard that efforts have been undertaken to put the journal in the prominent Scopus database (meeting with the director of the study field), which, in experts opinion, would be certainly valuable. Given that FT teachers publish their papers in The Way journal, this would undoubtedly increase the number of teachers' papers included in that significant international database.

The 19 invited lectures at international conferences given by FT's teachers between 2017 and 2022 are further evidence of their international recognition (Additional\_information\_FT\_29.11.2022.docx).

1.4.4. Projects are one of the primary mechanisms that promote teachers' participation in scientific and research work. Thanks to the project coordinator, who has been employed by the FT since 2018, the faculty monitors project activities, joins various research networks, and submits project proposals (SAR Annex, Plan\_study\_field\_development.docx). Certainly commendable in this context is the financing of faculty projects by external sources. Using the financial resources available in the projects, the administration of the FT has made attracting funding for research and improvement of the quality of studies a priority. The funding attracted for research in international projects is also increasing; in the last two years, it was 1700/PLE, which is also below the average indicator of the UL (9,000/PLE); however, the FT has a positive trend in attracting projects with external funding (p. 89, SAR). In addition to the two international projects mentioned above, it is worth mentioning some other projects in which the FT is involved, such as: Interaction of an Individual, Society, and State in the Process of Latvian History: Conflicts of Values and Formation of Common Values at Historical Fracture Points, Gender Sociality in Cultural and Power Interactions: The Diversions of Latvia and Norway, Development of Institutional Capacity of the University of Latvia (in which one of the teachers participated), as well as the projects Reformation 500 and 95 Theses in 95 Days which contributed to the popularization of the importance of science as such (p. 92, SAR). During the assessment process, meetings with various civil society stakeholders revealed a willingness to

establish cooperation through professional and other projects; the faculty should capitalize on this in the future (meeting with employers for all study programmes). All the aforementioned project activities are commendable, but according to experts, the faculty lacks a larger, more significant international project that would undoubtedly contribute to the scientific excellence and international recognition of this institution of higher education. Since 2015, the academic staff has presented the results of their scientific research at a number of significant conferences organized by the faculty (experts would especially like to highlight the faculty's participation in the organization of UL international conferences on various topics: Crisis and Religion; Where are we going? Theology, Religious Studies and Spirituality in the 21st century; Religion: the Real and the Imagined; Modern Trends in Theology and Religious Studies, The Dialogue between Science and Religions, etc. (p. 93, SAR). Some activities aimed at highlighting the significance of science as such are undertaken by teachers. Here, experts could highlight interactive discussions held as part of the aforementioned Lampa festival, as well as think tanks addressing various contemporary issues (How Not to Lose Hope; "Should We Put an End to It?"; How are Religious Communities Responding to the COVID Crisis?) Additionally, similar lectures are held within the doctoral school (p. 94, SAR).

Although the FT has made progress on this issue, there is still much work to be done in the future. Experts are primarily concerned with the fundamental question posed by this criteria, namely the mechanisms for involving faculty in scientific research. Specifically, it is evident that these mechanisms exist, but only at the state and university levels, which is insufficient, according to experts. In this regard, the FT should introduce earmarked funding of science, as part of which funds would be provided annually to teachers for the publication of scientific works (particularly in the Web of Science and Scopus databases), author's, editorial, and professional books, project management, mobility, and popularization of science. In other words, anything that might contribute in any way to the internationalization of FT's scientific research.

1.4.5. Mechanisms of student participation in scientific and research work are evident in the organization of student scientific conferences, which are mainly reserved for doctoral students. Additionally, the best bachelor's and master's theses have the opportunity to be published in the faculty journal *The Way* as a scientific paper. (<https://www.lu.lv/gribustudet/skoleniem/nodarbibas-skoleniem/jauno-teologu-un-religijpetnieku-universitate/>) In SAR, examples of student involvement in the popularization of science are also provided. Doctoral students have, for instance, participated in events promoting science and organized discussions in collaboration with the delfi.lv portal. The research conducted by FT students contributed to the development of the website [www.sievesuordinacija.lv](http://www.sievesuordinacija.lv). Participation in various church events has allowed for the promotion of the FT at the UL and the formation of public opinion on religious issues (p. 97, SAR). It can be noted that the methods for involving students in scientific work are efficient and effective.

1.4.6. The FT develops an innovative strategy for promotion, marketing, and organization in order to enhance the study process and internationalize the faculty. In its SAR, the FT particularly emphasizes the importance of organizational innovations related to the planning and implementation of FT's activities, including attracting new students, developing study programmes, securing financial resources, and improving internal communication.

Marketing innovations are based on the general marketing strategy of UL and serve to improve the image of the university and faculty. Examples of good practise include the Agora of Knowledge in which scientists present their research, events organized by the faculty called The Month of the Spirituality Tent (as part of the Lampa festival), expressing opinions in articles that are disseminated through social media networks, and The University of Young Theologians and Religious Researchers (<https://www.lu.lv/gribustudet/skoleniem/nodarbibas-skoleniem/jauno-teologu-un-religijpetnieku-universitate/> ).



The use of digital platforms is also mentioned as an example of innovative changes to the teaching and learning process. The use of MS Teams, Zoom platforms in online studies, including the preparation of new study materials, the use of a recording platform, the transition to hybrid studies, new approaches to online testing organization, consulting, video lectures (such as in World Religions I,II courses), etc., should be highlighted as the most important (p. 98, SAR; presentation of the e-studies system, and tour of the facilities during the experts visit).

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

The direction of scientific research in the study field and the development objectives of the faculty are aligned, which is essential not only for the national and international recognition of this higher education institution but also for the establishment of a functional system of internal quality assurance at the FT. Clearly, there is a connection between scientific research and the study field, as the scientific research of individual teachers is integrated into the studies and study programmes, which is of vital importance. The faculty has developed some mechanisms to engage teachers and students in scientific research, primarily through participation in projects, but also through scientific works, conferences, and various forms of popularization of science. Regarding international cooperation in scientific research, FT's efforts are commendable and must be pursued. The FT has made a big step forward in coming up with innovative ways to improve teaching, with a focus on using digital platforms for learning. Evidently, efforts are also being made in the context of marketing innovations that aim to promote the faculty and achieve various modes of communication with potential students and external stakeholders.

#### **Strengths:**

1. Teachers and associates at the FT are committed to achieving a high level of quality and quantity in scientific research.
2. There are well-established mechanisms for student involvement in scientific research work, and scientific research is well-integrated with the educational process.
3. Regarding international cooperation in scientific research, FT's efforts are commendable.
4. The FT has made a step forward in coming up with innovative ways to improve teaching, with a focus on using digital platforms for learning.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. The plan for the development of the study field for the period 2021–2027 does not include annual reports on the strategic programme's implementation. Also it is not visible how the strategy was implemented in the previous period, as there are no reports for previous years. Consequently, the SAR does not indicate whether this criteria was met during the reporting period.
2. SAR is not based on regular and comprehensive monitoring of student participation in scientific research and monitoring of teachers' national and international achievements. In the document that was added later, it is clear that these data exist, so it would be good if they were recognized and evaluated based on the criteria that this standard sets out.
3. Teachers at the FT are not sufficiently encouraged to engage in scientific and research work, despite some progress made since the last accreditation.
4. It is a deficiency that the FT has not launched a larger international project.
5. The international visibility of the only faculty scientific journal The Way is weak.

### **Assessment of the requirement [2]**

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

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

Since its last accreditation, the UL has been committed to achieving sustainability and developing the quality and quantity of scientific and professional research. However, its recognition in international frameworks, in experts opinion, is satisfactory but with a room for future improvement, as the recommendations in this report demonstrate (see 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field).

### **1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

#### **Analysis**

1.5.1 FT's cooperation with state institutions in Latvia is ongoing, the FT specialists regularly provide expertise to the Ministry of Justice on various religious communities on different issues (SAR 2.5.1.). Consultation on the establishing profession standard for theologians has recently been provided to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (On site visit 15.11.22.). The teaching staff and students of the FT are interviewed on national media outlets on topical religious issues in relation to contemporary events like pandemic or war, or gender and family complexities, participate in public discussions, for example in discussion festival "Lampa" or publish articles on widely read internet portals (SAR 2.5.1.).

Cooperation with churches and religious institutions in Latvia is largely characterized by mutual participation in separate events (SAR 2.5.1.), representatives of several churches have participated in the practical study courses, but there are no established formal agreements of cooperation between the FT and religious institutions (on site visit 14.11.22.). The plans of agreements, e.g. concerning internship, have not been implemented yet (on site visit 15.11.22.). Although there is a list of planned agreements regarding internship of DSP students provided with a planned starting date of 2021 given in Annex 9, those have not been implemented yet, because the relevant study module of internship has not been put into practice yet (meeting with the DSP director 14.11.22.) At the meeting with employers most of them were not aware of such plans and expressed an interest in taking part in internship programmes. The employers survey pointed out the lack of practical knowledge of students of religious and other institutions they worked in (Annex 8). There is a need for more concrete plans in this area.

The assessment committee noticed a mismatch between the skills teaching staff, students and alumni focussed on, such as religious competence and working with texts, which enabled students and alumni to find jobs in the public and private sector (in finance, publishing, education) and the selection of employers, for meeting with experts, who represented church or chaplaincy institutions with small number of employees (meetings with staff, students and employers).

The assessment committee also registers (discussions during site visit) that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia (ELCL, the largest Protestant church) has developed its own seminary for ministerial education. This seminary offers a bachelor degree in theology. The relation between the FT and the ELCL has been of historical importance since the first years of the UL. However, the relationship has not been on a good level in the last decades. In experts opinion, the quality of academic theology in the ELCL and the quality in the FT both suffer from this situation. The assessment committee suggests starting new dialogues to find constructive ways of better, mutual cooperation.

The FT positions itself as a non denominational institution, which offers courses not only in theology but also in religious studies, at the meetings with the FT staff, students and alumni, the aim of contributing towards building a tolerant, diverse, cohesive and religiously literate society was reiterated, as well as a demand for an expert view on religious issues in the public sphere and education (meetings with staff, students and alumni). In experts opinion, it would have been helpful to involve representatives of public institutions which the FT envisions would benefit from employing

in the planning of study courses and advising on skill sets relevant in the public sector in relation to the study field. Equally, in experts opinion, the FT would benefit from consulting people who have obtained education in the FT on their experience in the labor market.

Currently there is a mismatch between the espoused focus of the FT on Religious studies, the public sphere where they are trying to make an impact and the actual content of study programmes dominated by theological subjects, which are of a more specialized interest of religious institutions and their respective constituencies. In experts' opinion, the FT would benefit from clarifying their vision and focus. The challenge is how the FT might be able to both serve the needs of religious institutions and at the same time develop an attractive profile for the whole of society.

1.5.2 Cooperation between the FT and the UT has been successful, however, it seems "asymmetrical" with more UT teaching staff contributing to FT study programmes by delivering study courses than vice versa (on site visit, meeting with teaching staff 14.11.22.). In experts opinion, it would be beneficial to develop that even closer as a joint programme as the courses which focus on the Baltic context can be competitive in a research network. However, the assessment group was made aware that it is not possible in the time being due to bureaucratic hurdles and the extra resources it entails (meeting with the Dean). Cooperation with universities abroad (School of Theology and Religion of Tartu, Lithuania's Vytautas Magnus University, universities of Tübingen, Heidelberg, Berlin and others in Germany, as well Leuven Catholic university, University of Prague and others in western and Central European countries), America (Vanderbilt University) and Global South (University Pretoria in South Africa)) is developed in view of special features in the study field, for example, TF has a joint project with UT on the church history in the Baltic region, the lecturer from the University of Pretoria was a specialist in Biblical theology (meeting with teaching staff on site visit 15.11.22.)

In the meeting with employers the Latvian Evangelical Church Worldwide was represented, and they pointed out that they have employed FT graduates in many parts of the world, and seen some of those theologians and pastors develop successful academic careers in universities abroad and they in turn have helped the FT (meeting with employers). Patrons from Lutheran churches in Germany and USA offer scholarships to students (<https://www.fonds.lv/studentiem/pamatstudijas-no-2-kursa/sadalijums-pec-fakultatem/teologijas-fakultate/>).

Cooperation with other institutions in Latvia is selected in view of special features in the study field, for example, students' visits to Children's Hospital are part of the course on Pastoral theology. The cooperation with public institutions, such as media, educational and social care establishments, which require experts in religious studies for the benefit of wider society, currently is done on an occasional basis, whenever a particular issue relating to religion is flagged by particular events. In experts opinion, the FT may explore a targeted and more comprehensive involvement in the public sphere through cooperation with media and state institutions.

1.5.3. Teaching staff and students participate in both outgoing and incoming mobility, which provides added value to the implementation of the study process and the quality of studies. Involvement in Erasmus+ programme has been fruitful, and has given more opportunities to students. There have also been lectures/seminars taking place delivered by academics from outside European networks, namely US and Pretoria, which were appreciated by students (meetings with students), and should be continued. In the last years, the outgoing and incoming mobility decreased (3 foreign students in 2017 and 2018, and none in 2019; 1 teaching staff from abroad in 2018 and none in 2019) and the Covid pandemic was quoted as the main reason for years 2020 to 2022. There was no particular explanation given for the year 2019, as one year in itself does not constitute a trend and could be just a coincidence. (SAR 2.5.3.). There are more teaching staff attracted from abroad than foreign students (3-5 guest lecturers, and 1-3 foreign lecturers in 2015-2019 period)

(SAR 2.5.3.). One of the difficulties in attracting foreign students, especially from third countries, is verification of their qualifications (meeting with the study field director). There is also a lack of information in English about the content of study courses available to foreign students (on site visit 14.11.22.). Implementation of mobility has provided added value to study process by widening the perspective of both students and teaching staff, as well as enhanced the quality of debate and discussion, most notably in the DSP (on site visit 15.11.22). For teaching staff the mobility gives them an opportunity to gain experience in different teaching environments, styles and methods as well as access to Libraries of the relevant universities (on site visit 14.11.22.)

