

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Riga Technical University

Study field: Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes

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

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

The study field "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" and its three study programmes align with one of Riga Technical University (hereinafter RTU) strategic specialisation areas and key scientific priorities at RTU Liepāja Academy (hereinafter RTU LA). These programmes address societal and national economic needs, being developed with reference to national and regional strategic documents and the latest research in Humanities. Weaknesses and risks related to this study field are incorporated into RTU's strategic planning. The current management structure of the study field facilitates effective internal communication across different decision-making levels, aimed at advancing the study field. However, a standardised communication strategy within the university has not yet been fully implemented since the affiliation with RTU. The study field and the three programmes are supported by other RTU LA units. Student admissions are managed through a well-established system. Recognition of professional experience, particularly previous formal and non-formal education, could be enhanced to improve access to higher education in the Liepāja region.

The quality management system at RTU LA is currently in transition, with efforts to integrate the RTU system underway. While the existing procedures support academic operations such as admissions, teaching evaluation, and feedback collection, there are notable gaps in the effective use of stakeholder feedback, particularly from students. Despite having mechanisms in place for collecting student input, concerns were raised regarding the anonymity and responsiveness to critical feedback, which has undermined trust in the process. Moreover, while faculty development is encouraged, discrepancies in staff qualifications and language proficiency raise concerns about transparency. The QMS supports programme development and review, yet there is limited evidence of stakeholder engagement in these processes, suggesting room for improvement.

The study field "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" is financially sustainable and students of all programmes are provided with necessary support services, infrastructure and resources necessary for a high quality study process. However, the assessment was conducted during the ongoing consolidation with Riga Technical University. Although existing agreements guarantee a certain level of funding, the potential of investments into further development remains unclear.

The research carried out by the teaching staff aligns with the development goals of RTU LA and is highly relevant to the study field. Research findings are incorporated into the curricula across all programmes. The research output reflects the expertise of the researchers, providing students with insights into the latest advancements in Language, Literature, and Culture. RTU LA has effectively established mechanisms to engage teaching staff in high-quality research, which function well. Students have the opportunity to participate in research activities alongside their professors and supervisors. Additionally, the study field incorporates innovative approaches, particularly in the area of language technology solutions.

RTU LA has demonstrated a commendable commitment to fostering collaboration and internationalisation within its academic programmes, particularly through strategic partnerships with institutions and organisations across Latvia and beyond. This collaborative approach, while effective in some areas such as the PhD programme, has not fully translated into broader programmatic improvements or increased international visibility. While RTU LA has established numerous partnerships and international collaborations aimed at enhancing its BA, MA, and PhD programmes, there remain significant gaps in achieving the stated goals. Efforts to increase international mobility for students and staff have been hindered by limited participation, a lack of visiting professors, and insufficient international promotional materials. Although the institution has a solid framework in place and some success stories, particularly in the PhD programme, there is still much room for

improvement. Expanding strategic partnerships and increasing international engagement are crucial steps forward for the institution's global competitiveness.

The recommendations provided during the previous assessment procedures of RTU LA study field and respective programmes have largely been addressed with several significant improvements, particularly in programme structure. However, some recommendations remain only partially implemented, such as further extending the range of elective courses, improving interdisciplinary aspects in the doctoral programme and improving course descriptions. Library resource improvements and technical infrastructure has shown progress, but certain long-term recommendations, such as further clarification of course modules and a comparison with other institutions' programmes, still require more attention.

Both the Bachelor's and Master's programmes are well-structured, interconnected, and up-to-date. They adhere to the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other relevant regulations. Both programmes cover all mandatory components and fully comply with the State Standard for Academic Education. The alignment of study courses with the intended learning outcomes is appropriate, although the distribution of ECTS credits in both programmes is somewhat imbalanced. The course content is designed with the requirements of the labour market in mind. The study methods follow student-centred learning and teaching principles. Although there are opportunities for students to personalise their studies, these opportunities are limited. The topics of final theses are relevant to the study field and align with the study programmes, though additional topics more closely connected to labour market needs would be beneficial.

The joint doctoral study programme implemented at RTU LA is highly relevant for the regional and national development of scientific and research excellence in the field. The transition to the ECTS framework aligns the programme with international standards, thereby enhancing its credibility and facilitating better student mobility across Europe. Furthermore, the tripartite agreement involving Daugavpils University, RTU LA, and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences represents a strategic initiative to sustain and advance the doctoral programme. This collaboration is pivotal for pooling resources, sharing expertise, and enhancing research capabilities, which ultimately benefits students by offering them diverse perspectives and opportunities. The programme's alignment with the European Qualifications Framework and its emphasis on interdisciplinary study highlight its adaptability and responsiveness to the evolving academic and professional landscape. By integrating various sub-fields, the programme equips PhD students with a broad set of skills and a comprehensive understanding of language and literature, essential for navigating and contributing to the global academic community. Overall, these developments reflect a proactive and strategic approach to doctoral education, aimed at ensuring the programme's sustainability, quality, and international competitiveness. The JDPS is on a par with similar domestic and foreign programmes. Its interdisciplinary character and close relations with local partners help to ensure that graduates have good employment opportunities. The consideration of regional needs and the development of local research niches provide a future-proof framework for the further development of the JDSP.

## **I - Assessment of the Study Field**

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#### **1.1 Management of the Study Field**

##### **Analysis**

1.1.1. The overall goal of the study field "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" is clearly formulated and attainable. The study field is implemented by Riga Technical University (hereinafter RTU) in its structural unit - RTU Liepāja Academy (hereinafter RTU LA). According to SAR p. 17, the study field aims to enable its students to gain high-quality academic education in the areas of humanities, language and culture studies, including interdisciplinary study

programmes, making it possible to prepare for independent, creative, interdisciplinary research and professional activities. The achievement of this goal is supported by the three interlinked study programmes and their respective goals ensuring students the opportunity to acquire a high-quality academic education in the study field and, in addition, a seamless continuation of studies from the Bachelor's programme into the Master's and doctoral levels.

The study field and the three study programmes meet the strategic specialisation area of RTU „Humanities and Arts“, as stated in SAR on p. 17 and in the RTU strategy for 2023-2027 (p. 10). The RTU LA strategy for 2024-2027 includes the priority scientific field „Language, culture and new media art within the context of regional, ecological and socio-economic sustainability“ (p. 9). This is very important for the future development of the study field due to the university's technological profile. Furthermore, the goal is related to RTU's mission: „we are building a competitive, educated, innovative and creative future, the vision – an internationally competitive, dynamic and modern university of science and technology“ (SAR p. 4). The study field can benefit from the recent affiliation of the Liepāja University to the RTU, as the future development of language and cultural studies is closely linked to interdisciplinary research, digital humanities, artificial intelligence and other innovative approaches.

The study field corresponds to at least two strategic tasks outlined in the RTU Liepāja Academy strategy for 2024-2027: Optimise, improve and modernise the study programme offer, preserving the strengths of the existing programmes, based on labour market requirements and the direction of higher education development (p. 13); Renewal and development of the academic staff necessary for research and fields of studies at the RTU LA, ensuring cooperation between universities and research centres in Latvia and abroad, promoting participation of researchers in international cooperation programmes and scientific organisations, as well as purposefully attracting PhD students for research and study process.

The three study programmes respond to the needs and development trends of society and the national economy, as they are developed taking into account the strategic documents at national level such as the National Development Plan 2021-2027 (SAR p. 6) and the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia (Latvia 2023) (SAR p. 93). The objectives of the “European Language and Culture Studies” programme are aligned with both the Kurzeme Region's planning documents for sustainable development and the City of Liepāja's Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, and are implemented in cooperation with stakeholders from Latvia and beyond. In addition, the development of the programme is also linked to Liepāja's status as European Capital of Culture 2027 and is in line with the aims and objectives of the programme (SAR p. 89).

During the on-site meeting with the employers, the experts were convinced that graduates of the study field are in high demand on the Latvian labour market, especially in the Liepāja region, as there is a shortage of language and cultural specialists.

According to SAR p. 19, the study programmes included in the field do not overlap with the degree programmes offered by other Latvian universities and consistently cover the various facets of the programmes that are unique to this field of study.

1.1.2. The SAR contains a comprehensive SWOT analysis (SAR pp. 20-24), which identifies the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the study field. The SWOT analysis focuses on two central aspects: 1. The study process. 2. Research, creative and popular science activities. The analysis covers all three study programmes and considers key aspects of the study field including the integration of Liepāja University into Rīga Technical University, the consolidation of study programmes, the impact of research, international aspects, resources, material and technical assets, the public image of the humanities, etc. It identifies the main internal and external threats to the study field. During the on-site discussions, the expert group was able to see for itself that the RTU LA administration is aware of the main threats to the study field. In order to prevent negative factors, a plan with measures to remedy the weaknesses is presented in SAR p. 24. In addition, a

development plan for the study field has been elaborated (Annex 2.1.A). The plan includes four main tasks related to the optimisation of the Bachelor's study programmes, the development of the Master's programme, the development of the joint doctoral study programme and the preparation of the programmes for accreditation. All four tasks have been implemented, considering the results presented in the SAR and the Annex 2.1.A. One of the plan tasks was to integrate the previous "Baltic Languages Philology, Culture, and Communication" bachelor study programme into the "European Languages and Culture Studies" programme. This decision is considered as a very timely and important step to stabilise the student numbers and to provide them with better opportunities at the international level.

According to SAR p. 24, the plan for the next 6 years after integration into the RTU ecosystem will be reviewed and further developed by the end of 2024, in line with RTU's strategic specialisation, goals and resources. The identified weaknesses and threats are taken into account in the newly adopted RTU LA strategy for 2024–2027 (p. 6) with concrete tasks and performance indicators to be achieved by 2027.

1.1.3. The management structure of the study field and the corresponding study programmes follows the organisational structure of RTU LA and is typically structured from bottom to top according to Annex II.1.4. A. The central unit responsible for the administration of the study field and the corresponding study programmes is the Centre for Humanities and Arts. The unit takes care of the study process and scientific activities of the study field, e.g. reports on research activities and future plans, plans and reports on sabbaticals, publications and conference plans (SAR p. 25). The Head of the Centre, Head of study field and Study programme directors were actively involved in the implementation of the development plan of the study field (2013–2024). Decisions at a higher level, e.g. adjustments to study programmes, approval of licencing and accreditation documents, annual study plans, self-assessment reports of study programmes, topics for theses are made by the Council of the study field "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" of RTU LA. The Council is a collegial management body which organises and performs the development and monitoring of the implementation of study programmes. The functions of the Council are crucial to support the development of the study field, e.g. to organise and monitor the development of study programmes in the study field; to coordinate and promote interdisciplinarity and cooperation with employers in the development of study programmes; to promote research-based studies; to supervise the implementation of study programmes in the study field etc. The implementation of the joint doctoral study programme (hereinafter JDSP) is separately managed by the JDSP Council composed of members from RTU LA, Daugavpils University and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences. The current structure enables efficient internal communication between the decision-making bodies at the various levels and is geared towards the development of the study field. However, there is a lack of a uniform communication strategy within the university (SWOT analysis, SAR p. 21). The expert group is aware it will take time to establish well-calibrated internal communication and management procedures between the Liepaja Academy administration and the RTU central administration, yet this is crucial for the successful development of this study field.