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

Having a broad Study Field of Theology and Religious Studies, the FT cooperates with many institutions and organizations in Latvia and abroad which enhances the quality of studies. FT's relationship and cooperation with state institutions and media is constructive and the input from experts from the FT on religious issues is appreciated. Relationships with major religious denominations in Latvia are more complicated, there are representatives of these organizations that take part in practical courses and some of the teaching staff are members of clergy of different denominations. However, currently a dialogue and cooperation on institutional level, especially on education of the workforce of religious institutions is lacking. Historically, the FT had had close links to the ELCL, and, in experts opinion, it might be beneficial to both the FT and the ELCL educational establishments to reopen the dialogue and also explore cooperation with other denominations which have their programmes of theological education.

In cooperation between the FT and the UT, the FT has been the main beneficiary, and in experts' opinion developing even closer relationships, for example, a joint study programme would increase the competitiveness of study programmes on the international scene.

Teaching staff and students of the FT had participated in both outgoing and incoming mobility, mostly through Erasmus+ programme, which contributes to the quality of studies. During the Covid-19 pandemic this mobility has stopped, and it is uncertain how it will be revived in the current political situation in the world.

#### **Strengths:**

- 1) The cooperation with UT has been a success.
- 2) Collaboration with universities in Europe and other continents have broadened the perspective of teaching staff and students alike.
- 3) Cooperation with public institutions and religious organisations in Latvia and abroad have facilitated greater understanding of historical and current religious phenomena and contributed to greater tolerance in the society between different groups.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- 1) FT seems to be in a tension between its historical profile as a faculty for denominational education and training and a (post) modern profile in a more pluralistic cultural/societal context.

### **Assessment of the requirement [3]**

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

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

The overall cooperation with various Latvian and foreign organizations is satisfactory. The

cooperation with the TU has been fruitful and promising. While having the majority of courses on subjects of Christian theology rather than Religious studies, the FT has not established strong cooperation with church institutions in Latvia. But there is cooperation with practicing communities and their representatives in the field of practical theology. Cooperation with public sector players requiring expertise in religious issues is good but somewhat sporadic.

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

### **Analysis**

The previous accreditation included recommendations for the development of e-studies, the adoption of more contemporary study techniques, and the internationalization of scientific research. It was proposed to acquire equipment that would improve study conditions and allow for higher-quality work. It is suggested that the FT increase student participation in scientific research and focus on advertising in order to attract more students. Increasing financial assistance for students and teachers was also proposed. In the context of implementing the expert team's recommendations, the FT implemented e-learning options, and scientific research became more international in terms of international cooperation through projects and the doctoral programme. The development of a system to attract the necessary financial resources for project completion, the improvement of working conditions, and the purchase of new equipment for teaching and scientific research were all undertaken (SAR Annex, Review\_implementation\_recommendations.docx). During the meeting with the Dean, it was stated that the noted conditions will be even better once new campus construction is completed (meeting with the HEI management).

The FT worked on its external communication and promotion using social networks, modern communication and marketing platforms after its last accreditation. Student participation in scientific activities was encouraged by activities such as scientific conferences, the publication of papers in the faculty's scientific journal, and events promoting the popularization of science. In addition, financial support for teachers has been increased, primarily through projects, and scholarship opportunities have been made available to students (p. 104-106, SAR; meeting with BSP and MSP students). Students whose previous studies are unrelated to theology and religious studies, and who wish to enroll in master study programme are aided by providing them with additional e-learning resources (p. 106-107, SAR).

The doctoral study programme was licensed in 2021, and experts also provided short-term recommendations for the programme. It was suggested that, in order to be admitted to the programme, candidates with a Master's degree in a different science who have not previously studied theology must meet the requirements that will be used to evaluate their prior knowledge.

According to the documentation submitted subsequently, this recommendation was implemented (addition to the annex 11). In addition, it is recommended that the procedure for enhancing the resources in the UL databases and library be reexamined so that they correspond with the current academic foundation in the field, which, according to an addendum experts received later to Annex 11, is implemented continuously every six months. Also recommended was a review of the academic staff's workload within the doctoral study programme; accordingly, FT formed a working group with this objective (p. 106-107, SAR).

Long-term recommendations centered on strengthening and expanding cooperation with the TU and other European universities to facilitate the integration of the study programme into international research networks, as well as examining the possibility of offering more scholarships to doctoral students to encourage them to conduct research and write dissertations (SAR Annex, Review\_implementation\_recommendations.docx).

These recommendations have been implemented based on the annex 11 addendum. In addition, as a long-term recommendation, it was suggested that extensive research be conducted on the labor

market and demand for specialists in this field and that more effort would be made to identify and, whenever possible, eliminate the obstacles preventing the completion and defense of doctoral theses. In its SAR, the FT notes that it constantly communicates with students and strives to assist them in completing their studies through a variety of scholarship opportunities (p. 107, SAR).

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

The Faculty implemented all the recommendations based on previously conducted evaluations. Specifically, progress in the development of e-studies and modern methods of teaching, learning, and faculty advancement should be highlighted. The faculty also worked on its financial and internationalization strategies. Improved equipment is important for teaching and scientific work, and student participation in teaching activities is encouraged. There is still room for improvement, but financial support for students has increased through a variety of scholarship types, and for teachers through projects. The FT has demonstrated that it understands and can implement the recommendations from previous evaluations in its own way and according to its capabilities, and the expert team is optimistic that the FT will find a way to implement this expert group recommendations in a manner consistent with its own vision for the development of scientific and teaching activities.

Strengths:

None.

Weaknesses:

None.

### **Assessment of the requirement [4]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The higher education institution has implemented activities based on previously conducted evaluations, which is supported by examples of results based on recommendations from earlier evaluations (SAR Annex, Review\_implementation\_recommendations.docx, SAR Annex, 2022.11.10\_Additional\_information\_Religion\_Theology (Before visit).docx; p. 104-107, SAR).

### **1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field**

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

Within 2 years: To develop a more coherent plan for a less top-down leadership model. The plan should be developed by a group of teachers, the dean and the study directors and representatives of the students. Responsible: The dean, 1 teacher representative and 1 student representative

Within 2-3 years: .To move the FT into a new and modern building to avoid the present historical and not updated premises, classrooms and technical solutions. Responsible: The Dean in cooperation with UL Vice-Chancellor

Within 2 years: To set up a plan, which aims at distributing more research time for each individual academic member of staff. The plan should open for a non-specified numbers of research time for each staff member and a number of hours to be distributed to the staff members involved in developing of research projects or the implementation of such projects. Responsible: The Dean in cooperation with the Council

Within 2 years: To achieve a better visibility of the FT journal The Way in international databases. Responsibility: The Dean in cooperation with the director of study field

Within 6 months: To develop an annual report of the development plan 2021-2027

Within 1 year: In light of the limited budget for purchasing new information resources, explore further cooperation options with the UT to make their library resources available also to BA and MA students.

Within 1 year: To make an annual report of student participation in research project.

### Long-term recommendations

Within 3 years: To transform the FT definitely from an institution for one specific ministerial education to a non-denominational institution. A plan should be developed to be presented to the UL leadership. Responsible: The dean in cooperation with the Council, administrative and student representatives.

Within 3 years: To make an ambitious plan for involving societal stakeholders (media, public management, art institutions, publishing etc) in the profiling of the FT, in all programmes and in research ambitions. The general society should also benefit from this plan. Responsible: The director of study field.

Within 3 years: To continue efforts to initiate a strong international research project by building on the competence of all Baltic theological high level institutions, using the significant international awareness of Baltic freedom and democracy. The building up of this project should gain from cooperation with a number of other Baltic universities. The Dean in cooperation with the Council should chair this process.

## II - "Theology and Religious Studies" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Theology and Religious Studies" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The academic bachelor's study programme "Theology and Religious Studies", complies with indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of "Religion and Theology". The length of the implementation of the study programme, which is 3 years, is evaluated as sufficient for acquiring the necessary skills and way of thinking to enter the labor market.

2.1.2. According to the SAR p. 110, the title of the study programme is "Theology and Religious Studies" in the study field of "Religion and Theology" with education classification code 43221 with the last 3 numbers (221) standing for religion and theology according to the classification of Latvian education which can be accessed here: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitiba-klasifikaciju>. There is no qualification

given after graduating as it is an academic bachelor's study programme.

According to the SAR p.110, the aim of the programme is to ensure the development of students' wider knowledge, methodological skills and competence in theology and religious studies. According to the information provided in the SAR p.111, the admission requirements of this programme is secondary education. The programme is implemented in Latvian thus no proof of proficiency of English language is necessary. It has been stated in the SAR p.111 that after successful completion of the studies, students are awarded with Bachelor's degree of Humanities in Religion and Theology. According to the SAR p.111, the study programme is a full-time study programme with 120 CP to be gathered during the study process of 3 years. In the opinion of the experts, the title, code, degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.

2.1.3. There have been various changes made within the study programme since the last accreditation procedure. According to the SAR p.112, since the last accreditation, the degree to be obtained has been changed from "the Bachelor's degree of Humanities in Theology and Religious Science" to "Bachelor's degree in Humanities in Religion and Theology". It has been done in accordance with the regulations of the Cabinet Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the National Academic Education Standard" and Cabinet Regulation No.322 "Regulations on the classification of education in Latvia".

According to the SAR pp.112-114, there have been changes made also in the content of the study programme in regards to the study courses provided for the students. In April of 2019 there was a decision made by the Council to make changes in the mandatory part of the programme. It was decided to close the study course "Introduction into Philosophy for Theologians II" SDSK2068, 2 CP and instead to include the study courses "Civil Protection" Chemi 1059, 1 CP and "Environmental Protection" instead of the above-mentioned course VidZ1032, 1 CP. These changes came into force starting with the spring semester of 2019. It has been done for the purpose to improve the competence of students in civil and environmental protection issues, in accordance with "Compliance with the requirements laid down in the Environmental Protection Law and the Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law."

According to the SAR p. 112-113, in October of 2019, the Council decided to close 9 study courses starting with the spring semester of 2020 as they have been seen as outdated. The following courses are: 1. "Biblical Archaeology: Customs and Traditions", 2 CP; 2. "Introduction to Islam II", 2 CP; 3. "The New Testament Greek (Koine) I", 2 CP; 4. "The New Testament Greek (Koine) II", 2 CP; 5. "Theological English III", 2 CP; 6. "Theological English V", 2 CP; 7. "Theological German III", 2 CP; 8. "The Old Testament Hebrew - I", 2 KP; 9. "The Old Testament Hebrew - II", 2 CP.

According to the SAR p.113, in the January of 2020, there were additional changes made in the study programme content. There has been a removal of specific study courses: 1. "Introduction to Philosophy for Theologians I", part A, 2 CP; 2. "Introduction to theological ethics", part A, 2 CP. The study courses mentioned have been replaced with a study course "Theological ethics", part A, 4 CP. The course of "World religions II", part A, 2 CP has been replaced with "World religions II", part A, 4 CP. Another change made has been a transfer - starting from autumn semester 2020 to the part B2 of the study course "Religious pedagogy I", part A, 2 CP. There has also been a new study course added to the study programme "Reformation in Livonia", in English language, 2 CP; There have been a few courses recognized as out-of-date and thus removed: 1. "Theological German IV" and 2. "Theological German V" part B1 2+2 CP; One course also has been transferred from the 2nd to the 3rd semester, the study course "The age and cultural environment of the Old Testament", B1, 2 CP. According to the SAR p. 113.-114., there have also been changes made in the autumn of 2021. The course Teol2104 "The New Testament: Introduction and Theology I", 4CP was replaced with Teol1079 "The New Testament: Introduction and Theology I", 4CP. 6 courses have been removed:



“Theological English IV”, 2CP, “Introduction to Islam II”, 2CP, “Religious Pedagogy I: Interactive Methodology of Learning Religion”, 2CP, “Religious Pedagogy II: Christian Perspective and Values in Curricula”, 2CP. “Religious Pedagogy III: Research on Society, Family and Religion”, 2CP, “The New Testament Greek I (Koine) (seminar)”, 4CP. Also, 4 new courses have been introduced: “Theological English”, 2CP, “Introduction to Islam”, 2CP, “Worldview, religion and education”, 4CP, “The New Testament Greek I”, 4CP. Overall, in the expert opinion, the corrections made to the study programme’s parameters within the assessment of the study field are justified and experts support them.

2.1.4. According to the information gathered during an onsite visit meeting with the management, the UL is the only university providing studies in this field, which makes this Bachelor’s programme the only programme in the whole country that ensures studies in theology and religion. In the opinion of the expert group, studies of theology and religion provides students with a specific way of thinking and seeing the world as well as provides knowledge of human history and development which can be applied not only in one specific type of a workplace or field but to many diverse ones of students' choice.

In the SAR p.117, it is outlined that the graduates of the study programme are employed in various different institutions and sectors of the labor market. It has been stated in the report that the graduates can find employment in the fields related to religious research and analysis of current events or processes in universities, institutes, public administration, religious organizations. The knowledge acquired in the studies allows the graduates to become teachers, civil servants, business analysts, politicians, social workers, charity workers, journalists. In the opinion of the expert group, it is rather interesting that an education in the study field of religion and theology can provide the necessary knowledge for journalism, teachers and politics which are rather different from the one taught. It seems that such a thing would be possible in case if the students have done studies in another field before and this is their second higher degree as a more likely scenario as this is a Bachelor’s programme and usually students have limited if not zero work experience beforehand.

According to the SAR p.118, where are reflected the dynamics of the number of students, 2015-2021, there has been a slight decrease of the students in 2017 and after that being rather stable numbers of students per study years which is around 70 students in all of the study years. In the SAR p.118 also numbers of graduates and student dropouts are reflected which shows a bit of instability in the numbers. Dropouts of students are rather high being around 23 students in a study year. In the study year of 2019/20 and 2020/21, the dropouts have slightly decreased being 20 and 16 which hopefully continues to decrease in the future.

There is a very low involvement of students of the Bachelor programme in ERASMUS study exchange. According to the table that is provided in the SAR p.119, 0 students have gone on ERASMUS+ in the last 3 study years which are 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21. According to the SAR p.120, there are some incoming students from other foreign universities which happens from time to time while in recent years it last time happened in 2018/19 when 3 students came on exchange and that was some time ago.

2.1.5. N/A.

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

All of the indicators of the study programme are in compliance with the existing preconditions of the implementation of the study programme. The study programme “Theology and Religion studies” complies with the study field indicators, conditions and criteria. In the opinion of the experts, the title, code, degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme

implementation as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified. The study programme is implemented in Latvian. The goals, objectives, learning outcomes are in line and in compliance. The programme is in demand and there is a flow of incoming students every study year. Graduates can find employment in the fields related to religious research and analysis of current events or processes in universities, institutes, public administration, religious organizations. The corrections made in the study programme's parameters within the assessment of the study field are justified and experts support them. There has been a significant level of dropout rate in the last study years which causes instability. There is also a rather low involvement of students in study mobility.

Strengths:

1. Unique Bachelor's programme that provides studies in the study field.

Weaknesses:

1. Large dropout rates;
2. Low involvement of students in study mobility.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1 The content of the study programme "Theology and Religious Studies" is topical, even though it has been developed following the older scheme of pastoral training where, at the moment, theology heavily outweighs religious studies. Given the current trends, the FT is aware of this imbalance, indeed admitting that religious studies are underdeveloped (p. 22, SAR), which is clearly a weakness to be corrected. The leadership of the FT both in the development plan (SAR Annex 3) and during visit on site (meeting with study programme director and dean) has pointed out that during the next five years the FT is ready to develop a larger module for religious studies so that the content of religious studies would become the same size as theology. As for now, the BSP in its compulsory (A) part is dominated by traditional theological themes: biblical theology, history of the church, systematic and practical theology, where religious studies is a smaller portion (p. 122-123, SAR).

The study courses and modules are interconnected and complementary. The principle of gradualness is being followed. The emphasis is laid on introductory courses, for example, the New Testament: Introduction and Theology I, II, Systematic Theology I, II, Introduction to Studies and Methodology of Scientific Work, Introduction to Religious Research, etc., which become the basis for successful studies of subsequent courses (p. 125, SAR). Students are gradually led towards the development of Bachelor's thesis, which is the main - final component of the programme.

In view of the limited 3 year studies, the statement (p. 125, SAR) that "the programme focuses on working with original texts, highlighting the role of a language (Koine, Hebrew, English of Theology, etc.) in research of the ancient texts" is evidently exaggerated, since the ancient languages are only in elective (B) part courses, where there are no exegetical courses offered in the BSP, at all. (Annex\_19\_BSP\_study\_plan.docx) Another shortcoming can be considered the fact that besides the topical courses of Sociology of Religion and Psychology of Religion (p. 123 SAR), the BSP has ignored the vital study of Philosophy of Religion which has been an essential part for understanding theology and religion throughout history.

The overall content of the BSP corresponds to the objective in forming students' independent learning skills, critical understanding of theology and religious research, which serves the "generalist" purpose of humanities in meeting the needs of the society, as well as industry, labor market and scientific trends.

The BSP complies with Cabinet Regulations No. 240, Riga, 13 May 2014 (Minutes No. 28, §18)

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266187-noteikumi-par-valsts-akademiskas-izglitiba-standartu>; only in Latvian) Total amount of CP in Study programme 120 CP length of implementation 3 years, CP are divided as follows: 16 CP is allocated to Biblical theology, 10 CP to History of the Church, 16 CP to Systematic and practical theology, 16 CP to Religious studies, 10 CP to the UL undergraduate courses (including the courses "Civil Protection" and "Environmental Protection", each 1 CP); and 10 CP to The Bachelor's thesis. The compulsory (A) part 78 CP (68 CP study courses, 10 CP Bachelor's thesis). The restricted elective part 40 CP (B1 28 CP, B2 12 CP). The optional (C) part 2 CP. Based on the information provided by HEI, experts find that other requirements specified in the regulations are also met. Annex\_15\_BSP\_Compliance of the study programmes with the State education standard.docx

#### 2.2.2. N/A

2.2.3. The courses and the study programme is being implemented with methods which contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes. Studies are organized in the form of lectures and seminars, interactive learning, where students are introduced into discussions, problem-solving, using a variety of methods and types of communication. There are also practical field studies (p. 126, SAR). For example, in cooperation with LELBAL, a student internship in Sandby (Sweden) has been organized (p. 101, SAR).

Each study course has an intermediate test and a final exam. In the final exam, students demonstrate their knowledge, skills and competence according to the specific requirements of each study course. The final examination of the course might have various forms: in writing (tests, answers to exam questions), orally, in the form of a scientific study (essay) and discussion, in the form of a practical scientific study or successfully implemented practice. The main task of the entire study process is to introduce students into independent scientific research and discussion, and encourage them to start writing scientific articles (p. 127, SAR).

According to onsite interviews with students, the e-learning environment is being widely used and appreciated by students. The student-centered approach is followed in updating the study programmes and the respective study courses. Students receive friendly support and feedback from the lecturers. Student mobility is promoted. The results of student surveys are evaluated and taken into account for the improvement of the study process (p. 128, SAR). The study environment is open and welcoming, teachers are friendly and supportive, as confirmed during the meeting with students.

#### 2.2.4. N/A

#### 2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. According to the SAR and several examples highlighted within it, the topics of students' final bachelor theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme. The list of all bachelor's theses that were subsequently submitted to experts provides an even greater indication of how well this criterion is met. (For example, "The Role of Religion in the Process of Legitimising Violent Islamic Radicalisation in Western European Countries", "The Story and the Symbol: the Symbolic Role of a Serpent in the Story of Falling in Sin in the Context of Psychoanalysis", "The Culture Books in Tibetan Buddhism", "The Call of Military Service - in the Context of Anthropology and Psychology of Theology" p. 129 SAR) There is an established evaluation procedure for these theses, and the rector of the UL awards the best thesis (p. 129-130, SAR; SAR Annex, Bachelor theses\_themes.7z).

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

The overall content of the studies is topical, interconnected and complementary, where appropriate study methods are being implemented, meeting the needs of the industry, labor market and scientific trends. The content of the study courses corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes. The BSP content complies with national regulations, state education standard. Student-centered learning and teaching principles are followed. The study environment is open and supportive. The compatibility between the teaching process and scientific-research work is evident in the selection of bachelor theses. The difficulty, at the moment, is that the BSP is in the process of transitioning to a more balanced programme which would not be so heavily dominated by theology. It is definitely a challenge when such a big part of the content is to be changed and added.

Strengths:

1. The study environment is open and welcoming, teachers are friendly and supportive.

Weaknesses:

1. The imbalance between theology and religious study courses.
2. A lack of Philosophy of Religion course.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The study provision, informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision comply with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme. The infrastructure resources have been supplied by the UL. A unified system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of provision is functioning well. The information and communication technology solutions (LUIS, MOODLE) developed and used by the UL ensures smooth running. As this study programme shares material and technical provision with other study programmes of TF, for the general analysis please, see analysis at "1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field". BSP students' surveys indicated that there can be improvement on learning resources. The students of the BSP have access to regularly updated library resources (SAR 3.3.1.), library provides the following classes for the students of the BSP: presentation "Step by step: Library for you", classes "Electronic Union Catalog and Primo for your successful studies" (90 min.), "Get to know e-resources" (90 min.), "E-resources in the field" (90 min.), E-course "The Introduction into information literacy" (Part C course) (SAR 2.3.3.).

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. To ensure the necessary funds for the implementation of the study programme the UL uses: a state budget grant, tuition fees and the UL subsidy (SAR 3.3.3.). The cost of study programmes at the UL is calculated according to the methodology developed by the UL, which takes into account the costs of providing the study process and information on the study programme plan, reliability of

forecasts (SAR 3.3.3.). According to these calculations for ensuring the profitability of the study programme it is necessary to increase the number of students. TF plans to increase the number of fee-paying students by 8 in the next 5 years (SAR 3.3.3.). The fact that the study programme does not have the number of students to ensure profitability of the study programme and may make the development of the study programme more difficult. Currently the FT receives additional support for the development of programs from the common funds of the UL for the implementation of study programmes. Support from 'Zentrum für Mission und Ökumene — Nordkirche Weltweit' (Mission and Ecumenical Centre of the Northern Church of Germany) also helps to balance the books and ensure the development of the study programme (SAR 3.3.3.).

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

The established system for determining and redistributing the financial support for the implementation is in place in the UL and functioning well in the FT. A system for funding scientific research is working within the new framework of the UL governance structure in place. It is both robust and flexible enabling the FT to cover shortfall of financial resources due to not having enough students to make the study programmes profitable. Through participation in projects FT managed to get additional financial resources for scientific research, which come from other sources than the UL. The infrastructure resources have been supplied by the UL. A unified system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of provision is functioning well. The information and communication technology solutions (LUIS, MOODLE) developed and used by the UL ensures smooth running. The FT follows procedures established by the UL in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia for attracting qualified teaching staff. The UL offers courses for professional and didactic development of the teaching staff and assesses their results. The development of the performance of the teaching staff is assessed by the Dean and in student surveys. The balance between academic, research and administrative workload is manageable but not perfect and would benefit from more involvement of the teaching staff in the scientific research. The FT provides necessary support for students, the faculty staff is accessible and students appreciate a personal approach offered by both teaching and administrative staff. There is a high dropout rate at the FT, which is related to the fact that many students have to deal with work and family commitments. There are several scholarships available, but most of those are not fully covering the financial needs of students. Current premises and equipment could have been better developed for students with special needs. The purchase of provisions is done within the limitations and priorities of the UL budget, and according to the plans of FT moving to new premises in the House of Letters the learning environment will improve there.

Strengths:

1. None.

Weaknesses:

1. Premises, furniture and some of the equipment is basic and somewhat dated, physical accessibility to students with special needs is limited.
2. The number of students does not ensure profitability, and implementation of the study programme requires extra funding.

### **Assessment of the requirement [6]**

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

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

Informative and library resources are good. The technical equipment is average. Rooms are very basic and not equipped for easy use by people with special needs. Low number of students and high number of dropouts makes financial sustainability challenging.

### **2.4. Teaching Staff**

#### **Analysis**

2.4.1. The qualification of the teaching staff members complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments. 21 lecturers (13 with doctoral degree, 8 with Master's degree, 6 are professors and 4 are assistant professors (SAR, p. 134) are involved in the BSP (SAR p. 134). Among the 21, 14 have UL academic positions (SAR, p.135).

Also the most prominent scholars at the FT teach in the programme. Visiting professor Riho Altnurme (latest publication (Annex 24): Rohtmets, P.; Pekko, I.; Altnurme, R. (2020). The Lutheran church in Estonian society: the impact of secularization and religious change. In: Altnurme, Riho (Ed.). Old religion, new spirituality: implications of secularization and individualization in Estonia. Leiden: Brill. (International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology) [forthcoming], teaches Teol 1054 Reformation in Livonia (Basic information teaching staff). Altnurme is considered one of the leading specialists in Reformation history (SAR, p. 125). The BSP programme director teaches many courses, among them are Teol 1079 and Teol 2105: New Testament: Introduction and Theology I and II (Basic information teaching staff) He also has many publications. One recent is (Annex 24): Kokins, Ralfs. Kristus nāves interpretāciju shēmas un to problemātiskie aspekti / Ralfs Kokins. Atsauces parindēs. // Ceļš Nr. 69 (2018), 61.-82. lpp. <http://doi.org/10.22364/cl.69.4>. , Kokins is also a leading researcher in the project "Transformation of Religion and Theology in Contemporary Latvia in the Global Context I" (SAR, p. 83). Professor in practical theology teaches Teol 1080 Worldview, religion and education (Basic information teaching staff). She is a member of the Board of the Independent Education Society, a representative of the partner institution Network for Ecumenical Learning in Central and Eastern Europe, a member of The European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education, a national coordinator of International Commission on Church and School and a leading researcher in the project "Religion and Gender Equality: Baltic and Nordic developments" (2021), a project manager "Feminist Discourse and Intersectionality in Theological Studies: Academic Theology in Latvia -100" (2020), and a leading researcher in the ERDF project "Interactions of Theology and Practice in Sustainable Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue" (2017-2020).

The academic staff involved in the implementation of the bachelor study programme "Theology and religious studies" (now – "Theology and science of religion", code 43221) complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. (Annex\_23\_2\_HEAD\_OF\_STUDY\_FIELD\_DECLARATION\_LHEI\_sect\_55.docx)

In the BSP, there are more than five professors and associated professors with doctoral degrees and three are also experts in the Latvian Council of Science (p.135, SAR), which complies with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

The teaching staff is proficient in Latvian which is the official language, in accordance with regulations for performing professional duties and office duties. (Annex\_23\_3\_Certificate\_knowledge\_official\_language.pdf)

2.4.2. The SAR (p. 138) reports that there have been no significant changes in the composition of the teaching staff during the reporting period. New courses, however, have been added to the program. Among them are Teol 1003 "Schools of theology and theologians" and Teol 1029 "Introduction in methodology of studies and scientific work". (Basic information academic staff). The

new courses have improved the quality of the programme (SAR, p. 138). The two teachers responsible for these new courses are both elected UL members and well qualified (Basic information academic staff). In order to enhance and develop the competence of the teaching staff when new teachers are engaged in the program the FT in 2019, applied the SAM project 8.2.2 "Renewal of academic staff and

improvement of competences at the University of Latvia" . In this program visiting professor Riho Altnurme from the University of Tartu was invited as an expert. This has resulted in the hiring of new colleagues in assistant positions. (SAR, p. 24) . In the present situation hiring new colleagues among qualified PhD students is a FT policy ( SAR, p. 24). Among new hired staff members there are numerous, qualified publications. Some cases are "The Spiritual Experience Gained Through the Act of Listening Music in the Beat Generation's Poetry During the 1950's" .//Sast. Valdis Tēraudkalns. Ceļš. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2017 and "Bībeles verbālā inspirācija, fundamentālisms un sievietes loma baznīcā." Reliģiski -filozofiski raksti 29: 203-228. 2021 <https://doi.org/10.22364/rfr.29>. (Annex 24).