The study field and the delivery of the three study programmes are supported by other units of RTU LA: Centre of Pedagogy and Social Work, Centre of Science and Engineering, Centre of Management and Social Sciences, Study Centre, Library, Information Technology Centre, International Relations Department, Public Relations Department (SAR p. 25).

1.1.4. When admitting students, RTU LA follows an approach typical of Latvian universities. According to SAR p. 26, the RTU LA admission rules are approved by the Senate for each academic year and published on the RTU website. The rules cover all important aspects for applicants such as general requirements, application procedure, selection criteria, etc. There is an RTU Admissions Committee that deals with possible admission issues that are not related to national requirements.

RTU LA admits students to the Bachelor study programmes via the national e-service Unified Admission. Enrolment in the Master's programme is subject to RTU's internal systems. Graduates of RTU study programmes may apply for the Master's programme electronically in the ORTUS portal or electronically in RTU's public application system or arrive in person under the terms set by the RTU Admissions Committee (Admission Regulations for Academic and Professional Graduate Study Programs in the Academic Year 2024/2025). There are separate admission requirements for doctoral programmes. Admission to doctoral study programmes takes place by competition for announced doctoral vacancies, which are published on the RTU website, in the "Doctorate" section. Before submitting the application documents, the doctoral candidate must agree with the director of the doctoral study programme about the possible thesis supervisor, employment at RTU and obtain the consent of the possible thesis supervisor and consultant (if applicable). The enrolment of foreign students is organised by the RTU International Cooperation Department (ICD) and the RTU Admissions Committee.

Recognition of students' previous education and professional experience is based on two internal regulations: These mechanisms cover the recognition of both formally acquired study courses and knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education or through work experience. Information for potential applicants can be found on the RTU website at <https://www.rtu.lv/en/university/documents?highlight=recognition>

According to SAR p. 26, in the reporting period there were no cases of recognition of competences acquired outside formal education or in professional experience and of study outcomes achieved in previous education within the study programmes corresponding to the study field. The reason for this could be a lack of information about the recognition procedures and a complicated procedure itself, especially the recognition of competences acquired outside formal education. The study field could benefit from the validation of non-formal and informal learning, as it is seen as an alternative access route to higher education.

The assessment of students' performance and learning outcomes is based on the internal regulations for the assessment of learning outcomes. A widely used ten-point scale is used for the assessment of examinations and study projects, where a successful assessment ranges from 4 (almost satisfactory) to 10 (with distinction) and an unsuccessful assessment from 1 (very, very weak) to 3 (weak). Scores of the final assessments of the study courses are entered into the ORTUS portal by the end of the semester or usually within five working days of taking the final examination. This is considered good practice as students and study programmes administrators are informed in a timely manner.

1.1.5. The analysis of the SAR, course descriptions and internal procedures revealed that RTU LA has developed clearly defined methods, principles and procedures for assessing achievements of students. Each course is planned with clear aims, tasks, expected outcomes (knowledge, skills, competences), course plan, content description, student independent work description and assessment methods. Courses are evaluated on a scale of 10 points. Different assessment methods are used depending on the type of course and the requirements set for it. Classical methods such as final examinations or tests, which are used in the final assessment of student performance, are supplemented by intermediate student assessments, e.g. the writing and presentation of essays, oral presentations, text analyses, discussions, problem solving, the defence of research projects, practical tasks, etc. Summative assessment is complemented by the use of formative assessment (SAR p. 27) to contribute to a student-centred approach and to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses. Formative assessment takes place not only at the level of relationships between lecturers and students, but also in relationships between students and groups of students. It is at the discretion of the teaching staff to choose assessment methods that are consistent with the aims of the programmes and the specific courses. Examinations and assessments may use different forms of testing, such as oral, written, combined or electronical (SAR p. 122). The structured approach to

assessment ensures that the assessment of student performance is consistent with the aims of the programmes of study and the needs of the students.

Continuous cumulative assessment (intermediate examinations) contributes to the creation and provision of feedback. The final grade is calculated as a weighted average of different assignments, e.g. regular attendance of classes and active work in seminars, execution of independent tasks, final exam. Students may take the final exam only if they have passed all intermediate exams. According to RTU Regulations of the Assessment of Learning Outcomes (approved at the Meeting of RTU Senate on 29 May 2017, Minutes No 610), counselling is available before the exam to help students understand the exam requirements. Post-exam consultations are also available to provide students with personalised feedback on their final assessment. The student has the right to receive an explanation from academic staff regarding the mark achieved in the examination. The assessment procedures for evaluating student performance are publicly available to ensure transparency and fairness. According to SAR p. 27, course descriptions with requirements are also published in the Moodle e-learning platform and in the personal profiles in the LAIS database. It is not clear from the course descriptions how the Bachelor's and Master's theses are assessed. According to SAR p. 123, professionals are involved in the Master's defence procedures as supervisors and reviewers. It is not stated whether it follows the multilateral approach (weighted average) of the assessment by the supervisor, the assessment by the reviewer and/or the assessment by the defence committee.

1.1.6. As stated in SAR p. 28, until 30 June 2024, RTU LA used the joint computerised plagiarism control system of the University of Latvia to check students' theses and thus successfully combat plagiarism. Following its affiliation with RTU, RTU LA is now switching to the RTU plagiarism control tool CAPS. The statistics on plagiarism cases listed in the SAR p. 29 and the information gathered during the on-site interviews with the management of the study programmes indicate that plagiarism cases are effectively avoided. Staff are aware of the threat to academic integrity posed by the use of AI-generated texts and are able to prevent it. Important regulations on academic integrity that promote the development of the university's internal culture are in place, e.g. Code of Ethics of RTU Students, Academic Personnel and Staff, RTU Code of Academic Integrity, Code for Academic Integrity at Liepāja University (superseded).

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

The study field "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" and the three study programmes correspond to one of RTU's strategic areas of specialisation and one of the priority scientific fields of the RTU LA. The study programmes meet the needs and development trends of society and the national economy, as they are developed taking into account the strategic documents at national and regional level and latest research in Humanities. The SWOT analysis covers all three study programmes and takes into account important aspects of the study area, including the integration of Liepāja University into RTU. A development plan for the study field has been prepared and successfully implemented, with future perspectives to be reviewed and further developed after the affiliation with RTU. The identified weaknesses and threats to the study area are taken into account in the institution's strategic documents.

The current study field management structure enables efficient internal communication between the decision-making bodies at the various levels and is geared towards the development of the study field. However, there is a lack of a standardised communication strategy within the university following the affiliation with RTU. The study field and the implementation of the three study programmes are supported by other units of RTU LA.

Student admissions follow a well-developed system and process. Recognition of professional experience, especially previous formal and non-formal education, could be further developed to

improve access to higher education in the Liepāja region.

RTU LA has clearly defined methods, principles and procedures for the assessment of student performance. Summative and formative assessments are used to promote a student-centred approach. The assessment system is well structured and consistent with the aims of the programmes and the needs of the students. Nevertheless, the description of the procedures for the defence of Bachelor's and Master's theses could be more detailed. RTU LA effectively combats plagiarism with computerised plagiarism detection systems. Students are well informed about plagiarism prevention.

Strengths:

- 1) The three study programmes are especially relevant for the Liepāja region, but not limited to. Serving regional needs and the cooperation with regional stakeholders is proof the programmes are in demand.
- 2) The study programmes are linked to each other and conform to the study field. This enables students to continue their studies in the Liepāja region and pursue an academic career by joining the JDSP.
- 3) The decision to integrate the previous "Baltic Languages Philology, Culture, and Communication" bachelor study programme into the "European Languages and Culture Studies" programme is a very timely and important step to stabilise the student number and to provide them with better opportunities at the international level.
- 4) The development of the study field is reflected in the strategic documents of both RTU and RTU LA and is linked to the institution's strategic areas of specialisation. All three programmes have the potential to benefit from affiliation with RTU as they can grow in size, resources and reputation.

Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a lack of a unified communication strategy and well-coordinated internal communication and management procedures between the RTU LA administration and the RTU central administration, as this is crucial for the successful development of this study field.
- 2) The description of the procedures for the defence of Bachelor's and Master's theses is not detailed enough.
- 3) The validation of informal and non-formal achievements and the recognition of competences is not sufficiently promoted to provide students with an alternative pathway to higher education.

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

### **Analysis**

1.2.1. The quality management system (QMS) is currently in a transitional phase, as efforts are being made to fully integrate the principles of the RTU system. Meanwhile, many existing practices remain in place. As a result, a complete evaluation of the success of this transition can only be conducted once the full integration within RTU has been achieved. Nevertheless, RTU relies on planning and development documents, along with its internal quality management system, to achieve its academic goals. The RTU QMS includes databases containing internal regulatory documents and procedures. The QMS outlines processes that govern various aspects of the study experience, including admissions, academic progress, internships, ERASMUS+ exchange programmes, and final or state exams. Additionally, as claimed by the institution it contains procedures for evaluating teaching staff, conducting student satisfaction surveys, and gathering feedback from graduates and employers. It also covers procedures that support the academic environment, such as personnel management, financial management, IT, library and resource management, document handling, project management, communication, and public information, as well as scientific research processes. To maintain the quality of studies, according to provided

documentation, regular discussions with students are held (SAR. p. 29). Their feedback on the study process and study environment is collected through semester surveys. The Dean of the Faculty (until 29.02.2024) or the Head of Centre (from 01.03.2024) (SAR p. 29) meets with students once per semester, while Programme Directors hold regular formal and informal meetings with various student groups to address suggestions promptly and ensure study quality. However, given the information obtained from all the involved stakeholders, there are still issues regarding integration of student feedback and making necessary changes to address issues raised. The active involvement of students is encouraged through one-time scholarships for achievements in research or creativity. Scholarships are also awarded as a social and financial support mechanism for students in need, based on individual requests reviewed by the Centre. If students express dissatisfaction with a staff member's work, the Programme Director discusses the issue with the staff member in question. If the issue persists after repeated warnings, a different instructor will be assigned to the course or module in the following academic year. Instructors in the study field enhance their qualifications by participating in research and creative projects, as well as attending career development courses offered by the University, such as English language and presentation skills workshops. It appears that the current QMS does not fully encompass certain aspects of teaching staff qualifications. For example, while some staff members indicate in their CVs that their English language proficiency is at the C2 level, observations during on-site visits suggest otherwise, as both-way translation was required during meetings. This observation is not a critique of English language skills per se, but rather raises concerns about the accuracy and transparency of the documentation provided. Additionally, this raises questions about the quality of research, particularly in regard to faculty members for whom international peer-reviewed publications are a requirement. During meetings, it was noted that there is a general consensus that research, especially in fields such as linguistics and areas related to the Latvian language, should primarily be conducted in Latvian. While the autonomy of researchers and institutions is fully respected, it may be beneficial to reconsider the current research strategy. A more focused effort towards the internationalisation of research could enhance the visibility of findings within the global scientific community and facilitate the validation of new research conducted in languages other than Latvian. The quality of the joint doctoral programme is evaluated during teaching staff meetings within the relevant fields of study, as well as during Faculty Council meetings (until 29.02.2024) at each higher education institution. Discussions between programme heads from RTU and from other both institutions also play a role in this evaluation. Results from student surveys are shared with programme Heads and/or Deans or Heads of Centres at partner universities to implement necessary improvements. The strategic goals and procedures of the programmes are supposedly addressed and resolved within joint programme councils. Once approved by the RTU LA Council, the RTU Senate finalises the changes. Any amendments to the structure of study programmes are confirmed by the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs. Technical support for the study field is provided through the study programme record-keeping system, along with assistance from the RTU IT department. This collaborative approach in implementing study programmes within the field is seen as effective and conducive to its growth.