#### 2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. 16 out of 21 (Annex 24)) of academic staff have published in peer-reviewed journals and publications, and teachers also publish in internationally known journals. 17 staff members have participated in conferences. It is evident from the list of publications of faculty teachers that there are fewer works published in renowned global databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, i.e. that the dominant works are from national publishers or publishers that are not included in the aforementioned databases. As a result, the works are not so visible to the international public, which should definitely be improved in the future. (SAR Annex, List\_scientific\_publications\_teaching\_staff.docx; SAR Annex, UL FT Teaching staff CV.pdf). The experts would like to see a more transparent list of publications. Nevertheless, the experts regard the number of staff member, who publish and participate in conference to be on a very good level.

The SAR mentioned 21 persons as members of the staff connected to the programme. It also states that among these 21, 14 have an academic position. In Annex 24 there is a list of publications from staff members in peer-reviewed journals. A simple analysis of this list compared with the names on the list of lectures connected to the programme, shows that 12 out of the 14 academic staff have published in a peer reviewed journal since last report. In the Study development plan there is an overview over how many articles have been published in national journals in 2020. This number is 16. It is, however, not possible to know from this plan if the number 16 means that all staff members have published these articles or only a group of members. It seems that the reporting in the SAR on this issue could have been more transparent.

2.4.5. The SAR (p. 139) reports good practices for cooperation of the teaching staff. This is a topic, which has been significantly improved since the last assessment report. The collegiality aspects of academic work is given priority. This has led to a larger sharing and dialogues on theoretical and valuable experience and methodological skills. This cooperation is initiated by both the programme director as well as the administration of the faculty. In these more formal meetings and in collegial meetings in the Council of the Study Field also student evaluations and reflections are taken into the elaborations.

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

The qualification of the teaching staff complies with the requirements and it enables the aims and the learning outcomes of the study programme. There have been no changes in the composition of the teaching staff. A clear majority of academic staff have published in peer-reviewed journals and

publications. The institution has developed new, good practices and formal meetings for sharing and discussing quality issues (content-wise and methodological) in the programme.

**Strengths:**

1. Staff members have good international cooperation and relations.
2. The institution has developed good formal and informal meetings among colleagues to share and enhance quality issues in the programme.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Staff needs to publish more works in journals that are part of renowned global databases such as Web of Science and Scopus.

## **Assessment of the requirement [7]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

16 out of 21 members of the academic staff have published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions within the last six years. A number of staff members also have practical experience within a period of five years,

## **2.5. Assessment of the Compliance**

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Academic Bachelor's study programme "Theology and Religious Studies" (code 43221) complies with the State Academic Education Standard. The code of the study programme 43221 complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 322 (Riga, 13 June 2017 (Prov. No. 30, §18))  
(Annex\_15\_BSP\_Compliance of the study programmes with the State education standard.docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The description has been provided in Latvian and English, the language in which the study programme is implemented is Latvian, complying with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions



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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma of BSP is provided in Annex\_12\_1\_Bachelor\_diploma.docx, and it complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued - Cabinet Regulation No. 202 "Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents"

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/256157-kartiba-kada-izsniedz-valsts-atzitus-augstako-izglitiba-apliecinoss-dokumentus>.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The academic staff involved in the implementation of the bachelor study programme "Theology and religious studies" (now - "Theology and science of religion", code 43221) complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. (Annex\_23\_2\_HEAD\_OF\_STUDY\_FIELD\_DECLARATION\_LHEI\_sect\_55.docx)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

In the BSP, there are more than five professors and associated professors with doctoral degrees and three are also experts in the Latvian Council of Science (p.135, SAR), which complies with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The teaching staff is proficient in Latvian which is the official language, in accordance with regulations for performing professional duties and office duties.

(Annex\_23\_3\_Certificate\_knowledge\_official\_language.pdf)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement, which is provided in Annex\_7\_standart\_samples\_study\_contract.zip, complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement Cabinet Regulation No. 70 "Mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement".

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The UL has certified that in the event that the implementation of the bachelor study programme "Theology and religious studies" (now - "Theology and science of religions", code 43221), of the study field "Religion and theology" is terminated, the UL undertakes to provide students with the opportunity to continue their studies in bachelor's study programme "Philosophy" (code 43229) of the study field "History and philosophy" (Annex\_5\_Declaration\_continue\_studies.zip).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Refund and Compensation Policy STATEMENT attests that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees paid in the event the bachelor study programme "Theology and religious studies", (code 43221) of the field of study "Religion and theology" is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme (Annex\_6\_Declaration\_refund.docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

**Assessment of the requirement [8]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The code of the BSP 43221 complies with the Cabinet Regulation No. 322 (Riga, 13 June 2017)

and No. 240, Riga, 13 May 2014 - only in Latvian). Based on the information provided by HEI, experts find that requirements specified in the regulations are met (Annex\_15\_BSP\_Compliance of the study programmes with the State education standard.docx).

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

Students and graduates have very positive assessments of the BSP program, both in surveys and in interviews during onsite visits. Staff and other lectures together have a competence on a much higher level than what is the required minimum. There are a variety of courses, the majority, however, are in (Christian) theology. A smaller number is in religious studies and some in non-Christian religions. There is a successful implementation of e-learning. On the side of weaknesses, there is a too big number of dropouts and student mobility is low. There is also very little done for students with specific needs and rooms and facilities are somewhat outdated.

Taken together, the expert committee is, nevertheless, convinced that the BSP is a well-functioning program, which will improve its qualities after the transition to the new campus. Most of the deficiencies can, therefore, be dealt with within the coming 2 years. The dropout number needs more time to handle. It is also a problem, which needs assistance from the UL level, as it is also connected to financial challenges for a larger student cohort. On this background, experts think the dropout problem relates more to financial issues than to academic quality. On the level of BSP, the expert team, therefore, assesses the program as good.

#### **Strengths:**

1. Unique Bachelor's programme that provides studies in the study field.
2. The study environment is open and welcoming, teachers are friendly and supportive.
3. Staff members have good international cooperation and relations.
4. The institution has developed good formal and informal meetings among colleagues to share and enhance quality issues in the programme.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. Large dropout rates.
2. Low involvement of students in study mobility.
3. The imbalance between theology and religious study courses.
4. A lack of Philosophy of Religion course.
5. Premises, furniture and some of the equipment is basic and somewhat dated, physical accessibility to students with special needs is limited.
6. The number of students does not ensure profitability, and implementation of the study programme requires extra funding.
7. Staff needs to publish more works in journals that are part of renowned global databases such as Web of Science and Scopus.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Theology and Religious Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Theology and Religious Studies"**

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

Within 2 years: to address the lack of a Philosophy of Religion course, the FT should establish such a course within 2 years. Responsible: The study director in cooperation with the competent teachers

Within 1 year: The Dean should present to the Council a document, addresses the financial challenge regarding the student numbers. On the one hand, the present number of students is not profitable. On the other hand, there is a too large drop out number of students. The document needs to present proposals on how to negotiate with UL to increase funding in such a way that the number of students can be reduced without losing financial resources needed.

Within 2-3 years: To move the FT into a new and modern building to avoid the present historical and not updated premises, classrooms and technical solutions. Responsible: The Dean in cooperation with UL Vice-Chancellor

Within 2 year: To strengthen information and logistics to improve student mobility (Erasmus).

### Long-term recommendations

Within the next assessment period: The study director, in cooperation with programme directors and representatives of student bodies should pursue and realize a plan for an equal balance between courses of theology and religious studies. Report mid term after 3 years.

Within the next assessment period, the management should make a decision on earmarked funding of science, which will allow the faculty to annually provide financial resources to teachers for the publication of scientific works (especially in Web of Science and Scopus databases Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4). Author's, editorial, and professional books, project management, mobility, and popularisation of science.

## II - "Theology and Religious Studies" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Theology and Religious Studies" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The academic master's study programme "Theology and Religious Studies", complies with indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of "Religion and Theology". The length of the implementation of the study programme, which is 2 years, is evaluated as sufficient for acquiring the necessary skills and way of thinking to enter the labor market.

2.1.2. According to the SAR p.142, the title of the study programme is "Theology and Religious Studies" in the study field of "Religion and Theology" with education classification code 45221 with the last 3 numbers (221) standing for religion and theology according to the classification of Latvian education which can be accessed here: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju>. There is no qualification given after graduating as it is an academic master's study programme.

According to the SAR p.142, the aim of the programme is to prepare students for independent scientific research in the selected sub-branch of theology or religious studies. According to the information provided in the SAR p.143, the admission requirements of this programme is a Bachelor's degree. It has been elaborated that anyone with a Bachelor's degree with a degree in social sciences or humanities can apply and enter studies without any entrance exams. Those

students of different previous study backgrounds are obliged to take the entrance examination. Those who have studied in any of the social sciences do not have to take the entrance examination. During an onsite visit, experts asked the representatives of the university if it seems reasonable as those students from different backgrounds are likely not to have in-depth knowledge in this specific field of studies. The lecturers stated that it is quite a challenge and not necessarily easy but with extra work and motivation by the students themselves it is possible. In the meeting with the Masters students, two of them outlined that they are coming with a different background - one from history and the other one from social anthropology and for them it was not hard to switch to a slightly different Masters studies as some skills and knowledge background is the same. The programme is implemented in Latvian thus no proof of proficiency of English language is necessary. It has been stated in the SAR p.143, that after successful completion of the studies, students are awarded with Master's degree of Humanities in Religion and Theology. According to the SAR p.143, the study programme is a full-time study programme with 80 CP to be gathered during the study process of 2 years. The title, code, degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.

2.1.3. According to the SAR p.144, the title of the degree to be obtained has been changed to Master's degree in religion and theology of humanities. The changes were made in accordance with the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, which regulate the degree awarded in the study program, those are Cabinet Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the National Academic Education Standard" and Cabinet Regulation No.322 "Regulations on the classification of education in Latvia". According to the SAR p.145, the following changes have been made in the study programme:

1. In the mandatory part, the course "Hermeneutics of the New Testament" was replaced with the course "Hermeneutics of the Scriptures", which is broader in content than the previous one.
2. The course "Eastern Churches: History and Theology", which previously has been offered as an optional course, is now included in the mandatory part, replacing the course "Relevant Topics in St. Augustine's Theology", which is now included in the restrictive elective part.
3. Since the previous accreditation, the study plan includes new courses in the restrictive elective part: "Greek, Roman Mythology and Religion", "Eastern Religious Art and Architecture", "History of Christian Churches in the 20th century", "Koran". Due to changes in legislation, the courses "Civil Protection" and "Environmental Protection" (for those students who have not acquired it at Bachelor's level) have been introduced. A number of courses have been closed as "Lutheran Theology", "Theology of Death", "Theological German I, II, III", "Anthropology of Religion", because they were courses taught by particular visiting lecturers, they overlapped with courses of other study programmes or did not meet the objectives of the study programme. The corrections made to the study programme's parameters within the assessment of the study field are, in experts opinion, justified and experts support them.

2.1.4. According to the information gathered during an onsite visit meeting with the management, the UL is the only university that is providing studies in this field which makes this Master's programme the only programme in the whole country that ensures studies in theology and religion. In the opinion of the expert group, studies of theology and religion provides students with a specific way of thinking and seeing the world as well as provides knowledge of human history and development which can be applied not only in one specific type of a workplace or field but to many diverse ones of students' choice.

According to the SAR p.148, graduates of the FT of the UL are employed in various fields of national economy. Most of them have been employed as spiritual staff in various Christian churches/denominations in Latvia and abroad. A significant number of the graduates are employed in the public sector both in state and local government administrative institutions, in the field of

health care and education.

According to the SAR p.149, the number of students is rather stable in the reported time period of 2015 to 2021. The largest decrease in the number of students was in the academic year 2017/2018 but overall the average number of students per study year is around 35 students in all of the study years.

According to the SAR p.150, there is a large number of dropouts and thus significantly low number of graduates. The statistics show that the numbers are unstable and constantly changing per study year. According to the SAR p.150, the main reason for the discontinuation of the studies during the reporting period was that almost all students work and they lack the motivation to combine studies with work duties. In the year of 2020, there were only 2 graduates with a number of 11 dropout students while in 2021, there were 11 graduates and 8 dropouts.

There is no data provided on the study exchange in the SAR by students, however, during onsite visit, one of the students stated that she is currently on her study exchange in Turkey and she is enjoying it. When asked by other students of the Masters programme why they are not keen to participate in the exchange, they stated that they are employed or have families in Latvia which are their priorities.

2.1.5. N/A

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

All of the indicators of the study programme are in compliance with the existing preconditions of the implementation of the study programme. The study programme "Theology and Religion studies" complies with the study field indicators, conditions and criteria. The goals, objectives, learning outcomes are in line and in compliance. The title, code, degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified. The study programme is implemented in Latvian. The programme is in demand and there is a flow of incoming students every study year. There has been a significant level of dropout rate in the last study years which causes instability. There is also a rather low involvement of students in study mobility. A significant number of the graduates are employed in the public sector both in state and local government administrative institutions, in the field of health care and education. However, there is a rather low number of graduates of the study programme. The corrections made in the study programme's parameters within the assessment of the study field are justified and experts support them.