1.2.2. As indicated by SAR (SAR p. 30) the system and procedures for the development and review of study programmes at RTU are organised and overseen by the Council of Field of Study, established in 2019. These councils are composed of key stakeholders, including heads of corresponding fields and/or centres, programme directors, academic staff, students, and employer representatives. Their main responsibility is to supervise the implementation of study programmes and regularly review programmes. However, during the on-site visit, there was no evidence obtained from invited stakeholders to suggest that such meetings had taken place. Even if these meetings did occur, it appears that not all invited stakeholders were informed, and the outcomes of these reviews seem to have no significant impact on the overall operation of the study programmes or on day-to-

day teaching activities. Therefore, there is a discrepancy between the claimed impact of the review processes outlined in the provided documentation and the observed reality. Student feedback is gathered through a general satisfaction survey at the beginning of each second semester, while employer satisfaction is gauged via the evaluation of student internships and final/national examination commissions. Additionally, graduate feedback is collected annually through electronic surveys.

The QMS at RTU supports the development, licensing, and accreditation of study programmes with specific procedures for course creation, plan approvals, and change management. The QMS also regulates various aspects of the study process, including admissions, progress monitoring, internships, and international exchange opportunities like ERASMUS+. Regular assessment of teaching staff and programme effectiveness is also incorporated into the system.

A significant example of the programme development process is the creation of a joint doctoral programme "Language and Literature Studies". This initiative, developed in collaboration with Daugavpils University and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, aimed to reduce fragmentation and improve resource sharing between institutions. The creation of this programme followed a structured process involving programme content development, approval by institutional senates, and eventual submission for licensing and accreditation. Furthermore, during the reporting period, two bachelor programmes were consolidated into one, following a detailed procedure involving the field of study council and a comprehensive self-assessment process. This consolidation and the development of new programmes are aligned with institutional and national regulations, ensuring that programme creation and review remain systematic, inclusive of stakeholder feedback, and adaptable to evolving academic and industry requirements.

1.2.3. The RTU states (SAR p.32) that the mechanism for submitting student complaints and suggestions is in place and aligns with the criteria for effectiveness, promoting improvements, informing students, and providing feedback. Currently the mechanism is as follows - at the start of each academic year, students are briefed by the Dean or Head of the Centre, as well as programme heads, about the study programme's structure, goals, and the rights outlined in the RTU Internal Rules of Conduct. These rules explicitly grant students the right to submit proposals and suggestions on various issues, such as academic activities and staff performance. This ensures that students are made aware of their ability to provide feedback, satisfying the requirement for student awareness. The SAR (SAR p. 32) highlights that the RTU administration is responsible for considering student proposals, suggestions, and critical remarks, indicating that the system is structured to encourage improvements. The opportunity for students to submit anonymous complaints or proposals through the "ORTUS" portal directly to the Rector provides a secure and accessible platform for feedback. This mechanism's anonymity feature likely increases participation and helps ensure transparency. Responses to student submissions are given within a designated timeframe which demonstrate that students receive feedback and that their input leads to programmatic changes, fulfilling the criteria for feedback and improvement promotion, however there was no indication that this opportunity has been taken by the students.

However, contrary to statements in SAR there have been instances of misconduct in the review process of student feedback provided at the end of study courses - semester surveys. For example, some students who provided critical feedback on the courses were approached by the teaching staff involved and confronted about their comments, raising concerns about the anonymity and integrity of the feedback process. Additionally, in certain cases within the study field, issues, concerns or proposals raised by students, whether through formal or informal channels, were not adequately addressed. During the on-site visit, the institution appeared to struggle to provide concrete examples of changes implemented in response to some constructive and critical student feedback

that indicates continuous and ongoing effort to improve the study process. However, it was noted that some individual teaching staff members are proactive in collecting feedback and actively seek additional ways to make meaningful improvements. These efforts, though commendable and exemplary, are largely left to the discretion of individual staff members. As a result, there is a lack of consistent evidence of continuous improvement based on student feedback across the board. Given these findings, it is evident that there is room for improvement in the overall procedures of RTU to ensure a more systematic and transparent approach to handling student feedback and implementing improvements. Particularly concerning is breach of trust in the feedback collection process, as instances where students were confronted by staff members after providing critical feedback may discourage meaningful future participation of students in improvement of study processes.

1.2.4. Statistical data on student enrollment, graduate numbers, and academic staff are collected annually on 1 October and integrated into the self-assessment reports for each study field. This data is regularly reviewed to assess the performance and alignment of study programmes with job market demands and the needs of the academic community. RTU has established procedures for conducting annual student satisfaction and graduate surveys, which form a crucial part of the feedback mechanism. The results of these surveys, along with an employer satisfaction survey, provide some insights into the effectiveness of study programmes and are used to inform improvements. For instance, adjustments such as eliminating course overlaps, restructuring course content, and involving industry professionals and international lecturers are made based on student feedback, as claimed by RTU (SAR 2.2.4.).

Feedback from employers is collected through a survey of final/national examination commission chairpersons and internship evaluations, which assess students' theoretical and practical skills and offer recommendations for improvements. Graduate feedback is also collected annually through electronic surveys, with results being summarised both by Centres and by individual study programmes. All collected data is compiled by the Head of the Study Field and incorporated into self-assessment reports and programme characterizations.

RTU claims (SAR 2.2.4), that the analysis of student satisfaction, graduate feedback, and employer input is key in improving the study environment, as evidenced by specific changes like course content adjustments, staff replacements, and professional development opportunities for staff. A report summarising student feedback and future prospects is presented at the end of each academic year, ensuring that all stakeholders are informed of the outcomes and future directions. However, at closer look, this practice is more sporadic or involved stakeholders are not fully informed about those processes. Additionally, closer collaboration with employers is anticipated, as the current level of data collection from employers remains low and presents opportunities for improvement.

1.2.5. RTU generally provides comprehensive, easily accessible information about its study fields and programmes (SAR p. 34) through multiple online platforms catering to both Latvian and international audiences: RTU LA webpage - <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/liepaja>; information on the "European Language and Culture Studies" academic bachelor study programme (Only in Latvian): <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/studijas/visas-studiju-programmas/atvert/HBE?department=0L000&type=P>; information on the "Writing Studies" master programme (Only in Latvian): <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/studijas/visas-studiju-programmas/atvert/HBE?department=0L000&type=P>. However, information regarding joint doctoral programme "Language and Literature Studies" is insufficient:

<https://www.rtu.lv/lv/studijas/visas-studiju-programmas/atvert/HDV?department=0L000&type=P>

Information available in RTU webpages generally corresponds to data available in VIIS and E-platform.

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

QMS at RTU LA is currently in transition, with efforts to integrate the RTU system underway. While the existing procedures support academic operations such as admissions, teaching evaluation, and feedback collection, there are notable gaps in the effective use of stakeholder feedback, particularly from students. Despite having mechanisms in place for collecting student input, concerns were raised regarding the anonymity and responsiveness to critical feedback, which has undermined trust in the process. Moreover, while faculty development is encouraged, discrepancies in staff qualifications and language proficiency raise concerns about transparency. The QMS supports programme development and review, yet there is limited evidence of actual stakeholder engagement in these processes, suggesting room for improvement. The university's statistical data collection mechanisms are effective, and steps have been taken to use this data for continuous improvement, although further collaboration with employers is needed. Lastly, while information about study programmes is generally accessible, the availability of information about the joint doctoral programme "Language and Literature Studies" remains insufficient.

### Strengths:

- 1) Structured system for feedback collection from students, graduates, and employers.
- 2) Clear procedures for programme development, review, and consolidation in alignment with state regulations.
- 3) Effective use of statistical data for programme evaluation and improvement.
- 4) Active involvement of teaching staff in student feedback collection.

### Weaknesses:

- 1) Inconsistent handling and integration of student feedback.
- 2) Instances of confrontation over anonymous feedback, compromising the integrity of feedback collection.
- 3) Discrepancies between staff qualifications, particularly language proficiency, and actual performance.
- 4) Limited evidence of stakeholder engagement in programme review processes.
- 5) Insufficient collaboration with employers in feedback mechanisms.
- 6) Incomplete information about the joint doctoral programme on public platforms.

## Assessment of the requirement [1]

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

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

RTU utilizes development and planning documents, supported by an internal Quality Management System (QMS), to meet its study area objectives. The QMS includes databases of internal regulations and processes, with effective programme development and internal approval mechanisms. While the Councils of Study Fields involve stakeholders in programme development and evaluation, there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of their review processes. Additionally, student feedback is inconsistently handled. Criteria for evaluating student performance are well-defined, and no issues were observed during the on-site visit. Academic staff qualifications meet requirements, though discrepancies in reported language skills were noted. Data collection and analysis meet standards, but there is potential to enhance employer engagement for more actionable insights.

- 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

RTU employs development and planning documents, along with an internal QMS , to meet the objectives of its study areas. The QMS consists of databases of internal regulations and processes.

- 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

RTU employs development and planning documents, along with an internal QMS , to meet the objectives of its study areas. The QMS consists of databases of internal regulations and processes.

- 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

Well-defined criteria, conditions, and procedures for evaluating students' performance have been established, ensuring the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. No evidence to the contrary was observed during the on-site visit.

- 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:** Partially compliant

Requirements for academic staff members are established as evidenced by the qualifications of the teaching staff members recruited, however there are discrepancies regarding reported languages skills with observed ones during on-site visit.

- 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

While the current data collection and analysis processes are conducted in accordance with requirements, there is potential for a more comprehensive approach to gathering actionable insights from employers.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

A key mechanism for stakeholder involvement in the development and review of study programmes is the Council of Study Field. However, there is limited evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of their review processes. Additionally, the inconsistent handling of student feedback highlights areas for improvement in ensuring continuous improvement.

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

#### Analysis

1.3.1. The RTU Liepāja Academy (RTU LA) has implemented a structured financial support system for the "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" study field. According to the Self-Evaluation Report (SAR) and Annex 3.3.3, the field is primarily funded through state budget allocations (96%), supplemented by tuition fees (4%). Funding allocation adheres to the cost parameters established by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia.

Financial distribution within the study field prioritises teaching staff remuneration, followed by infrastructure and modernization (11%), scholarships (10%), and administrative costs (5%) (Annex 3.3.3). The state budget funding is allocated annually in compliance with Cabinet Regulation No. 994 and the agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and RTU LA regarding specialist training quotas (SAR, p. 36).

The study field benefits from additional support for indirect costs, sourced from project deductions, donations, and EU structural funds etc., which contribute to RTU LA's overall budget (SAR, p. 38). Expenditure planning is conducted collaboratively across study fields. The recent consolidation process with RTU has secured a five-year commitment to maintain at least the current funding level for LA (as confirmed during HEI management interviews). In 2013-2024 70 one-time scholarships were awarded to bachelor's and master's students from the study field with purposes of science communication.

While the SAR asserts a "stable financial situation" (p. 39), the SWOT analysis (pp. 20-21) identifies financial-related challenges:

1. Weakness (W1): Inadequate support for course preparation and teaching material development.
2. Threats: (T1) Insufficient state funding; (T2) Inadequate material and technical resources.

Additionally, the SAR acknowledges the generally low salaries in the higher education system (p. 46), though this does not currently pose a significant impediment to the programmes in question.

In conclusion, RTU LA has established a systematic approach to financial support determination and redistribution for the study field. However, there are areas for potential improvement, particularly in addressing the identified weaknesses and mitigating potential threats to ensure long-term sustainability and quality of the programmes.

1.3.2. The RTU Liepāja Academy (RTU LA) has effectively identified and allocated the necessary infrastructure resources and material-technical support for the implementation of the study field. The resources are appropriately distributed between students and teaching staff, ensuring accessibility and utility.

Physical Infrastructure:

1. The study field operates primarily in two well-maintained buildings situated in central Liepāja, providing a conducive learning environment.
2. Collaborations with leading cultural institutions in the city, such as theatres and museums, expand the available premises for specific projects and cooperative activities, enhancing the practical aspects of the programmes.
3. The infrastructure is designed to accommodate movement-impaired individuals, demonstrating commitment to inclusivity.

Technological Resources:

1. Students benefit from widespread access to an open wireless network in both buildings.
2. Information Technology (IT) and communications equipment are provided in alignment with the study field's goals and requirements.
3. The institution maintains a virtual learning environment, facilitating modern pedagogical approaches and remote learning capabilities.

Teaching and Learning Resources:

1. Teaching materials are available and tailored to meet the specific needs of the study field.
2. The material provision appears to be adequate for current educational demands.

1.3.3. RTU LA has implemented a comprehensive system for the improvement and acquisition of methodological and informative resources, with a particular focus on library resources and databases that support the needs of the study field.

The RTU LA Library provides a diverse range of resources, including print materials like books and serial editions, and electronic resources, i.e. access to major relevant databases like EBSCO, Scopus and Wiley Online Library. The library employs an open-access shelf system for the majority of its collections, enhancing accessibility for users. Reading rooms are adequately equipped with work stations and necessary equipment for copying and printing materials, available at set rates. Overall, the library collection is curated to be relevant to the study field's requirements. Local and international interlibrary loan services are available, expanding access to resources beyond the immediate collection.

A single login system allows users to access database resources and library catalogues remotely, facilitating off-campus research and study. The ongoing consolidation process is expected to broaden the range of available electronic resources, potentially enhancing the scope and depth of accessible materials.

The library collection is regularly updated in collaboration with teaching staff and students, ensuring alignment with evolving programme needs. A clear and consistent policy governs the acquisition of new materials, indicating a structured approach to resource management. During interviews, both staff members and students expressed satisfaction with the library services, suggesting that the current provision meets the needs of the study field.

In conclusion, RTU LA has established an effective system for maintaining and improving its methodological and informative resources. The library appears to be well-equipped to support the needs of the study field, with a user-centred approach to resource management and acquisition. The positive feedback from both staff and students reinforces the adequacy of the current provision.

1.3.4. The RTU Liepāja Academy (RTU LA) has implemented appropriate and effective information and communication technology solutions to support the study process. Students and staff have comprehensive access to essential equipment including computers, projectors, interactive whiteboards, and screens. Neither the Self-Evaluation Report (SAR) nor the interviews and expert visits to the premises revealed any significant shortcomings regarding the technical equipment.

The institution maintains an ongoing agreement with Microsoft, ensuring access to MS Office and MS Windows products through proper software licensing. Contemporary network hardware has been installed to virtualize the computer network, and a CAMPUS computer network connection has been established across all study blocks, enhancing connectivity and accessibility.

Since February 3, 2020, the use of the e-learning platform Moodle has been mandated for both teaching staff and students at RTU LA (SAR, p. 43). As part of the current consolidation process, Moodle content is being migrated to the RTU ORTUS system, which will allow access to all materials and information systems with a single login, streamlining the user experience. Concurrently, the RTU LA library is transitioning from the ALISE to the ALEPH library information system. During this assessment period, both systems remain available to library visitors. The library operates for 45 hours per week, ensuring ample access for users.

In addition to Moodle, email and MS Teams solutions are utilised for distance learning and communication needs. However, during assessment interviews, students noted inconsistencies in the proficiency and willingness of teaching staff to use the Moodle environment. They expressed a desire for greater consistency in this regard, suggesting an area for potential improvement in faculty development and standardisation of e-learning practices.

Overall, the information and communication technology infrastructure at RTU LA appears to be

robust and capable of supporting the study process effectively. The ongoing technological transitions, while potentially challenging in the short term, are likely to result in a more integrated and efficient system for both students and staff in the long run.

1.3.5. RTU Liepāja Academy (RTU LA) has established a comprehensive, well-regulated, and transparent policy for attracting qualified teaching staff, adhering to both national and international regulations (SAR, pp. 44-45). This policy demonstrates the institution's commitment to maintaining high standards in its academic workforce.

The effectiveness of this approach is evidenced by the retention of several graduates, at least one doctoral student, and four degree candidates who have continued their careers within the study field as teachers. This retention rate suggests that the programmes excel in developing pedagogical competencies among their students.

New teaching positions are adequately promoted at local, national, and international levels, ensuring a wide pool of potential candidates. This broad outreach strategy enhances the diversity and quality of the applicant pool.

The MA level programme “Writing Studies” has been particularly successful in attracting local researchers and industry professionals for specific study subjects, bringing valuable real-world expertise into the classroom. However, the number of visiting academic staff members, both on-site and through distance learning, is low across all three programmes. During interviews, students from all programmes expressed concerns about this limitation and identified it as an area for improvement.

The study field's public profile, enhanced by numerous creative and science communication activities, serves as an additional attraction for potential employees. This visibility not only aids in recruitment but also contributes to the overall reputation of the programmes.

While the current procedures for attracting qualified teaching staff appear to be effective in many respects, the low numbers of visiting academic staff present an opportunity for enhancement. Increasing the presence of visiting academics could broaden the perspectives offered to students and potentially address the concerns raised during student interviews.

1.3.6. RTU LA has implemented procedures for ensuring the qualification and quality of work of its academic staff in accordance with national requirements and tailored to the specifics of the study field (SAR, p. 46). The institution has established an appropriate quality management system for the evaluation and further training of academic staff. This system includes regular performance assessments, identification of development needs, and provision of training opportunities. Such a structured approach enables the institution to systematically enhance the competencies of its teaching staff.

As a result of the ongoing consolidation process, human resources development policies are now being implemented in a centralised manner through RTU. This centralisation may offer advantages such as access to a wider range of resources and expertise, standardisation of best practices across the institution, and potentially more diverse professional development opportunities for staff.

The effectiveness of these measures in addressing the professional and didactic development needs of the teaching staff is evidenced by the overall quality of instruction and the ability of the programmes to meet their educational objectives. However, continuous monitoring and adjustment of these development programmes will be crucial to ensure they remain responsive to evolving educational needs and challenges in the field of language and culture studies.

1.3.7. RTU Liepāja Academy (RTU LA) has established a basic regulation that prohibits employees from holding more than one full-time permanent position (SAR, p. 50). However, beyond this rule, there are no specific regulations or recommendations regarding the balance of academic, research, and administrative workloads.

Elected academic staff members typically carry both academic and research responsibilities, with some also undertaking administrative duties. Interviews with staff members suggested an optimal balance of 50/50 between academic and research activities. However, this ideal balance is rarely achieved in practice due to the predominantly project-based nature of research activities in Latvian higher education, which introduces an element of unpredictability in the medium term.

The study field demonstrates flexibility in accommodating workload changes. Nevertheless, periods of overburdening are common, a concern also highlighted in the SAR (p. 23). This overburdening is linked to recognized weaknesses such as:

1. Inadequate hours allocated for supervising student papers and independent projects.
2. Insufficient support for course preparation and the development of teaching materials.

The issue of heavy workload extends to doctoral students, as indicated in individual survey interviews (Annex II 2.2.4, p.5).

While the institution's ability to adapt to changing workload demands is commendable, the lack of formal guidelines for workload distribution and the frequent occurrence of overburdening present potential risks to the long-term sustainability of the programmes and the well-being of the academic staff. Addressing these challenges may require a more structured approach to workload allocation and additional resources to support key academic activities such as student supervision and course development.

1.3.8. A multi-level support system with specific functions has been established to meet the diverse needs of students. Given the relatively small scale of the institution, including this specific study field, personalised and immediate support from staff is readily available.

In addition to the general staff providing guidance on study processes, activities, and opportunities, students at RTU LA have access to dedicated support services, including a legal advisor, ERASMUS coordinator, and both male and female psychologists. Special support mechanisms are in place for international students.

The premises are wheelchair accessible featuring ramps and elevators, and signage in common areas is available in Braille. However, minor design enhancements, such as colour-coded markings, larger and more visible room numbers, and clearer directional signage on each floor, would further improve accessibility within the main building.

Additionally, 10% of the budget is allocated to various types of scholarships. However, there is uncertainty about the sustainability of this allocation and whether all types of scholarships will continue to be awarded in line with the Regulation on Granting RTU Scholarships (SAR, p. 49). There is also concern that consolidation of funds may increase competition for these scholarships.

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

Overall, the study field is financially sustainable and students of all programmes are provided with necessary support services, infrastructure and resources necessary for a high quality study process. However, the assessment was conducted during the ongoing consolidation with Riga Technical University. Although existing agreements guarantee a certain level of funding, the potential of investments into further development remains unclear.

Strengths:

- 1) Stable state budget funding.
- 2) Well maintained infrastructure.
- 3) Extensive library and information resources.
- 4) Multi-level-support mechanisms.
- 5) Satisfaction of students with provided resources, study process and overall quality of studies across the field.

6) Catering to local public and industry needs.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Low numbers of guest lecturers and industry representatives.
- 2) Uncertainty due to the consolidation process.
- 3) Low admission and high drop-out rate in BA programme "European Language and Culture Studies".
- 4) Inadequate support for course preparation and teaching material development.