Strengths:

1. Unique Masters programme that provides studies in the study field.

Weaknesses:

1. Large dropout rates;
2. Low involvement of students in study mobility.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The content of the study programme is topical, by trying to look at religion in a broader cultural and social context, using the principle of interdisciplinarity and by also involving students from other backgrounds in humanities (p.151 SAR).

The courses are designed according to the trends in contemporary theology and religious studies

(such courses as "Current Problems of the Old Testament Theology", "Interreligious Dialogue") - interdisciplinarity, for example, the course "Theology and Practice", analysis of religious ideas in a social and political context, for example, the course "Political Theology", globalization and contextualization of religions, for example, the course "Sociology of Religion" (p.152, SAR). There are a great variety of restricted elective (B) part courses which offer plenty of choices to broaden knowledge both in theology and religious studies (p.152-154, SAR).

A potential challenge for a successful realization of the MSP could be a lack of in-depth religious study courses on the Bachelor's level, which limits the range of scientific study and research aspired by the FT on the Master's level. The same difficulty could be connected with the lack of Philosophy of Religion course on the Bachelor's level. Those challenges would be encountered not only by students coming from different backgrounds, but by all MSP students (except students from Philosophy background).

Otherwise, the principle of gradualness is being observed in the programme. The study courses are interconnected and complementary, corresponding to the objectives of the programme and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes. The courses are designed in such a way that students study both theology and religious studies in the compulsory part, these courses are comprehensive and serve as the basis for deeper acquisition of special (optional) courses, for example, "Sociology of Religion", "Current Problems of the Old Testament Theology", "Interreligious Dialogue", etc. (p. 152, SAR).

Almost every study course requires research papers, developing scientific literacy, analytical skills, reasoning skills, public speaking competences, gradually directing students to the development of the Master's thesis, which is the main - final component of the compulsory part (p. 154, SAR).

When asked about the relevance of competencies offered by the MSP for the needs of industry and labor market, the students, for the most part, referred to the general skills of writing, critical thinking and research acquired in humanities which are helpful in all sorts of jobs, in general (meeting with students).

The Master study programme complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 240, Riga, 13 May 2014 (Minutes No. 28, §18), <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266187-noteikumi-par-valsts-akademiskas-izglitiba-standartu>; (only in Latvian), Total amount of CP in Study programme 80 CP length of implementation 2 years, CP are divided as follows: 46 CP in total compulsory part (the Master's thesis, which is the main final component of the compulsory part counts for 20 CP), 32 CP in total restricted elective part, and 2 CP in total optional part, Environment Protection 1 CP and Civil protection 1 CP (p. 154, SAR). Based on the information provided by HEI, experts find that other requirements specified in the regulations are also met.(Annex\_15\_MSP\_Compliance of the study programmes with the State education standard(1).docx).

2.2.2. The MSP aspires to provide the possibility to acquire deep knowledge, practical skills and competences in the field of theology and religious research, responding to rapidly changing global trends and challenges. An emphasis of the programme is placed on independent studies and the promotion of critical and creative thinking in students, as well as the improvement of research competences. The cooperation with partners in Germany, the Czech Republic, Finland, as well as practical activities are mentioned. (p. 155, SAR)

In order to promote scientific relevance, a reference is made to the competence of lecturers with advanced degrees and participation in scientific projects. Three persons from the staff of the FT are also experts in the Latvian Council of Science. All of them are involved as leading experts in different research projects, thus being able to relate the latest insights in the study field (p. 155-156, SAR). However, as SWOT analysis admits, the number of experts in the Latvian Council of Science is rather small and should be increased in future (p. 22, SAR).

Likewise, the FT teaching staff and students participate in the annual international conference of the

UL, where current research is presented, thus offering an opportunity to discuss research issues directly. There is also a cooperation when students participate in a study carried out by a teacher (p. 88-89, SAR). A weak point, in this regard, is the citability in the SCOPUS database, which is below average in the field (p. 89, SAR).

2.2.3. The MSP includes lectures, practical examples, group tasks, interactive discussions, and development of individual works. From students it requires intensive literature acquisition. Although the programme is academic, the study process also includes elements of practical studies. Practice activities have been implemented in Lutheran, Anglican and Methodist congregations. (p. 100, SAR) The lecturers mostly use methods that encourage active participation, critical thinking and reflection of the students. The e-learning environment is actively used by students and appreciated also as a way of interacting with the teaching staff (p. 156, SAR, interview with the students).

Student-centered learning and teaching principles are followed. The best teaching and testing methods are appropriate for the relevant courses. Feedback and advice is easily received from the teaching staff, as witnessed by students during the visits. In order to improve methods, students' surveys are organized regularly, which include questions about the methodological provision of study courses (p. 158, SAR).

2.2.4. N/A

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. According to the SAR and several examples highlighted within it, the topics of students' final master theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme. The list of all master's theses that were subsequently submitted to experts provides an even greater indication of how well this criterion is met. (For example, "Initiatives by the Roman Catholic Church on Healing the Trauma of the Holocaust in Society: Examples of Lithuania and Latvia", "Interethnic Reconciliation Practices in Latvia in the beginning of the 21st Century: Theological Reflection", "The Concept of Entropy as the Basis for Understanding Structural Sin in J.L.Segundo's Evolutionary Theology", "Interpretations of the Bible in the Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia " p. 159 SAR) There is an established evaluation procedure for these theses, and the rector of the UL awards the best thesis (p. 158-159, SAR; SAR Annex, Master theses\_themes.7z).

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

The overall content of the studies is topical, interconnected, complementary, as well as gradual, where appropriate study methods are being implemented. The content of the study courses corresponds the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes, in order to meet the needs of the industry, labor market and scientific trends. The MSP content complies with national regulations, state education standard. Scientific relevance and artistic creation is promoted by a wide-ranging competence of teachers, following global trends and challenges, and student participation in scientific conferences. Student-centered learning and teaching principles are followed. Students' final master theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme, bringing also novelty to this field of science. A potential challenge is the current transition period, during which the content of the whole study field is being balanced between theology and religious studies.

Strengths:

1. A wide range of courses in the restricted elective (B) part.



Weaknesses:

1. A small number of experts in the Latvian Council of Science among teaching staff and a limited citability in the SCOPUS database can hinder scientific relevance and artistic creation.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The MSP with its courses and lecturers are qualified to provide knowledge, critical thinking and creative thinking in order to promote scientific relevance (p. 155-156, SAR).

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

#### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The study provision, informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision comply with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme. As this study programme shares material and technical provision with other study programmes of the TF, for the general analysis please, see analysis at "1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field". Library provides students in MSP with training in "E-resources in the field" (90 min.), providing better skills for working with the electronic resources of the respective field (SAR 2.3.3.). It has to be noted that since the budget for library resources is allocated in accordance with the number of students in a given faculty, it is limited in the case of the FT, which is smallest in the UL (visit to the Library 14.11.22.) which may have an impact on a high quality study process. The resources provided for the study programme by the UL comply with the conditions of its implementation. IT and Library resources shared with other faculties give students access to a wide range of resources. LUIS, MOODLE and other digital platforms and solutions enable an effective learning process. A better cooperation with the UT on library resources should be developed to achieve an excellent availability of international journals.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. The cost of study programmes at the UL is calculated according to the methodology developed by the UL (SAR 3.3.3). The current tuition fee paid by students does not cover expenses of their participation in the study programme. The state grant is more generous. Data shows that in order to ensure the profitability of the study programme it is necessary to increase the number of students. Currently the FT receives financial support for the development of programmes from the UL Study Quality Improvement Fund, which helps to balance the books (SAR 3.3.3.).

Based on the calculation, for the programme to be profitable and provide students with a quality study process, the number of tuition students in the programme must be at least 40. However, if there were only budget students in the programme, then their number should reach 31 students (SAR 3.3.3.). The summary of the programme revenue shows only 26 students and 7 of them are paying fee which indicates that an extra subsidy is needed for the implementation of the programme. There is no precise target set on increasing the number of students (SAR 3.3.3.).

The fact that the study programme does not have the number of students to ensure profitability of the study programme may make the development of the study programme more difficult. Lack of experience in offering revenue generating lifelong learning courses does leave the FT dependent on the UL Study Quality Improvement Fund.

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

The study provision, informative, material and technical and financial provision comply with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme. A system for funding scientific research is working within the new framework of the UL governance structure in place. It is both robust and flexible enabling FT to cover shortfall of financial resources due to not having enough students to make the study programmes profitable. Through participation in projects FT managed to get additional financial resources for scientific research, which come from other sources that the UL. For overall provision shared by all study programmes in the study field, please see conclusions in "1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field". Library resources are allocated within the limitations set by the UL. On a critical note, the study programme does not have the number of students to ensure its profitability.

Strengths:

1. None.

Weaknesses:

1. Due to the low number of students, the programme is not financially profitable.

## Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The library resources are on a good level, a better cooperation with the UT on library resources should be developed to achieve an excellent availability of international journals. The low number of students indicate a fragility of the structure.

Lack of experience in offering revenue generating lifelong learning courses does leave the FT dependent on the UL Study Quality Improvement Fund.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. The qualification of the teaching staff members complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme. 14 lectures (5 professors, 5 assistant professors, 2 assistants, 1 lecturer and 1 researcher) are involved in the implementation of the MSP. Among them 11 teachers have a PhD (SAR, p 164). 13 of the lectures are elected to the UL (Annex 24, SAR, p. 163-164).

Among them is the programme director, who has a list of 28 publications 2015-2021. He teaches the courses Teol 5086 The sociology of Religion and Teol 5035 Doctrine of Man in Patristic-ascetic Tradition. (Basic information, teaching staff). One of his publications is: Tēraudkalns, Valdis. Protestantu sociāli-politiskie uzskati mūsdienu Latvijas publiskajā telpā / Valdis Tēraudkalns, Deniss Hanovs, Ņikita Andrejevs. Izmantotā literatūra: 130.-137. lpp. // Dzimtes konstruēšana IV Rīga : Avens, LU Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, 2016. 4. sēj., 97.-138. lpp. ISBN 9789934831461., URL: [https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/31672/RFR\\_XVIII.pdf](https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/31672/RFR_XVIII.pdf) ISSN 1407-1908., URL: [https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/45973/Cels\\_N\\_69.pdf](https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/45973/Cels_N_69.pdf) ISSN

1407-7841 (Annex 24, List scientific publications). The programme director is also elected as a correspondent member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, as the first representative of theology and religious studies in the academy.

Another leading scholar, teaching in the MSP, is the Faculty dean (SAR, p 163). She teaches 4 courses, among them are the courses Teol 5167 Hermeneutics in the Scripture and Teol 5097 Emergence of Concepts of Death and Afterlife in the Ancient East. (Basic information, teaching staff). The dean has a list of 15 publications between 2015 and 2021. One of them is: Balode, Dace. Die Bibel auf der Seite der Unterdrückten: Bibelinterpretationen von Frauen auf dem Territorium Lettlands in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts / Dace Balode. Atsauces parindēs. // Ceļš Nr. 66 (2016), S.34-56. , URL: <https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/37385/Cels-66.pdf> ISBN 9789934182044. ISSN 1407-7841. (Annex 24, list scientific publications). The dean is a leading researcher in the project "Transformation of Religion and Theology in the Global Context of Contemporary Latvia I" (2019-2020), as a leading expert in the ESF project "Development of Internationally Competitive Study Programmes Promoting the Development of the Latvian Economy at the University of Latvia" (2019); (SAR, p 83).

The academic staff involved in the implementation master's study programme "Theology and religious studies" (45221) complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Annex\_23\_2\_HEAD\_OF\_STUDY\_FIELD\_DECLARATION\_LHEI\_sect\_55.docx).

In the MSP, there are more than five professors and associated professors with doctoral degrees, and there are three experts in the Latvian Council of Science (p.155, SAR), which complies with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

The teaching staff is proficient in Latvian which is the official language, in accordance with regulations for performing professional duties and office duties (Annex\_23\_3\_Certificate\_knowledge\_official\_language.pdf).

2.4.2. The SAR (p. 166) reports that there have been no significant changes in the composition of the teaching staff during the reporting period. New courses, and new perspectives to existing courses, however, have been added to the program. Among them is the participation of a philosopher of religion in the course Teol 5167 "Hermeneutics of the New Testament" and the course Teol 6003 "Political Theology". The staff members giving these course are well qualified with a number of publications (Annex 24). In general (SAR p. 87-88 and Annex 3) there is a well established system for improving and developing teaching qualities among all staff members. The most decisive aspect of this quality improvement and exchange is to relate research and teaching quality development together. At the moment the TF policy seems to be to recruit new staff members from the UT partner on the one hand and from well qualified PhD students and candidates on the other hand. (SAR 87-88).

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. By analysing the teaching staff's list of scientific publications, the teachers' curriculum vitae, and the list of teachers in the report (p. 163-164, SAR), the expert team determined that academic staff publishes in accordance with the law. 13 out of 14 of academic staff have published in peer-reviewed journals and publications (Annex 24) during the reporting period, and teachers also publish in internationally known journals. It is evident from the list of publications of faculty teachers that there are fewer works published in renowned global databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, i.e. that the dominant works are from national publishers or publishers that are not included in the aforementioned databases. As a result, the works are not so visible to the international public, which should definitely be improved in the future (SAR Annex, List\_scientific\_publications\_teaching\_staff.docx ; SAR Annex, UL FT Teaching staff CV.pdf). Some of the staff members also serve as

pastors in Latvian congregations (SAR p. 136) and fulfil the criterion in this way

2.4.5. The SAR (p. 167) reports good practices for cooperation of the teaching staff. This is a topic, which has been significantly improved since the last assessment report. The meetings are organized as meetings of the teaching staff, coordinated by the Programme Director and the FT PHP. The ambition is both to achieve a better interlinking between the different courses and at the same time organize students' practical classes together with teaching staff representing the religious environment. These different forms of collegiality increase the interdisciplinary quality of the MSP (SAR, p. 167).