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

### **Analysis**

1.4.1. As stated in section 1.1.1 of this report, the study field meets the strategic specialisation area of RTU „Humanities and Arts“ and in the RTU strategy for 2023-2027. The RTU Liepāja Academy strategy for 2024-2027 includes the priority scientific field „Language, culture and new media art within the context of regional, ecological and socio-economic sustainability“. According to SAR p. 50, the aim of scientific research and creative activity of the study field "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" is subordinate to the overall aim of the study field. The research conducted in the study field is mostly related to Linguistics and Literary Studies, its sub-branches - History of Latvian Literature, Theory of Literature, Comparative Literary Studies, History of Foreign Literature, General Linguistics, Comparative and Comparative Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Latvian Synchronic Linguistics, Latvian Diachronic Linguistics, Baltic Linguistics, Germanic Linguistics, Romance Linguistics. Judging by the publication lists, the CVs of the teaching staff and the SAR, research is also carried out in other areas of the Humanities and Arts in addition to Linguistics and Literature: Philosophy, Ethics and Religion (History of Culture and Science, Philosophy of Culture, Aesthetics, History of Ideas), Music, Visual Arts and Architecture (History and Theory of Theatre and Cinema, Theory of Culture). The thematic division not only serves the interdisciplinary aspects, but is also perfectly aligned with the study field. The scientific research corresponds to the national research priority of Latvia „Arts&Humanities“ (<https://researchlatvia.gov.lv/en/brief-0>) and Horizon Europe specific intervention area in Cluster 2 - Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society.

The JDSP, which is carried out at RTU LA, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and Daugavpils University, is of great importance for the regional and national development of scientific and research excellence in the field. The data presented demonstrates the diversity of research topics, the thoroughly developed theoretical and empirical curricula and the results achieved. The implementation of the JDSP promotes the further development of the national language in a monolingual and multilingual perspective, has a positive impact on the further development of translation studies, linguistics and literary studies and contributes to the preservation of national identity. Doctoral students are directly involved in research activities relevant to their own dissertation topics and are encouraged to participate in the research of their supervisors and colleagues, which is a commendable strength. In the opinion of the expert group, the directions of the academic research of the study field are therefore in line with RTU's development goals and are relevant to the study field.

1.4.2. From the course descriptions, the titles of the publications, the research projects and the titles of conference presentations of the teaching staff, it can be concluded that scientific research is well connected to the courses offered in the study programmes of all levels. Examples of research output provided in SAR on p. 54 confirm that they reflect the researchers' areas of specialisation and thus help to provide students an overview of the latest developments in relevant research. The locally published scientific journal "Scriptus Manet" and the follow-up publications "Current Issues in

Research of Literature and Culture", "The Word: Aspects of Research", "Language Acquisition: Problems and Perspective" are used in the study process. The topics of Bachelor's and Master's theses are related to the research work, scientific and creative interests of the lecturers (sociolinguistics, translation studies, Germanic studies, Romance languages studies, applied linguistics, comparative linguistics, language learning, literary studies, theatre and drama studies, etc. (SAR p. 53). The content of the JDSP is deeply rooted in the scientific achievements of the personnel. The academic staff of the study programme participates in various scientific conferences and seminars on a regular basis, as well as organises high-reputation scientific events with publishing opportunities, which are recognized not only in Latvia, but also abroad. Doctoral students have an opportunity to get immediate access to recent publications and scientific innovations discussed at the university. However, not many publications of the teaching staff appear in international, high-ranking academic journals or edited volumes.

1.4.3. International research cooperation in this field is being expanded in a targeted manner and can be summarised under five categories:

1. International scientific conferences "Current Issues in Research of Literature and Culture", "Current Problems in Literature and Culture Research", "The Word and Its Research Aspects", "Language Learning: Problems and Perspective", "Via Scientiarium" are organised in cooperation with foreign universities. The conferences held at RTU LA attract many researchers from abroad and contribute to the international visibility of the research carried out locally in the region.

2. The scientific journals "Scriptus Manet", "Current Issues in Research of Literature and Culture", "The Word: Aspects of Research", "Language Acquisition: Problems and Perspective" have international editorial boards and involve research colleagues from Australia, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany, Greece, Poland, Czech Republic, United States of America, United Kingdom and Japan. The inclusion of "Scriptus Manet" in the SCOPUS database would considerably broaden the impact of research on an international level.

3. Visits by foreign staff to hold lectures, seminars, masterclasses, workshops and other activities. The latter collaboration is very important for the development and provision of the study field as the students at the on-site meeting emphasised that they would welcome more visiting professors.

4. Individual international scientific cooperation of researchers based on the specificity of their research interests, in particular with centres of Baltic studies, Baltic studies programme providers in Europe as stated in SAR on p. 56.

5. Erasmus+ programme with more than 40 agreements for cooperation in the field of Languages and Cultural Studies. The Erasmus+ initiative should be further developed by attracting more new and outgoing researchers and by applying for Erasmus+ strategic partnership projects.

The expert group agrees with the SAR statement (SWOT analysis on SAR p. 23) that participation in international research programmes and projects is low. There is much scope to improve the situation, as international research programmes and projects could strengthen the scientific level of the study programmes, involve more students in research and bring in more foreign guest researchers. The RTU LA should consider taking advantage of the RTU's membership of the European University Alliance EU+ as this is a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing both research and study activities. Future plans for the development of international cooperation in scientific research and artistic creation presented in SAR on p. 56-57 and directions for action and objectives on SAR p. 52 are viable, but somewhat limited. The expert group encourages the RTU LA leadership to develop a comprehensive action plan to strengthen international collaboration in scientific research and artistic creation, possibly as part of the study field development plan for the next 6 years in line with RTU's strategic specialisation, goals and resources.

1.4.4. According to the SAR, the former Liepaja University has entrusted the Science Council with the task of organising and coordinating the scientific research work of the entire institution, including

the study field“ Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes”. Prior to the affiliation with RTU, scientific research was carried out according to the annual plan approved each year by the Senate (SAR p. 57). The elected academic staff is obliged to fulfil the minimum number of scientific publications stipulated in the Law on Higher Education Institutions over a period of six years. Under the current conditions, the research activities of the teaching staff are being systematically developed. A fund for the development of academic activity has been set up to support teaching staff, with the aim of increasing the number of internationally cited publications and monographs and supporting participation in international conferences, particularly when researchers or academics do not have project funding (SAR p. 57). The incentives contribute positively to the international visibility of research conducted in the study field, although the field of Latvian linguistics needs additional administrative measures to encourage professors to publish more internationally. The lists of publications and research projects presented in the SAR on pages 58-62 confirm that faculty members are active in their areas of research – linguistics and literary studies or interdisciplinary projects and research. The level of research was rated 3 (good level of research, 20 out of 30 points) in a previous international assessment by the Technopolis Group (2019). The RTU LA successfully raises additional funds through National Research Programme (NRP) projects and collaboration with partner institutions. This means that RTU LA has developed the mechanisms for engaging teaching staff in high quality research and these work well and are efficient, but the SWOT analysis reveals three major drawbacks that need to be addressed in the long term (see section 1.4.3 of this report):

1. Poor communication between the different areas of language and literature research;
2. Lack of unifying research topics among faculty who are not involved in projects;
3. Low participation in international research programmes and projects and insufficient internationally cited scientific publications for all elected members of the Centre.

As the SAR does not elaborate on the first two points, the expert group can only assume that there are no interdisciplinary research groups at RTU LA working on unifying research topics and that the research potential between the different areas of language and literature may be somewhat dispersed.

1.4.5. Students on the Bachelor's, Master's study programmes and the JDSP are involved in scientific research together with their professors. The most active involvement of students in scientific research takes place in the JDSP, which is self-evident. RTU LA offers students of all levels the opportunity to participate in annual RTU LA conferences, student-organised creative expression evenings, Latvian and international summer schools, public events on language and culture, and competitions. The best research papers of MA and PhD students as well as MA graduates and early career researchers are published in the academic journals *Scriptus Manet*, *Current Issues in Research of Literature and Culture*, *The Word: Aspects of Research*, *Language Acquisition: Problems and Perspectives*. However, the SAR does not state what percentage of students are involved in academic research. The expert group concludes that RTU LA has developed mechanisms to encourage the participation of students at all levels in academic research and that these work well and are effective.

1.4.6. The self-analysis text in section 2.4.6. of the SAR focuses on the uniqueness of the three study programmes in this study field, with an emphasis on the innovative design of the programmes and the interdisciplinary nature of the JDSP, which is true. In addition to that teachers are actively creating and using innovative language technology solutions. The expert group was able to identify few examples of good practise to support the view that innovative solutions are used in the study field:

1. Within the project *Latvian Language of Science in Intralingual Aspect* a digital database and mobile application “The Language of Science” (2020) was created;

2. The Online Explanatory Dictionary of Educational Terms, developed by the ESF project is a significant contribution to the development of Latvian terminology;
  3. Involvement in the project PPP Digital Resources for the Humanities: Integration and Development, lead partner University of Latvia (2020 - 2022) is an important initiative to provide a balanced and diverse programme in order to considerably promote development, sustainability and usage of humanities digital resources and to provide a remarkable impact on the advancement of digital humanities in Latvia;
  4. The participation in Baltic International Digital Humanities Summer School, Riga (2023) is a significant benefit for students, particularly those interested in the intersection of humanities and digital technologies.
  5. The JDSP incorporates the use of modern digital tools and is based on the latest research in the Humanities. It equips students with knowledge that enables them not only to conduct high-level research but also to run successful businesses, which is a commendable practice. The compulsory entrepreneurship practice is an innovative approach to a modern study programme.
- According to the SWOT analysis, there is a lack of new, innovative approaches in all fields of language learning study (SAR p. 21). The expert group is aware of this and believes that there is room for improvement in terms of innovative and diverse teaching methods, especially in language learning. The affiliation to the RTU can be beneficial in this regard, especially in the search for technological innovations.

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

The research conducted by the teaching staff corresponds to the development goals of the RTU LA and is relevant for the study field. The results of the research are integrated in the study process of all programmes. The research output reflects the researchers' areas of specialisation and helps to provide students with an overview of the latest developments in Language, Literature and Culture. RTU LA has developed the mechanisms for engaging teaching staff in high quality research and these work well and are efficient. Students are provided with opportunities to participate in research activities alongside their professors/supervisors. Some innovative solutions are applied in the study field, mainly language technology solutions.

Strengths:

- 1) The research in the study field meets the strategic specialisation area of the institution and corresponds to the national research priority of Latvia.
- 2) JDSP students are directly integrated into the research activities of their supervisors.
- 3) Scientific research is well connected to the courses offered in the study programmes of all levels.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Low number of internationally cited academic publications.
- 2) Low participation in international research programmes and projects.
- 3) The research potential between the different areas of language and literature is somewhat dispersed, with no interdisciplinary research groups working on unifying research topics.
- 4) There is room for improvement regarding innovative solutions applied in the study field.

### **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

Research activities are systematically developed, are in line with RTU LA development goals and

are relevant to the field of study, even if there is a lack of internationally cited academic publications and participation in international research programmes and projects.

## **1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

1.5.1. The RTU LA has provided the expert group more than enough information about the processes implemented regarding its collaboration and internationalisation with institutions from Latvia, whether these are other HEI, colleges, primary and secondary schools, different stakeholders as employers, employer organisations, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, scientific institutes, etc.) within the study field. This collaboration definitely aids this HEI in achieving the objectives and learning outcomes of the study field and associated programmes, as well as it is clearly visible from the self-assessment documents that its partners for collaboration are chosen based on the specific characteristics of the study field and relevant programmes, but also because of crucial lack of certain professions in the relevant field of language and literary studies, cultural studies, etc. Although it is not so evident from the SAR, the alignment of the sector with the study fields of the HEI could ensure relevance and impact, and cooperation is strengthened when partners share common goals in their academic or creative pursuits. Long-standing and apparently very successful collaboration indicated in the report, furthermore, contributes continuous mutual improvement and job creation potential, especially in the sense that partners who can provide employment opportunities for graduates add value to the programmes. Nevertheless, the result of this cooperation is not so visible in the overall programmes that have been evaluated. The exception is only a PhD programme that has managed to implement demands from national stakeholders and different organisations in their curriculum, probably because the overall structure of the PhD programme is very open and tailor-made according to the students' needs.

The enhancement of cooperation, as seen from the self-assessment report, is facilitated through formal agreements and informal relationships with employers who are supportive of the programme and its research. Employers contribute to the evaluation process of study programmes, as well as to international scientific assessments. During the preparation of programme licensing and accreditation, employers share their opinions on programme performance and provide valuable recommendations for improvements. Nevertheless, in conversation with the employers they somehow feel they are neglected and are eager to be more involved as advisors of different programmes, especially on BA and MA level, where they had interesting proposals regarding new competitive MA programmes, e.g., in museum studies, history, etc.

In conferences organised by (at that point) Faculty of Humanities and Art (until 29.02.2024) and Centre of Humanities and Art (from 01.03.2024), discussions with employers (particularly from the cultural sector) on current issues and potential solutions have been held multiple times, but their opinions were not thoroughly integrated in development of the BA and MA study programmes. Even though it was clear to expert group that all international cooperation and study internationalisation are aligned with the RTU LA Strategy 2024-2027 (refer to Annex 02 of the Internal Regulations List), expert group were not so convinced that this alignment ensures that international collaboration is strategic and purposeful, contributing to institutional goals and global visibility. Employers and different regional organisations, especially those from the sector of creative industries, as it was evident from their statements, are willing to support RTU LA in offering practical and professional education for students during their BA and MA studies.

Furthermore, this is something that even students feel is missing in their study process. From the self-assessment report, it is clear that internationalisation played a significant role in the work of RTU LA. It allows the development of study programmes and processes based on internationally accepted quality standards, enables teaching staff to engage in international collaborations through study and research projects, and facilitates hiring foreign instructors. Thus, the internationalisation

goals of LiepU (now RTU LA) include implementing international study programmes, attracting and selecting foreign students, promoting international mobility, fostering international partnerships, and cultivating a globally oriented study environment. But this is rarely happening, which is evident in the low number of foreign students and visiting professors, or fellows, in the low number of fulfilled exchanges, even in the HEI's overall orientation towards national context (e.g., the number of foreign publications is relatively low).

But there are opportunities for improvement. In the "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" study field, international cooperation is established through ERASMUS+ agreements with foreign universities and research collaborations, even though mainly with Lithuanian universities offering Baltic Studies or Lithuanian research institutions (for a list of LiepU's bilateral agreements, see: LiepU Partnerships; <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/liepaja/studijas-liepaja/erasmus--/sadarbibas-partneri-3>), where more than 40 institutions have agreements specifically related to Language and Culture Studies. This means that this institution has established a robust network of international and national scientific partners, as well as collaboration with various national and local authorities, businesses, and public organisations and these partnerships are supposed to be built on agreements, joint projects, and collaborative efforts in organising conferences, as well as active participation in the academic, cultural, and educational spheres, but this has never been fully implemented. As it is evident in the report, in terms of international collaboration, the institution has cooperation agreements with prominent partners such as the Lithuanian Institute of Literature and Folklore and Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University from Lithuania, as well as the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art at the University of Latvia. Together with the RTU LA Kurzeme Institute of Humanities, these institutions work closely to jointly organise the international scientific conference. This collaboration fosters the exchange of knowledge, research findings, and best practices, enhancing the academic field's growth and internationalisation. Nationally, the institution collaborates with a wide range of scientific partners. For instance, the Latvian Association of Applied Linguistics is instrumental in organising the international scientific conference, which brings together scholars and researchers from across Latvia to discuss linguistic challenges and innovations. Other national partners include the Latvian Language and Literature Teacher Association, the Latvian Association of Teachers of English, and the Latvian Association of Speech Therapists, all of which contribute to the development and organisation of educational and linguistic research-focused events. Moreover, the institution maintains a productive relationship with the National Library of Latvia (NLL), contributing to the digitalization of periodicals by including them in the NLL's digital library and assigning DOI indexes to facilitate academic citation and accessibility. Additionally, the University of Latvia is an active participant in seminars, conferences, and editorial board discussions, further enriching the academic dialogue within the country.

The institution also works closely with Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and Daugavpils University, particularly in the teaching of doctoral programme, participation in academic discussions, and involvement in various national projects. Furthermore, cooperation with the Latvian Language Agency (LLA) and the National Centre for Education (NCE) focuses on contract work, programme reviews, and participation in national educational projects. These collaborations could not only strengthen academic research but also support the professional development of faculty and students. The institution's collaborative efforts extend beyond academia into the cultural and educational sectors. It actively engages with national and local authorities, businesses, and public organisations. For example, the Goethe Institut participates in several projects, while the French Institute in Latvia plays a vital role in organising events like Francophonie Day, which promotes French language and culture.

On a local level, the institution partners with the Liepāja City Department of Culture in organising the E. Līvs Memorial Award, and is involved in the organisation of Poetry Day events. Cultural initiatives such as these are supported by further collaboration with the Liepāja Central Scientific

Library, which co-organizes literary events and book launches. In the field of education, the Liepāja City Department of Education and Latvian language and English language teacher methodology groups contribute to school competitions, while the Grobiņa Municipality Pupils' Interest Centre includes institutional representatives in the jury for the Zvirbulis regional stage speech competition for school children. The institution also collaborates with the Latvian Section of The International Board on Books for Young People and actively participates in their organised activities. Engagement with the arts is further strengthened through partnerships with the Liepāja Theatre, where the institution is involved in the Liepāja Theatre Repertoire Council and contributes to the implementation of the Acting programme. The Liepāja Museum is another important partner, with which the institution co-organizes cultural events. Additionally, cooperation with the Children's Literature Centre of the National Library of Latvia enables participation in activities that promote children's literature and reading. The institution's close relationship with the Latvian Writers' Union and the Ventspils International House of Writers and Translators supports the organisation of events under the Coastal City Literary Academy, including workshops led by international lecturers.

In terms of publishing, the institution maintains active collaborations with publications such as Konteksts monthly magazine, the Latvian National Encyclopaedia, and literary and philosophical magazines like Punctum, Domuzīme, and the regional newspaper Kurzemes Vārds. These partnerships facilitate the involvement of employers in the study process through guest lectures and contribute to the publication of relevant research and creative works.

Lastly, the institution has agreements with Baltic Media Global Language Services and the RISEBA University of Applied Sciences to maintain the art journalism website karakuda.net, where student publications are featured. This partnership provides students with real-world experience in publishing, further enhancing their academic and professional development.

Through these numerous partnerships and collaborative efforts, the institution remains a key player in national academic, cultural, and educational landscapes, contributing significantly to the growth of research, BA and Ma student engagement, and the promotion of cultural heritage, but our suggestion is to try to traverse this national and sometimes even narrowly local perspective to a wider, international engagement, i.e., on the level of teaching staff exchange, students exchange, creating residential programmes in their environment for foreign guests, creating financial and motivational platforms for publishing in foreign journals and doing research transculturally and comparatively, which is a good way of promoting Baltic topics, etc.

The internationalisation of higher education has seen significant transformations over the past few decades, quickly responding to global shifts, technological advancements, and changing societal needs. These trends are reshaping the future of the HEI system worldwide, emphasising collaboration, mobility, and integration across borders. Some of the most noteworthy trends include cross-border partnerships and joint degrees, where the HEI's innovative PhD programme can function as an excellent model.

The rise of digital technology has significantly impacted the internationalisation of higher education. Online learning platforms, virtual exchanges, and digital collaborative projects have allowed institutions to internationalise their programmes without requiring physical mobility. During the pandemic, institutions pivoted to online formats, creating new opportunities for international engagement. Virtual mobility has emerged as a complement to traditional student exchange programmes, offering more flexible, inclusive, and accessible options for international learning experiences. This could also allow students who are maybe reluctant to go abroad for exchange to profit from the international education surrounding from their own home, or in a hybrid manner. As the global demand for higher education grows, so does the diversity of international students. Universities are now recruiting students from a broader range of countries, including those in developing regions, aiming to create truly global campuses. This shift has prompted institutions to adopt more inclusive approaches, offering support services tailored to the needs of diverse student populations. Diversifying the student body also enriches the educational environment, fostering

cross-cultural dialogue and a deeper understanding of global issues.

From the conversation with the HEI's management, experts have realised that this is sometimes very difficult (e.g., Cameroonian students that ended up as dropouts as discovered during the visit), but it is a good trend that RTU LA is open to this cooperation. Faculty members, on the other hand, are not so engaged in international research projects, co-publishing with colleagues from other countries, and participating in global academic networks, whether via exchange, fellowships, guest-professorships abroad, etc., so there is definitely place for improvement, especially having in mind hybrid education models. These collaborations not only advance scientific knowledge but also enhance the global reputation of the institutions involved. Faculty mobility, whether through short-term exchanges, sabbaticals, or long-term appointments abroad, has become an essential component of professional development and institutional strategy. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on fostering global citizenship and social responsibility through higher education internationalisation. Universities are increasingly incorporating global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and sustainable development into their curricula and research agendas. In this sense, there is also room for improvement, especially in the context of language/literature/culture-oriented BA and MA study programmes, whereby foreign visiting scholars, e.g., native speakers, could be of great help. By integrating these trends into their strategies, institutions like RTU LA could position themselves as key players in the "glocal" education landscape, ensuring that their local advantages are more than visible in the international higher-education context. This would also improve a big gap in international publications, as stated in the self-assessment report as well as during conversation with the teaching staff, which is more than evident and only partly justifiable by "national orientation" of Baltic philologist's argument.