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

The teaching staff members involved in the MSP comply with the requirements for the study programme. This quality enables the achievements of the learning outcomes. There have been no changes in the permanent staff of the MSP since the last evaluation. PhD students and candidates have developed interesting new courses and achieved a stronger interdisciplinarity. Most of the teaching staff publish in peer-reviewed journals. Practices of mutual cooperation for quality improvements have been developed with good results.

Strengths:

1. Excellent qualifications of the teaching staff.
2. A strong group of qualified professors participating in good research projects.
3. Increasing interdisciplinary practices.

Weaknesses:

1. Some staff members have few publications in peer-reviewed journals.

### **Assessment of the requirement [7]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The number of professors and associate professors with a doctoral degree is more than double of what is required. 13 out of 14 members of academic staff have published in peer-reviewed editions in the last six years.

### **2.5. Assessment of the Compliance**

#### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Academic Master's study programme "Theology and Religious Studies" (code 45221) complies with the State Academic Education Standard (Annex\_15\_MSP\_Compliance of the study programmes with the State education standard(1).docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The description has been provided in Latvian and English, the language in which the study programme is implemented is Latvian, complying with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Annexes Courses\_MSP(1).docx and studiju\_kursi\_apraksti\_MSP.docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma of the MSP is provided in Annex\_12\_2\_Master\_diploma.docx and it complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued - Cabinet Regulation No. 202 "Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents"

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/256157-kartiba-kada-izsniedz-valsts-atzitus-augstako-izglitiba-apliecinosh-dokumentus>

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The academic staff involved in the implementation master's study programme "Theology and religious studies" (45221) complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Annex\_23\_2\_HEAD\_OF\_STUDY\_FIELD\_DECLARATION\_LHEI\_sect\_55.docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

In the MSP, there are more than five professors and associated professors with doctoral degrees, and there are three experts in the Latvian Council of Science (p.155, SAR), which complies with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The teaching staff is proficient in Latvian which is the official language, in accordance with regulations for performing professional duties and office duties (Annex\_23\_3\_Certificate\_knowledge\_official\_language.pdf).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement, which is provided Annex\_7\_standart\_samples\_study\_contract.zip, complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement Cabinet Regulation No. 70 "Mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement".

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The UL certifies that in the event that the implementation of the master study programme "Theology and religious studies" (now - "Theology", code 45221) of the study field "Religion and theology" is terminated, the UL undertakes to provide students with the opportunity to continue their studies in the master's study programme "Philosophy" (code 45229) of the study field "History and philosophy" (Annex\_5\_Declaration\_continue\_studies.zip).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Refund and Compensation Policy STATEMENT attests that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees paid in the event the master study programme "Theology and religious studies", (code 45221) of the field of study "Religion and theology" is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme (Annex\_6\_Declaration\_refund.docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

### **Assessment of the requirement [8]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The MSP "Theology and Religious Studies", code 45221, complies with the Cabinet Regulation No. 322 (Riga, 13 June 2017) and No. 240, Riga, 13 May 2014 - only in Latvian). Based on the information provided by HEI, experts find that requirements specified in the regulations are met (Annex\_15\_MSP\_Compliance of the study programmes with the State education standard(1).docx ).

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

In general, students and graduates give a very positive assessment of the programme and the possibilities to find relevant jobs as graduates. The meeting with graduates showed the job market for graduates is much wider than in denominations. The expert committee recommends that this societal asset of the program become more visible when the programme is presented in recruitment, projects and in dialogues with stakeholders. The variety of topics for the master thesis is also impressive. This shows that the staff has a competence relevant to many research areas. Different from the DSP, it seems like the MSP has few active relations with stakeholders and that internship programs are not developed. The programme would benefit from balancing the theological and religious study course better, as already addressed in the development plan. The most important aspect of this balance is to give candidates aiming at denominational work and candidates aiming for jobs outside denominations a better and more regulated offer in terms of content of courses. It should also be clearer whether denominations require more practical competence for their candidates offered by the FT.

The number of students is, however, not on a high level, and makes the program more fragile than necessary. There is a need to sort out how the programme gives good competence for a variety of jobs in society outside denominations and need to develop stronger offers for practical competence. Those are reasons to grade the programme good.

The e-learning platform presented during the site visit seems to be on a good level, even though it could need some more modernized technologies. Students expressed positive evaluation of the e-learning logistics. The implementation of distance-learning etc. could be done, also in the languages necessary.

The expert committee assesses the MSP as good.

Strengths:

1. Unique Masters programme that provides studies in the study field.
2. A wide range of courses in the restricted elective (B) part.
3. Excellent qualifications of the teaching staff.
4. A strong group of qualified professors participating in good research projects.
5. Increasing interdisciplinary practices.

Weaknesses:

1. Large dropout rates.
2. Low involvement of students in study mobility.
3. A small number of experts in the Latvian Council of Science among teaching staff and a limited citability in the SCOPUS database can hinder scientific relevance and artistic creation.
4. Due to the low number of students, the programme is not financially profitable.
5. Some staff members have few publications in peer-reviewed journals.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Theology and Religious Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Theology and Religious Studies"**

### **Short-term recommendations**

Within 1 year: The Dean should present to the Council a document, which addresses the financial challenge regarding the student numbers. On the one hand, the present number of students is not profitable. On the other hand, there is a too large drop out number of students. The document needs to present proposals on how to negotiate with UL to increase funding in such a way that the number of students can be reduced without losing financial resources needed.

Within 2 years: To present a plan to the Council on how to stimulate student mobility. Responsible: The Study director

### **Long-term recommendations**

During the assesment period: To give more research time to colleagues, who might be elected members of the Latvian Council of Science. Responsible: The Dean

## **II - "Theology and Religious Studies" ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Theology and Religious Studies" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

2.1.1. The doctoral study programme "Theology and Religious Studies", complies with indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of "Religion and Theology". The length of the implementation of the study programme, which is 3 years, is evaluated as sufficient for acquiring the necessary skills and way of thinking to enter the labor market. A part of this study programme is implemented in 2 languages - Latvian and English, as there is the so-called "foreign module" which allows students to study in a course together with students of University of Tartu having seminars, discussions and interaction with guest lecturers in English.

2.1.2. According to the SAR p.170, the title of the study programme is "Theology and Religious Studies" in the study field of "Religion and Theology" with education classification code 51221 with the last 3 numbers (221) standing for religion and theology according to the classification of Latvian education which can be accessed here: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju>.



One important challenge is that this doctoral study programme is called "Theology and Religious Studies", but the degree to be obtained is called: Doctoral Degree of Science Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in Humanities and the Arts" (p. 172 SAR). Adding to this is a recent letter from the Latvian Academy of Sciences to UL/FT concerning the name and the content of the PhD programme. The Academy claims that the program needs a stronger focus on Philosophy and Ethics (2022\_45-53\_30.11.2022 - 1-3.N-1783 (LZP).edoc) The view of the expert group is that two relevant courses, one in philosophy and one in ethics would improve the quality of the programme. It might also be an added value if the new courses were given in English to expand the cooperation with the TU. The experts also suggest that, in the near future, a meeting between representatives of the Latvian Academy of Sciences and the UL/the FT to discuss/solve the issues might be helpful.

According to the SAR p.170, the aim of the programme is to prepare high-level specialists in religion and theology, providing an opportunity to obtain internationally recognized science-based education in theology and religious research, independently developing and publicly defending the doctoral thesis, which contains the results of original scientific research, provides new knowledge in theology and religious research and is open to other fields.

According to the information provided in the SAR p.171, the admission requirements of this programme is Master's degree in humanities and social sciences (in sociology and anthropology) or equivalent higher education and entrance examination. Those who wish to study in English, are required to have at least B2 level of English as outlined in the SAR p. 172. During an onsite visit, experts asked the representatives of the university if it seems reasonable as those students from different study backgrounds are likely not to have in-depth knowledge in this specific field of studies. Those who have a social science related background, do not have to take the exam. The lecturers stated that it is quite a challenge and not necessarily easy but with extra work and motivation by the students themselves it is possible. The programme is implemented in both Latvian and English according to the SAR p.171-172. During the onsite visit, it was stated by the study programme director that there has been some interest from foreign students to apply but no one has yet been enrolled in the study programme in English. It has been stated in the SAR p.172, that after successful completion of the studies, students are awarded with Doctoral Degree of Science Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in Humanities and the Arts, the study programme is a full-time study programme with 144 CP to be gathered during the study process of 3 years. The title, code, degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified. It seems justified that the programme is offered in English and Latvian as it allows for foreign students to study in Latvia in this specific study programme.

2.1.3. According to the SAR p.174, until 2021, "Theology and Religious Science" doctoral programme had been carried out, which existed in parallel with the new "Theology and Religious Studies" that got licensed in 2021 and is being promoted for accreditation for the first time on this term, so there are no changes to the study parameters of the licensed new doctoral study programme. The old "Theology and Religious Science" is planned to be terminated as soon as the new one is accredited.

2.1.4. According to the SAR p.178, in Latvia only higher education institution offering a Doctoral study programme in the relevant field is the UL. Overall, religion as a cultural and social phenomenon is a part of modern post-secular society, therefore, in response to current events, many universities incorporate the issues of religion into their programmes and study courses. There is still a shortage of qualified staff in theology and religious studies with a doctoral degree in Latvia according to the SAR p.178.

As the new study programme was licensed in 2021, there is limited amount of data on the new study programme. The numbers provided show both the students enrolled in the new and the old

study programmes in the recent years. According to the SAR p.179, the dynamics of the number of students 2016-2021 has been rather stable with a slight decrease in 2018. During the last 3 years the number of students in the programme in all of the study years has remained stable, the students mostly study for the budget grant.

According to the SAR p.179, problems in the study programme are caused by the relatively large number of exmatriculated students. In most of the cases the reason for dropping out is leaving on their own will for personal reasons. In some cases, students have not fulfilled the study contract or in one case actually died.

2.1.5. N/A.

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

All of the indicators of the study programme are in compliance with the existing preconditions of the implementation of the study programme. The study programme "Theology and Religion studies" complies with the study field indicators, conditions and criteria. The study programme is implemented in Latvian. The goals, objectives, learning outcomes are in line and in compliance. The title, code, degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified. The programme is in demand and there is a flow of incoming students every study year. There has been a significant level of dropout rate in the last study years which causes instability while there is hope that the numbers will rise and stabilize with the implementation of the new doctoral study programme. As the programme is newly licensed there is no data on the graduates as no one has graduated it yet. The same applied towards corrections made in the study programme. The programme is new and thus, it is not needed to make additional changes at this point. The study programme is unique in its way where cooperation is provided with Tarty University. Expert group supports this cooperation and sees as a great opportunity for doctoral students to internationalize, use English and meet together with foreign students in specific courses.

Strengths:

1. Unique Doctoral programme that provides studies in the study field.

Weaknesses:

1. No uniformity between the title of the programme and the content of the study programme based on the Latvian Academy of Science provided opinion.
2. Large dropout rates.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The study content is topical in a sense that it follows the current trends in the field, while the study process is mostly focused on the development of the Doctoral thesis. The content of the compulsory study courses is designed to support the student in the development of independent research. There are four modules: 1) the module of original research is the most extensive, which is compulsory; 2) the module of development a researcher's career, 3) the module of international cooperation, and 4) the module of innovation of theological and religious research ideas and methodology (p.184 SAR).

The modules are interconnected and complementary, where the continual research work on doctoral thesis is supplemented with expanding knowledge and skills in a researcher's career, in publishing

and promoting research results, in creating projects, as well as developing experience in university pedagogy. The module of international cooperation is done together with the School of Theology and Religious studies at University of Tartu (p.184 SAR). The students are very satisfied with this cooperation, having quality guest lecturers and meeting with UT doctoral students (interview with students). The module of innovation expands knowledge and develops understanding of the current events of the sub-branches of theology and religious studies.

The process of writing doctoral thesis is divided into stages of the programme, thus creating an opportunity for the doctoral student to report on the work done at the end of each semester, while obtaining feedback from the advisor, as well as from other lecturers and study colleagues (p.184 SAR). The meeting with students affirmed that they feel supported and motivated by the programme. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to judge the effectiveness of the DSP fully and comprehensively, in the situation, when there are so very few graduates (Annex 14). The DSP content is being updated according to the trends in the field, labor market and scientific development. For example, the DSP includes a course on science management, given the growing role of management in project administration. But internships in the creative industry will provide an opportunity for students to link with their industry. (p. 185 SAR)

The DSP complies with the requirements of Law on Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Latvia as well as on Law on Scientific Activity for doctoral study programmes. Total amount of CP in Study programme 144 CP length of implementation 3 years, CP are divided as follows: 94 CP are allocated to the module of original research, in which the Doctoral thesis is developed; 24 CP to the module of international cooperation; 16 CP to the module of development a researcher's career; and 8 CP to the module of innovation of theological and religious research ideas and methodology. (p. 181 SAR) There are all necessary parts in the programme, the mandatory, limited elective and elective part. There are additional courses offered, Environmental Protection and Civil Protection, each 1 CP, if not taken by students before. (p. 184 SAR)

Since the programme is also implemented in English, the foreign students studying permanently in the programme who do not have proof of proficiency in the official language at the A1 level specified by the State Centre for Education of the Ministry of Education must take the course "Latvian Basic Course" in accordance with requirements of paragraph 56 of Law on Higher Education Institutions. (p. 184 SAR) Here, the experts recommend that the level of proficiency should be adjusted to B2, as it's required. Based on the information provided by HEI, experts find that other requirements specified in the regulations are met.

2.2.2. The Doctoral programme has been developed on the basis of the conceptual report adopted in Latvia "About the introduction of a new doctoral model in Latvia" (<https://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40488284&mode=mk&date=2020-06-16> - only in Latvian) which sets the criteria for competitive and innovation-oriented doctoral studies. The content of the courses follows the recommended proportion - the time allotted for scientific research (~70%) and study courses (~30%). The emphasis is placed on the widely used skills, knowledge and competences, such as digital skills, research methodology, pedagogy, management, academic language and scientific communication, crisis situation, conflict, stress management and time planning etc. All lecturers carry out research according to the scientific branch, have international experience in both teaching and research, which allows them to include in the programme insights of the latest research and achievements of the branch. (p.185-186 SAR).

An emphasis of the programme is also placed on independent studies and the promotion of critical and creative thinking in students, as well as the improvement of research competences. The cooperation with partners in Germany, the Czech Republic, Finland, as well as practical activities are mentioned. (p. 155, SAR) The research novelty is clearly encouraged by the FT, yet at the same time, it is difficult to evaluate these developments and findings, especially in this period of very limited awards and achievements, as well as reduced academic activities during Covid 19 (p. 81

SAR, Table 11).

2.2.3 A variety of methods are implemented and adjusted, in order to contribute to the learning outcomes and the aims of the DSP. Practical assignments, seminars, individual, pair and group work, discussions and project development, study tours to industry organizations are widely used. The study process is supported by interactive learning, where the teachers encourage students' active participation, critical thinking and reflection. The e-learning environment is being widely used in the study process and to promote independent studies (p.186-187 SAR).

The courses are mostly delivered in the form of seminars, where the main focus is laid on a reasoned discussion based on systematic acquisition of the literature on topical issues of the relevant sub-branch. Both compulsory and optional study courses can be held in Latvian and English (p.184 SAR) The study process respects the diversity of students' learning needs by choosing pedagogical methods, promoting students' learning motivation, self-reflection and participation in the study process. The study process takes into account students' prior knowledge, previous experience and different ways of learning. The same methods are used in courses taught in Latvian and English languages. (p.188 SAR)

In the implementation of the DSP, there has been a successful cooperation with the UT, creating a joint study module, ensuring an internationally open environment for the FT – attracting foreign doctoral students and teaching staff, implementing international research activities, providing jointly supervised Doctoral theses or doctoral theoretical research, supporting individual study and research mobility. The module of international cooperation is done in the format of joint seminars together with the doctoral studies program of the UT. (p.184-187 SAR).

The student-centered approach is followed during the study process, as lecturers use methods, examination forms and assessment criteria that are appropriate to the study goal and planned learning outcomes. (p.187-188 SAR) Students receive prompt support and feedback from the lecturers, which was confirmed by all students during the visit. Doctoral students, mainly, expressed their satisfaction with the process and methods used by the DSP (interview with students). At the same time, the large drop out rates indicate that many students still lack the skills and discipline necessary for advanced academic work, and the FT needs to find ways to improve skills and competences of academic writing and analysis.

Employers are also involved in the implementation and improvement of the study courses. Within the framework of the study course “Internship in the corresponding branch” students have the opportunity to cooperate with such organizations as the Latvian Bible Society, the Mental Care and Social Work Service of Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University, the Anglican Congregation of the Holy Redeemer in Riga and the Riga Lutheran Parish Centre for Human Growth "Torņakalns" (p. 188, SAR).

2.2.4. The DSP attempts to promote the unity of theory and practice. Students may look for internship opportunities independently and/or in cooperation with the thesis supervisor and the program director. In the second option, internships are selected from the cooperation partners of the FT of the UL, for example, congregations of various denominations and other organizations such as The Latvian Bible Society, Latvian Lutheran Women's Theological Association, diaconal institutions, chaplain service, etc.. These institutions are related to the learning outcomes, as confirmed during the onsite visit with potential employees. It is interesting to note, that there is no discussion of internship opportunities on the level of Bachelor's and Master's programmes, but only on the doctoral study level. The procedure of internship is described in Regulations on Internship of Doctoral study programme “Theology and religious studies” (DSP Religija un teologija-PRAKSES NOLIKUMS-EN.docx). Since the DSP is implemented in Latvian and English, opportunities for foreign students might be limited and not on the same level.

2.2.5. In describing promotion opportunities, the SAR points out how essential is the role of the scientific supervisor, then comes the supervision of the doctoral council of the science field, mobility opportunities, and the allocation of the support funding. Furthermore, the FT has established the Doctoral School "Relevant Problems of Theology and Religious Studies". The aim of the school is to expand and deepen research on various topical fields of theology and religious studies (p. 189 SAR). The FT hopes that drop-out levels (Annex 12) can be reduced by increasing involvement of students in various research projects, thus also providing support for them. 6 doctoral students from the FT of the UL participated in the research and doctoral support projects (p. 190 SAR). It remains to be seen whether these measures really will reduce drop-outs and help to improve the efficiency of the DSP in the coming years.

In the same way, a major problem is that so few of the students can complete their dissertation and defend it. From 2013-2015 there were 5 graduates; from 2016-2021 there were no graduates at all; and this year there was 1. Two main reasons are mentioned for inability to complete the work: the difficulty to combine work and doctoral studies; and the lack of discipline for a regular research project (Annex 14). Those are definitely important reasons which should be addressed, by teaching a proper discipline for academic work already on Bachelor's and Master's level.

The Doctoral thesis process is coordinated by the Doctoral Council of the Faculty of Theology in Philosophy, Ethics and Religion. When the Council of the doctoral branch has decided to advance the developed doctoral thesis for defense, it is submitted to the Academic Department. After that the thesis is examined by the Field Promotion Council, which, in case of a positive decision, determines the approximate date of defense and reviewers, and the work is transferred to the State Commission for Scientific Qualification (SCSQ) (p. 190-191 SAR).

A positive sign is the participation of two FT lecturers in postdoctoral projects: project "Interrelationship of Theology and practice in Sustainable Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue" (2018-2020); Project "Success for Sustainable and Integrated Development of Society in the Context of the Case of the Movement "Revival and Renewal". (2020-2022)

2.2.6. The DSP provides a variety of research directions, from which to choose. During the reporting period, a wide variety of topics of the Doctoral theses have been approved. According to the SAR and several examples highlighted within it, the topics of students' final PhD theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme. (For example, the last two theses defended were: "Synod Principle of Administration in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in 1948-1984" (2015); and "Verbal Inspiration as a Response to a Theological crisis - Implications in Theological Discourse of Latvia" (2022).) The list of all PhD's theses that were subsequently submitted to experts provides an even greater indication of how well this criterion is met. (For example, among the topics approved are: Unity of Divine Essence and Diversity of God's Word in Ibn Araby Theology (2021); Study of the Bible texts by text linguistics (2019); Martin Luther's "De Servo Arbitrio" - a clash of concepts in the polemics of Erasmus and Luther on the issues of human freedom (2017)) There is an established evaluation procedure for these theses, and the rector of the UL awards the best thesis (p. 158-159, SAR; SAR Annex, TF\_promocijas\_darbi\_2013\_2022\_garais (PhD theses themes).docx).

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

The overall content of the studies is topical, interconnected and complementary, where appropriate study methods are being implemented, and the content corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes, as well as meets the needs of the industry, labor market and scientific trends. The DSP content complies with national regulations. Student-centered learning and teaching principles are followed. The research novelty and artistic creation is being encouraged. The unity of theory and practice is promoted. The four modules of original research, development of a researcher's career, international cooperation, and innovation

are constructed to lead students into expanding knowledge and skills, as they focus on writing doctoral thesis. The compatibility between the teaching process and scientific-research work at the FT is evident in the selection of PhD theses. The opportunities and provision of internship offered to students, as well as the organization of work are effective. The tasks of the internship are related to the learning outcomes achievable. The internship complies with the requirements of regulatory enactments. That applies also to foreign student. There are clearly defined promotion opportunities with substantial help from supervisors, yet dropouts are also substantial. The awarding of a degree is based on the achievements and findings of the relevant field of science. The greatest challenge for the DSP is to motivate and support students all the way to reaching graduation.

**Strengths:**

1. The successful cooperation with the UT.
2. Promotion of the unity of theory and practice.
3. Post-doctoral participation.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Students' lack of skills and discipline for advanced academic work.
2. A small number of graduates.
3. The level of proficiency for foreign students should be B2, not A1.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The DSP has been developed on the basis of the conceptual report "About the introduction of a new doctoral model in Latvia" (only in Latvian) which sets the criteria for competitive and innovation-oriented doctoral studies

<https://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40488284&mode=mk&date=2020-06-16> .

**2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme**

**Analysis**

2.3.1. Overall the study base, informative base, material and technical base and financial base of the study programme conform to the specifics of the study programme. As the most material and technical provision this study programme shares with other study programmes of TF, for the general analysis please, see analysis at "1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field". Doctoral students use resources of the UL libraries, databases and information resources subscribed by UL, the following training opportunities are provided for students in DSP: "The introduction into the Scientific Publication Process" (90 min.), "Bibliography and Citation Management Tools" (90 min.), "How to use Web of Science and ScopusDatabases in Studies and Research" (90 min.).

Those doctoral students who are involved in teaching can benefit from training opportunities provided for the academic and research staff: "Bibliography and Citation Management Tools" (90 min.), "How to use the Web of Science and Scopus Databases in Studies and Research" (90 min.), "Entering Publications and Editing the List of Publications in LUIS" (90 min.), "Depositing Research Results in the Repository of e-Resources of the University of Latvia" (90 min.) (SAR 2.3.3.). On site visit DSP students mentioned that their supervisors provided them with required and recently published books, which were not available in the UL libraries. UL library services and consultations

are available in Latvian and English ( for example <https://www.biblioteka.lu.lv/en/services-2/consultations/>). Great proportion of books and informative resources are in English which would make it easy for foreign students to study in the FT. (visit to the library) The anticipated move to new premises in 2023 would result in significantly improved facilities and technical equipment. The merger of resources of the libraries of several humanities and social fields at the UL, and 24/7 access to them, will facilitate a high quality study process (Rector's report 2020 [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/5.\\_DAZADI/LU\\_2020\\_gada\\_paskats.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/5._DAZADI/LU_2020_gada_paskats.pdf).)

Provision of technical resources for the implementation of remote studies proved essential during the last two years. It is planned to improve these resources further, especially in the view of further cooperation with the TU (SAR 3.3.1.). There are opportunities to publish papers in theological magazine "Ceļš" in Latvian and in English ( for example, see [https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/50051/Cels\\_70.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/50051/Cels_70.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y))

2.3.2. Base funding for science provided for the UL by the state is calculated based on the information about the results of scientific activity. For example, the scientific journal "Ceļš" (The Way) is financed and part of expenses related to conference travel are covered from the centralized funding of science (SAR 3.3.2.) The cooperation with the UT has improved the study and science provision for DSP students as the library resources and teaching staff expertise of the UT became available to DSP students of the FT. Positive feedback on using UT resources was noted at the meeting with DSP students (on site visit 15.11.22.).

When internship programme in the relevant industries is implemented it would help put the academic knowledge in practice and will inform their studies and research as well as provide them with practical skills. Some of prospective internship placements, for example St. Saviour's Anglican Church would be available to foreign students who do not speak Latvian. (on site visit 15.11.22.)

The opportunities to use Erasmus+ programme resources (SAR 3.3.2.) were taken up by a number of DSP students (on site visit 15.11.22.). During the visit DSP students shared their positive experience with these as well as challenges for those who had to juggle between studies, several jobs and family responsibilities (meeting with PhD students). This highlighted the fact that a limited amount of grants and scholarships (<https://www.fonds.lv/studentiem/pamatstudijas-no-2-kursa/sadalijums-pec-fakultatem/teologijas-fakultate/karla-ozolina-emila-medna-trasta-fonda-stipendija-2/>, <https://www.fonds.lv/studentiem/doktorantura/sadalijums-pec-fakultatem/teologijas-fakultate/vilman-tikas-latviesu-ev-lut-draudzes-stipendija/>, <https://www.fonds.lv/studentiem/doktorantura/sadalijums-pec-fakultatem/teologijas-fakultate/ziemel-elbas-macitaju-apvienibas-stipendija/>) didn't allowed students to take all opportunities provided and to fully realize their potential.

2.3.3. The funding available to the study programme ensures full implementation of the study process. The funding consists of a state budget grant, which in the academic year 2021/2022 is set at EUR 1,633.53 with a study level ratio of 3 for full-time studies; and a tuition fee for full time studies, which in the academic year 2021/2022 is EUR 2 500 per year which amounts to 41 705 (SAR 3.3.3.) According to the calculation of those implementing the programme, for the programme to be profitable and provide students with a quality study process, the tuition fee should be at least EUR 3 375 and the number of paid students in the programme must be at least 15. (SAR 3.3.3.), which means that both the number of students (currently there are 10 students) and tuition fees of DSP should be raised. Currently the development of the programme is partially financed from the revenues received from the UL Study Quality Improvement Fund.

The calculations made on attracting foreign students who speak only English and subsequent

formation of two study groups show the cost increasing to EUR 4,171 per student per year (SAR 3.3.3.). However, the plans for attracting foreign students are still vague (on site visit 15.11.22). The current tuition fee of 2,500 EUR has been set, taking into account the potential student's ability to pay, and will be reviewed in the future (SAR 3.3.3.).