1.5.2. The RTU LA, as visible from self-assessment report, has signed different agreements of collaboration with international partners (including several HEIs', employers, employers' organisations, municipalities, NGOs, scientific institutes, etc.) relevant to its BA, MA and PhD study programmes, which should enhance the achievement of the study field's objectives and learning outcomes. Their partners are selected based on the specific characteristics of the study fields and programmes, e.g., LiepU (now RTU LA) has secured the Erasmus+ Charter for the maximum duration of 7 years (2021–2027), demonstrating that its international strategy aligns with EU standards. As they emphasise, their goals of study mobility include: enabling LiepU (now RTU LA) staff to acquire knowledge and skills from international experiences and best practices, enhancing their job market skills and professional growth; promoting the expansion and enrichment of course offerings; providing opportunities for students who cannot participate in mobility programmes to benefit from expertise of international academic staff and guest lecturers from foreign companies; facilitating exchange of knowledge and teaching practices among European HEI contexts; strengthening connections between HEI and their partners/employers; supporting collaboration between universities and businesses; motivating students and staff to engage in mobility activities and assisting with mobility preparation. Nevertheless, most of these goals are still not achieved, which is evident from the following: small number of teaching staff exchanges and fellowships; lacking visiting professors or experts from the stakeholders' side; lack of international materials for promoting their own HEI in a global context, e.g., booklets in English, promotional materials for visiting students and lecturers, etc. (exception is only a PhD programme which has an elaborated strategy of attracting foreign students, which is visible in the number of foreign students, but also lacks visiting teaching staff, as evident from conversation with PhD students and teaching staff); lack of cooperation with the cultural and creative industries sector, as evident from the conversation with BA and MA students, graduates, as well as with employers. So, in this aspect there is still place for improvement: e.g., international cooperation in the "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" area is based on ERASMUS+ agreements with foreign universities and research connections, mainly with Lithuanian institutions specialising in Baltic

studies, which is a relatively narrow field. In accordance with the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (1997), LiepU (now RTU LA) has developed and approved Student Application and Selection Procedures for mobility in the ERASMUS+ Exchange Programme (see: <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/liepaja/studijas-liepaja/erasmus--/studiju-mobilitate> and <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/liepaja/studijas-liepaja/erasmus--/praksu-mobilitate>). Erasmus+ mobility application details are announced on RTU LA's website, and students are encouraged to use it, which is visible from the fact that in the period of 10 years, from 2013 to 2023, LiepU (now RTU LA) has seen only 45 students participate in the Erasmus+ mobility exchange programme (see: Annex II.5.1 for the student list), mostly in European Language and Culture Studies programme. The RTU LA outlines the Erasmus+ cooperation partners in the field of study for various academic programmes at LiepU (now RTU LA). For the BA programme RTU LA collaborates with a diverse range of institutions across Europe and beyond. In the Czech Republic, the University of West Bohemia and John the Evangelist Purkinje University are key partners. France is represented by multiple universities, including the University of Savoy-Mont-Blanc, Western Catholic University, University of Lorraine, University of Western Brittany, and ICES Catholic University of Vendée. Italy's contributions come from the University of Rome Tre, University of Language Mediation, SSML Unicollege, University of Insubria, Columbus Academy, and the University of Naples "L'Orientale". In Lithuania, LiepU (now RTU LA) partners with Vytautas Magnus University, University of Klaipeda, Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy, and Vilnius University, along with Kaunas University of Technology. Poland is represented by the State School of Higher Professional Education in Elblong, Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań, University of Szczecin, and University of Warsaw. From Portugal, LiepU (now RTU LA) works with the University of Madeira. Romania's University of Craiova and Slovakia's Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica are also partners. Spanish institutions include the University of Valencia, University of Córdoba, and University of Las Palmas (Canary Islands). Turkey is represented by Anadolu University, Karabuk University, Nevşehir Hacı Bekta Veli University, Istanbul Aydin University, Uludag University of Bursa, and Sivas Cumhuriyete University. Germany's contribution comes from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, University of Hildesheim, Technical University of Darmstadt, and Ernst Moritz Arnt University of Greifswald. Additionally, Goce Delceva University in North Macedonia and Stockholm University in Sweden are part of the network. For the MA it has established collaborations with the University of Western Brittany in France, Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania, University of Tartu in Estonia, and University of Tromsø - Arctic University of Norway. In the PhD programme this HEI has partnered with the University of Western Brittany, Vytautas Magnus University, and the University of Tromsø - Arctic University of Norway.

Merging that happened recently should be a good opportunity to use RTU's resources in the field of international cooperation and to even broaden the list, as well as to create an elaborate set of strategies to implement goals that were mentioned in the SAR. Even though outgoing mobility instances increased until 2020, and were then disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to continued low student engagement in outgoing mobility, nevertheless, hybrid models were not used as well. The list of incoming students is also very low.

As stated in the self-assessment, incoming Erasmus+ students can tailor their study plans with courses from their core programme or other fields (although Erasmus+ students in Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes primarily enrol in foreign language courses; list of incoming students and lecturers is available in Annex II.2.5), maybe following procedures could even enhance this: specialised courses tailored for foreign students; offering some courses in English; more promotional materials in English; grouping ECTS points in the programme, which could allow harmonisation with foreign HEI's principles (to be elaborated later on), etc.

In addition, BA programme has implemented cooperation with the University of Veracruz, Mexico, and the University of Ijuí, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil, by sending teaching staff there, as well as

admitted guest lecturers and students from partner institution, organising student conference in which students from both universities presented their research in languages and in cultural studies, but these efforts are, as expert group understood, based on individual efforts of the teaching staff – without any overall strategy being implemented.

1.5.3. Although SAR states that the RTU LA has established a comprehensive system and procedures to attract both international teaching staff and students, which proves effective, facilitating outgoing and incoming mobility for teaching staff and students, significantly enhancing the study process and the quality of education, etc., this is – in experts opinion – not fully supported by statistical data, it is not visible in strategic documents, as well it is not implemented in the HEI's milieu. The mechanisms for drawing foreign students and teaching staff, developed with the Department of International Relations, as stated in the report, include: participating in educational exhibitions (both online and in-person) and engaging with students through informative booklets prepared under Project SAM 8.2.1.0./18/A/010; reducing the fragmentation of programmes and strengthening resource sharing; engaging with Erasmus partner universities; partnering with educational agents to recruit students for RTU LA; utilising online marketing by placing information about English-taught study programmes on search portals; running informational campaigns on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr) and maintaining an English-language website; targeting potential students, particularly at the master's level, through the Latvian state scholarship programme; organising exhibitions, workshops, and discussions both at RTU LA and online to promote the university and inform about study opportunities, etc.

From the conversation with the stakeholders, students, teaching staff, and even graduates of HEI's BA and MA programmes, the expert group got the impression that most of these strategic points were not implemented. This means that the overall "orientation" of RTU LA is, indeed, very national and sometimes even regional. Even when teaching staff is faced with, e.g., foreign students, it is only to teach them languages – whereas they are not fully participating in the programme. Erasmus+ mobility students from the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE) / Centre of Science and Engineering (CSE) and the Faculty of Pedagogy and Social Work (FPSW) / Centre of Pedagogy and Social Work (CPSW), thus, only select study courses offered in English, Spanish, German, and French – to acquire language skills. FSE / CSE students, studying IT or computer science, often choose Latvian language courses as an additional subject, but for the same reason. Foreign students, furthermore, frequently express interest in learning Latvian language and culture, though opportunities are limited as these courses are mainly offered in Latvian.

Regarding attracting foreign visiting professors, the expert group got the impression that there were only a few examples, e.g., including Fulbright scholars from the USA and 4 Erasmus+ lecturers. In the conversation with BA and MA students, as well as graduates, experts got the impression that they would like more visiting scholars, especially because their English level is rather high.

Examples of good practice, thus, fall on several cases since 2018, i.e., in a period of 5 years, whereby the International Relations Department of HEI has hosted an International Staff Training Week, inviting lecturers from around the world to deliver open lectures, benefiting language and culture students. In fall 2023, students attended lectures on water management in Costa Rica, culture in Mecca, and the impact of Artificial Intelligence on research, provided by experts from institutions like the University of Veracruz and South Westphalia University of Applied Sciences. Additionally, cooperation with foreign embassies in Latvia has brought guest lectures from representatives of German, Spanish, Canadian, and Irish embassies, enriching the academic experience.

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

The RTU LA has demonstrated a commendable commitment to fostering collaboration and

internationalisation within its academic programmes, particularly through strategic partnerships with institutions and organisations across Latvia and beyond. This collaborative approach, while effective in some areas such as the PhD programme, has not fully translated into broader programmatic improvements or increased international visibility.

Despite having established a robust network of partners and engaging in numerous national and local initiatives, the institution faces challenges in leveraging these collaborations to enhance its overall global engagement and academic impact. The limited presence of foreign students, low levels of international faculty exchanges, and insufficient integration of external feedback into programme development highlight areas for growth.

To address these issues, the RTU LA should consider expanding its international outreach by adopting hybrid education models, increasing faculty participation in global research networks, and fostering more substantial international partnerships. Enhancing these aspects could not only improve the institution's global reputation but also enrich the educational experience for students and faculty alike. By embracing these opportunities for internationalisation, the RTU LA can better align with global educational trends, address current gaps, and position itself as a prominent player in the international higher education landscape.

In conclusion, while the RTU LA has established numerous partnerships and international collaborations aimed at enhancing its BA, MA, and PhD programmes, there remain significant gaps in achieving the stated goals. Efforts to increase international mobility for students and staff have been hindered by limited participation, a lack of visiting professors, and insufficient international promotional materials. Although the institution has a solid framework in place and some success stories, particularly in the PhD programme, there is still much room for improvement. Expanding strategic partnerships and increasing international engagement are crucial steps forward for the institution's global competitiveness.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The RTU LA demonstrates a strong commitment to collaboration and internationalisation through strategic partnerships across Latvia and beyond.
- 2) The institution has established a robust network of partners and engages in numerous national and local initiatives.
- 3) There is commendable success in specific areas, such as the PhD programme, reflecting effective collaborative efforts.
- 4) The HEI's solid framework and some success stories indicate a foundational strength in its academic programmes.
- 5) The focus on expanding strategic partnerships and international engagement shows a proactive approach to improving global competitiveness.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) The institution faces challenges in translating collaboration into broader programmatic improvements and increased international visibility.
- 2) There is a limited presence of foreign students and low levels of international faculty exchanges.
- 3) Insufficient integration of external feedback into programme development highlights a gap in responsiveness to international standards.
- 4) Efforts to increase international mobility for students and staff are hindered by limited participation and a lack of visiting professors.
- 5) The institution needs more robust international promotional materials to enhance its global reputation and attract global engagement.

### **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

RTU LA education has made notable strides in promoting collaboration and internationalisation within its academic programmes, particularly through strategic partnerships with institutions and organisations both within Latvia and internationally. While these efforts have proven successful in certain areas, such as the PhD programme, they have not yet resulted in significant programme-wide enhancements or a stronger international presence.

Despite building a strong network of partners and engaging in numerous national and regional initiatives, the institution struggles to fully capitalise on these collaborations to boost global engagement and academic influence.

Challenges such as the limited number of foreign students, low levels of international faculty exchanges, and inadequate incorporation of external feedback into programme development signal key areas for improvement.

To overcome these obstacles, RTU LA should focus on expanding its international outreach by incorporating hybrid learning models, increasing faculty involvement in global research collaborations, and establishing deeper international partnerships.

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

### **Analysis**

1.6.1. The last time the study field underwent external evaluation procedure was 12 June 2013, when the study field received its accreditation. In total there were 24 recommendations provided for study field and its respective programmes including during licensing of JDSP programme on 04.10.2022. Recommendations for study field and respective actions taken (“II 2.6.2 A Implementation of recommendations\_languages.pdf”) are as follows:

“1. Reduce the number of absolutely compulsory courses to no more than one third of the total; (2) ensure that students' general intellectual education is supported by introductions to different disciplines which can be chosen from a list rather than being compulsory for all; (3) change Part B modules to a list of courses from which students can choose; (4) change the system so that all courses rotate except compulsory introductions; (5) increase the completely free choice section from the current 2-4 credits to at least 20.”