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

Overall the study base, informative base, material and technical base and financial base of the study programme conform to the specifics of the study programme. The infrastructure resources have been supplied by the UL. A unified system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of provision is functioning well. The information and communication technology solutions (LUIS, MOODLE) developed and used by the UL ensures smooth running. Most of provisions like rooms, technical equipment, information systems, library resources are shared by all SP in the Study Field, and the info and conclusions on resources of Study Field apply to all of SP. The cooperation with the UT has improved the study and science provision for DSP students, as the UT library resources and teaching staff expertise advance their opportunities. This cooperation enables doctoral students to take part in joint seminars which broadens their perspective and debating skills. Access to information resources of UT helps their research. Doctoral students, involved in teaching in other FT study programmes, benefit from exposure to a prospective career in academia. The FT follows procedures established by the UL in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia for attracting qualified teaching staff. The UL offers courses for professional and didactic development of the teaching staff. The balance between academic, research and administrative workload is manageable but not perfect and would benefit from more involvement of the teaching staff in the scientific research. The FT provides necessary support for students, the faculty staff is accessible and students appreciate a personal approach offered by both teaching and administrative staff. Yet there is a high dropout rate at the FT, which is related to the fact that many students have to deal with work and family commitments. There are several scholarships available, but most of those are not fully covering the financial needs of students. Participation in research projects both locally and internationally gives doctoral students both experience and financial support. Current premises and equipment are not very friendly to students with special needs. The established system for determining and redistributing the financial support for the implementation is in place in the UL and functioning well in the FT. A system for funding scientific research is working within the new framework of the UL governance structure in place. It is both robust and flexible enabling the FT to cover shortfall of financial resources due to not having enough students to make the study programmes profitable. Through participation in projects the FT managed to get additional financial resources for scientific research, which come from other sources than the UL, which ensures the implementation of the study programme. The study and science provisions, including resources provided within the framework of cooperation with other scientific institutions and higher education institutions, are prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process.

#### **Strength:**

1. Cooperation with the UT gives an added value to the DSP, students and staff can use UT library and informative and scientific network resources.

#### **Weakness:**

1. Low number of students.
2. Tuition fee is considerably lower than the teaching cost of a student per year.

### **Assessment of the requirement [6]**



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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Informative, technical and library resources of the UL and the UT are good and comply with the implementation of the study programme.

Funding is available for the implementations of the study programme, however, to make it profitable both the number of students and the tuition fee should be raised.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. There are 12 lectures contributing to the DSP. Among them are 7 professors, 1 associate professor, 1 assistant professor and 3 leading researchers. All 12 have doctoral degrees. This means that the numbers meet the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, 55.1., which requires not less than 5 professors and associate professors who have been elected to the academic positions at relevant higher education institutions. 8 of the 12 lecturers have been elected to the University of Latvia and the University of Tartu (SAR, p. 197).

Important leading scholars in the programme are the study programme director, the dean, the professor of practical theology and the professor of church history (all mentioned in the columns for teaching staff with regard to BSP and MSP). The programme director teaches many courses, among them are Teol 7954 Introduction in doctoral study and Teol 7032-34 Designing draft of the dissertation I-III. One of the Tartu based professors teaches the course Teil 7052 Seminar in religious studies (Annex 24, Basic information, teaching staff). The added value of the teaching staff in this programme is the cooperation with UT. 4 of the 12 lecturers participating in the programme have their permanent position at the UT (Basic information, teaching staff). Regarding the critique of the programme formulated in the Letter of the Academy of Latvia about the lack of courses in philosophy and ethics, there are colleagues with doctoral degrees both in the UT and the FT, who have competence to deliver such courses (Annex 24, Basic information, teaching staff). One might also consider adding 1-2 colleagues with competence in philosophy to the programme staff.

The academic staff involved in the implementation doctor's study programme "Theology and religious studies" (code 51221) complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions Annex\_23.2\_sect55\_DSP.pdf.

In the DSP, there are more than five professors and associated professors with doctoral degrees, and there are four experts in the Latvian Council of Science (p.199, SAR), which complies with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Annex\_23.1\_staff\_DSP.pdf).

All the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme have degrees obtained in the field – either Dr. theol. or Dr. phil. (so more than five), and at least three of them are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. (p. 174. SAR) (Annex\_23.1\_staff\_DSP.pdf)

The teaching staff is proficient in Latvian, the official language, in accordance with regulations for performing professional duties and office duties (Annex\_23\_3\_Certificate\_knowledge\_official\_language.pdf).

2.4.2. The SAR (p. 199) reports that there have been no significant changes in the composition of the teaching staff during the reporting period since the programme was licensed in 2021. In general, (SAR p. 87-88 and Annex 3) there is a well established system for improving and developing teaching qualities among all staff members. The most decisive aspect of this quality improvement

and exchange is to relate research and teaching quality development together. At the moment the TF policy seems to be to recruit new staff members from the UT partner on the one hand and from well qualified PhD students and candidates on the other hand. (SAR 87-88).

2.4.3. According to SAR (p.199), the teaching staff involved in the DSP each year produce several scientific publications published on various sites, for example, R. Altnurme has published 21 scientific articles during the reporting period, D. Balode - 12, L. Geikina - 15, V. Tēraudkalns - 36 (Annex 24 has the complete list). A more detailed overview of the publishing activities of the most significant lecturers is presented in this report (1.4.1., 1.4.3 and 1.4.4). The most significant publications are mentioned in this report 2.4.1. (Teaching staff BSP). 4 lecturers involved in the programme are also experts of the Latvian Council of Science in the field of Humanities and art sciences - Philosophy, Ethics and Religion: D. Balode (ORCID 0000-0001-8303-8466) - until 23.04.2023. L. Geikina - until 16.10.2022. V. Tēraudkalns (ORCID 0000-0003-2367-2398) - until 03.09.2023. V. Vēvere - until 03.09.2023. Several members of the DSP staff participate in different national and international research projects. They participate as researchers, project leaders and coordinators (SAR, p. 201)

2.4.4. The academic staff have published in peer-reviewed journals and publications, and teachers also publish in internationally known journals (SAR Annex, List\_scientific\_publications\_teaching\_staff.docx ; SAR Annex, UL FT Teaching staff CV.pdf). 11 out of 12 academic staff have published in peer-reviewed journals and publications, and teachers also publish in internationally known journals. It is evident from the list of publications of faculty teachers that there are fewer works published in renowned global databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, i.e. that the dominant works are from national publishers or publishers that are not included in the aforementioned databases. As a result, the works are not so visible to the international public, which should definitely be improved in the future (SAR Annex, List\_scientific\_publications\_teaching\_staff.docx ; SAR Annex, UL FT Teaching staff CV.pdf).

2.4.5. The lecturers in the programme cooperate regularly to improve methodologies and course content. This cooperation is implemented by the FT leadership and the study director of the DSP. There are also good practices in the programme group of students and scholars regarding involvement in research and publishing activities (SAR p.201).

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

The competence of the academic staff involved in the programme complies with the requirements of the study programme. Leading FT and UT scholars are active in the programme and bring their own research results into the teaching, courses and seminars. This competence enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the programme. There are no specific changes in the teaching staff, the programme was licensed in 2021. It is a good idea to expand the programme with 1-2 courses in philosophy and ethics. This might imply adding 1-2 colleagues at the FT or the UT with explicit competence in philosophy to the programme. A significant number of staff members have published in peer-reviewed journals. There is a need to make the publications more visible in international databases. It has developed good functioning meeting points for exchange of research, teaching methodologies and interdisciplinarity.

Strength:

1. Top quality scholars have leading roles in the programme.
2. Teachers publish their works in peer-reviewed journals and other peer-reviewed publications.
3. Many DSP staff members participate and chair national and international research projects.

Weaknesses:

1. It is necessary to publish more works in journals that are part of renowned global databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, as suggested by the university's strategy.
2. A more explicit competence in philosophy and ethics is so far absent.

## Assessment of the requirement [7]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification of staff and other lectures are on the level of the requirements. 11 out of 12 staff members have published in peer-reviewed journals during the last 6 years.

## 2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The description has been provided in Latvian and English, the languages in which the study programme is implemented, complying with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Courses\_DSP.docx and studiju\_kursi\_apraksti\_DSP(1).docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma of DSP is provided in Annex\_12\_3\_Doctor\_diploma.docx and it complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued Cabinet Regulation No. 202 "Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents"

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/256157-kartiba-kada-izsniedz-valsts-atzitus-augstako-izglitiba-apliecinoss-dokumentus>

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The academic staff involved in the implementation doctor's study programme "Theology and religious studies" (code 51221) complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions  
Annex\_23.2\_sect55\_DSP.pdf.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

In the DSP, there are more than five professors and associated professors with doctoral degrees, and there are four experts in the Latvian Council of Science (p.199, SAR), which complies with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions  
(Annex\_23.1\_staff\_DSP.pdf).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme have degrees obtained in the field – either Dr. theol. or Dr. phil. (so more than five), and at least three of them are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. (p. 174. SAR)  
(Annex\_23.1\_staff\_DSP.pdf)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The teaching staff is proficient in Latvian, the official language, in accordance with regulations for performing professional duties and office duties  
(Annex\_23\_3\_Certificate\_knowledge\_official\_language.pdf).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The teaching staff members who are involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language (Annex UL FT Teaching staff CV.pdf).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement, which is provided in Annex\_7\_standart\_samples\_study\_contract.zip, complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement Cabinet Regulation No. 70 "Mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement".

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is an agreement between UL and TU that, in the event of suspension, UL Doctoral students can apply to TU Doctoral programme "Religion and Theology", and application is possible if there are vacant places. Studying as an external student is also a possibility. The UT module is available only in English. (Annex\_5\_Declaration\_continue\_studies.zip).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Refund and Compensation Policy STATEMENT attests that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees paid in the event the doctoral study programme "Theology and religious studies" (code 51221) of the field of study "Religion and theology" is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the licence of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme (Annex\_6\_Declaration\_refund.docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

**Assessment of the requirement [8]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The DSP "Theology and Religious Studies", code 51221, complies with the with the the Cabinet of Ministers, No. 322, 13.06.2017., <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju>). The degree change takes place in accordance with the amendments to the Law on Scientific Activities, which entered into force on 29.07.2022, the degree of Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in humanities and arts is awarded, in accordance with Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 595 "Rules on groups of Latvian scientific branches and sub-branches" 27.09.2022. Based on the information provided

under "2.5. Assessment of the Compliance", experts find that requirements specified in the regulations are met.

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

The DSP has many excellent aspects: The qualifications of the professors, the cooperation with the UT, the development of internship offers during the study, relations with stakeholders, to mention a few, addressed in the report above. The meeting with some of the graduates from the programme also confirmed the quality and wide competence. The weak side of the DSP is, obviously, the very low number of graduates in the last years and the lack of established research projects which could serve as a foundation for a future development of the programme. It takes, however, time to build a full working doctoral program on an excellent level. Experts are, therefore, convinced, that the FT will address and work hard to eliminate the two critical points during the next full accreditation period. It is a good idea to add 1-2 courses in ethics and philosophy to expand the general competence of the candidates.

#### **Strengths:**

1. Unique Doctoral programme that provides studies in the study field.
2. The successful cooperation with the UT.
3. Promotion of the unity of theory and practice.
4. Post-doctoral participation.
5. Cooperation with the UT gives an added value to the DSP, students and staff can use UT library and informative and scientific network resources.
6. Top quality scholars have leading roles in the programme.
7. Teachers publish their works in peer-reviewed journals and other peer-reviewed publications.
8. Many DSP staff members participate and chair national and international research projects.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. No uniformity between the title of the programme and the content of the study programme based on the Latvian Academy of Science provided opinion.
2. Large dropout rates.
3. Students' lack of skills and discipline for advanced academic work.
4. A small number of graduates.
5. The level of proficiency for foreign students should be B2, not A1.
6. Low number of students.
7. Tuition fee is considerably lower than the teaching cost of a student per year.
8. It is necessary to publish more works in journals that are part of renowned global databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, as suggested by the university's strategy.
9. A more explicit competence in philosophy and ethics is so far absent.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Theology and Religious Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Theology and Religious Studies"**

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

Within 2 years: : The programme director should present a concrete plan for the Council on measures relevant to increase the number of graduates from the program.

Within 2 years: Planning and establishing a course in Philosophy and a course in Ethics.

Within 2 years: Set up a small group of scholars (and one representative of the UL) with a specific mandate to enhance and improve the scholarly and financial conditions for doctoral students, who are behind schedule and have the academic quality to submit their theses.

Within 2 years: The proficiency for foreign language students, studying in the DSP, should be adjusted from A1 to B2.

### Long-term recommendations

Within 3 years: To continue efforts to initiate a strong international research project by building on the competence of all Baltic theological high level institutions, using the significant international awareness of Baltic freedom and democracy. The building up of this project should gain from cooperation with a number of other Baltic universities, making the DSP more attractive to foreign students.

Negotiate with stakeholders and the UL to find a stronger economic fundament for students in the programme.

Within 3 years, the management should make a decision on earmarked funding of science, which will allow the faculty to annually provide financial resources to teachers for the publication of scientific works (especially in Web of Science and Scopus databases - Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) author's, editorial, and professional books, project management, mobility, and popularisation of science

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

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

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

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:	Fully compliant		The UL has managed to establish an effective, continuous improvement type of internal quality assurance system that fulfills all its functions towards students and their satisfaction according to the quality assurance policy <a href="https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_politika_majas_lapai_ENG.pdf">https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_politika_majas_lapai_ENG.pdf</a> , surveys used as monitoring mechanism on regular basis.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)		Partially compliant	Since its last accreditation, the UL has been committed to achieving sustainability and developing the quality and quantity of scientific and professional research. However, its recognition in international frameworks, in experts opinion, is satisfactory but with a room for future improvement, as the recommendations in this report demonstrate (see 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field).
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.		Partially compliant	The overall cooperation with various Latvian and foreign organizations is satisfactory. The cooperation with the TU has been fruitful and promising. While having the majority of courses on subjects of Christian theology rather than Religious studies, the FT has not established strong cooperation with church institutions in Latvia. But there is cooperation with practicing communities and their representatives in the field of practical theology. Cooperation with public sector players requiring expertise in religious issues is good but somewhat sporadic.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.	Fully compliant		The higher education institution has implemented activities based on previously conducted evaluations, which is supported by examples of results based on recommendations from earlier evaluations (SAR Annex, Review_implementation_recommendations.docx, SAR Annex, 2022.11.10_Additional_information_Religion_Theology (Before visit).docx; p. 104-107, SAR).

### 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	Theology and Religious Studies (43221)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
2	Theology and Religious Studies (45221)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
3	Theology and Religious Studies (51221)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

None.