Recommendation can be considered as partially completed. Programmes generally comply with state education standard, elective course offering for masters programme is at good levels, however regarding bachelors programme there is still room for improvement regarding extension of elective course offering.

“2. Internationalisation and cooperation. The University should push for more Erasmus agreements and encourage students to make more use of them. Another way to achieve these goals could be the introduction of English taught courses to help students learn terminology and provide a broader exposure to the English language. The introduction of more electronic communication and video conferencing is recommended. On the other hand, the sphere of doctoral students' contact should not be limited to close regional partnerships: more active participation in international summer schools and other similar events is recommended.”

Recommendation can be considered as completed in context of Joint Opinion criteria 1.6 “Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures” However full analysis of internationalisation and cooperation efforts of RTU LA can be found at Joint Opinion chapter 1.5 “Cooperation and Internationalisation”

3. More strict evaluation of student works, as well as clearly defined works at each specific level.

Academic writing and research methodology courses may need to be enhanced to achieve these goals.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. The average final grade is still moderately high, but does not indicate grade inflation. Methodological guidelines have been updated.

4. Supplement the library's resources, create free access options, and modernize the library search system. To consider the possible merger of LiepU [RTU LA] and Liepāja public library into one institution, which should become a local history library, which could also serve as a historical and cultural documentation center of Kurzeme region.

Recommendation can be considered as partially completed. RTU LA library underwent accreditation, however, proposal to seek deeper cooperation with municipality institutions still stand.

5. Lecturers' publications in peer-reviewed international academic journals should be increased.

Recommendation can be considered as completed in context of Joint Opinion criteria 1.6 "Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures". However full analysis of scientific activities of RTU LA can be found at Joint Opinion chapter 1.4 "Scientific Research and Artistic Creation".

6. Interactive forms of studies and seminars are implemented in master's and doctoral degrees, but the percentage of lectures should also decrease at the bachelor's level.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. There were no indications of a lack of implementation of innovative teaching methods in the bachelor's programme.

Recommendations for academic bachelor study programme "European Language and Cultural Studies" are as follows:

1. More elective courses should be included. Too many study courses related to the Latvian language are taught at SP at the same time. In the introductory part of the studies, it would be recommended to teach a single theoretical course Introduction to Linguistics (recommended in English). Study courses in English should be grouped according to the level of language acquisition, not according to the chosen field of study.

Recommendation can be considered as partially completed. There is still potential for improvement in expanding the range of elective course offerings. Additionally, it is recommended to increase the availability of mandatory courses in English to enhance opportunities for international scientific engagement and exposure.

2. To cooperate more closely with employers in the future development of language programmes.

Recommendation can be considered as completed in context of Joint Opinion criteria 1.6 "Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures". However full analysis of RTU LA cooperation with employers can be found at Joint Opinion chapter 1.5 "Cooperation and Internationalisation".

3. The Internet should be more accessible to everyone, not only in the library.

Recommendation can be considered completed. Wifi access is available throughout the building.

4. It is recommended to emphasise the understanding of the important role of modern technology in the field of culture-related study courses.

Recommendation can be considered completed. RTU LA asserts that infrastructure improvements have been made, but the recommendation's wording is unclear, leading to varying interpretations of the role in culture-related study courses due to insufficient clarification.

5. Library resources for English language students are insufficient. Library working hours are not convenient for users.

Recommendation can be considered as completed in context of Joint Opinion criteria 1.6 "Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures". However full analysis of informative provision of RTU LA can be found at Joint Opinion chapter 1.3 "Resources and Provision of the Study Field". and respective programme chapters 2.3 "Resources and Provision of the Study Programme".

6. The number of learning modules should be increased. Cooperation with other study programmes

of LiepU and with other study programmes of Latvian universities should be strengthened.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. As a result of consolidation and merging processes Spanish and English has been added to the programme.

Recommendation made for joint doctoral study programme "Languages and Literature Studies" during its licencing procedure are as follows:

Short-term:

1. In addition to the information on the required previous education and entrance examinations, foreign students should be required to have at least B2 level of English in the matriculation rules. Include more detailed information on the requirements and parts of the entrance examination in the admission rules, while making sure that all partner universities provide the same information.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. The matriculation rules and admission requirements have been updated, now mandating that international students possess a minimum English proficiency level of B2.

2. Provide an updated model diploma indicating the specific degree to be awarded.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. The information in the model diploma has been updated to indicate the field of science in which the doctoral degree is awarded.

3. Provide information on the costing of the study programme, the amount of funding required and the number of students needed to ensure a quality study process.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. SAR provides necessary information regarding financials of the programme.

4. To make technical specification in the certificates on compensation of losses to students in case a study programme is not accredited due to an action (act or omission) of the university or college or the study programme licence is withdrawn and the student does not wish to continue his/her studies in another study programme.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. RTU LA has provided confirmation of compensation of losses to students in case a study programme is not accredited due to an action (act or omission) of a higher education institution or college, or the study programme licence is withdrawn and the student does not wish to continue his/her studies under another study programme.

5. To conclude a new written agreement between DU, LiepU [RTU LA] and VeA on the development and implementation of a joint study programme, as the agreement was concluded at the time of the development of studies in 2020 for a joint doctoral study programme "Philology", but currently the title is "Languages and Literature Studies".

Recommendation can be considered as completed. A new written agreement has been concluded between DU, RTU LA and VeA regarding JDSP with the updated title.

Long-term:

1. To compare the study programme with the doctoral programme "Languages and Cultures Studies" implemented at the University of Latvia, ensuring the uniqueness of the study programme under evaluation.

Recommendation can be considered as partially completed. It is not clear what actions the programme has taken regarding this recommendation.

2. Clarify and strengthen the interdisciplinarity aspect of the study programme, as well as clarify the interconnection of sub programmes and modules.

Recommendation can be considered as partially completed. PhD students will be given the option to select an 8 ECTS module from a different sub-programme during their 4th semester. Additional steps can be taken to further clarify and enhance the interdisciplinary nature of the study programme, as well as to better define the connections between sub-programmes and modules.

3. Improvement of course descriptions: where this has not been done and if applicable, specific credit requirements; indication of the proportion of midterm and examination/assessment marks, organisation of independent work, and updating of the sources of required and additional literature;

revision of the prerequisites indicated to ensure that they are in line with the admission requirements and the level of study; indication of face-to-face study only, distance learning if face-to-face study is not feasible.

Recommendation can be considered as partially completed. RTU LA states that the course descriptions will be enhanced following the completion of the full programme approval cycle, expected by September 1, 2025. However, minor updates have already been made to the descriptions of courses implemented.

4. To encourage JDSP academic staff to publish in scientific journals or conference proceedings indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science Core Collection or included in ERIH+ database.

Recommendation can be considered as completed in context of Joint Opinion criteria 1.6 "Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures". However full analysis of scientific activities of RTU LA can be found at Joint Opinion chapter 1.4 "Scientific Research and Artistic Creation".

5. Renew and/or acquire Latvian Science Council (LSC) expert rights in time to ensure the necessary number of LSC experts in the implementation of the JDSP in the long term.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. Current number of experts are in accordance with regulatory enactments.

During the procedure of inclusion of the study programme in the study field in the Daugavpils University on 15.11.2023 following recommendation were made:

1. The Quality Committee proposes that the University should word the admission requirements as follows: "Second cycle higher education in linguistics and literary studies, translation studies, history, philosophy, intercultural relations, social anthropology, social psychology or equivalent education in the relevant field and an entrance examination. English language studies require a minimum level of B2." The Quality Committee therefore decides to instruct the University to submit to the University Senate, within three months, a revised version of the admission requirements as set out in this Decision, approved by the University Senate and agreed with the partner universities.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. Necessary changes to the admission requirements for the programme were made.

2. The Quality Committee, in line with the previous practice for the English version of the Doctor of Science degree, notes that it would be more accurate to use the following translation: 'Doctoral Degree of Doctor of Science (Ph. D.) in Humanities and Arts'. The Quality Committee therefore decides to instruct the University to submit to the University Senate, within three months, a model diploma in English, approved by the University Senate, in which the wording of the title of the doctorate is expressed as indicated in this Decision.

Recommendation can be considered as completed. The diploma has been updated.

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

The recommendations provided during the previous assessment procedures of RTU LA study field and respective programmes have largely been addressed with several significant improvements, particularly in structure of programmes. However, some recommendations remain only partially implemented, such as further extending the range of elective courses, improving interdisciplinary aspects in the doctoral programme and improving course descriptions. Library resource improvements and technical infrastructure has shown progress, but certain long-term recommendations, such as further clarification of course modules and a comparison with other institutions' programmes, still require more attention.

Strengths:

1) RTU LA generally demonstrates a commitment to following recommendations and addressing them effectively.

Weaknesses:

- 1) There is still room for improvement regarding extension of elective course offering.
- 2) The availability of mandatory courses in English in order to enhance opportunities for international scientific engagement and exposure are still limited.
- 3) Cooperation with the municipality, especially regarding library provision, can be deepened.
- 4) There is room for improvement regarding course descriptions of doctoral programme.

#### Assessment of the requirement [4]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Short-term recommendations have largely been addressed, though some long-term recommendations remain outstanding, particularly concerning course descriptions in the doctoral programme, the expansion of elective course offerings, and the exploration of opportunities for collaboration with the municipality, as well as the possibility of offering mandatory courses in English.

#### 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

##### Short-term recommendations

- |   |
|---|
| 1) Develop a unified communication strategy between RTU LA administration and RTU central administration for the successful development of the study field.   |
| 2) Develop and internally communicate a clear roadmap of the consolidation process.   |
| 3) Avoid overlap of internal regulations of RTU and the former Liepāja University.  |
| 4) Develop more robust international promotional material to enhance RTU LA global reputation and attract global engagement.  |
| 5) Ensure the anonymity of student semester survey results for staff members to prevent potential confrontation of students by staff. Furthermore, implement measures to guarantee that confrontations do not occur under any circumstances.  |
| 6) Engage in targeted international recruitment campaigns that are region-specific, focusing on countries with a growing demand for international education. Collaborating with education fairs, embassy-backed programmes, and alumni networks in various countries can help reach a broader pool of potential students. |
| 7) Create sabbatical programmes and offer workload reductions for staff involved in international exchanges. Incentivizing mobility through career advancement opportunities or recognition within promotion frameworks can further motivate faculty participation.   |
| 8) Ensure that the Council of Study Field hold regular meetings and make the outcomes accessible to all relevant stakeholders.  |
| 9) Ensure that information on public platforms is presented in a comprehensive and detailed manner for all study programmes.  |

##### Long-term recommendations

1) Strengthen incentives and provide other administrative measures to increase publishing in high-impact international journals.
2) Expand international activities in the study field by taking advantage of the membership in the European university alliance EUT+, participating in Erasmus+ strategic partnership projects, creating a visiting professor programme, inviting more foreign visiting professors and attracting more foreign students.
3) Streamline credit transfer processes so that students can easily transfer credits earned abroad back to their home institution. Establishing pre-approved partnerships with international universities can simplify the administrative burden of credit recognition.
4) Introduce more mandatory courses in English in order to enhance opportunities for international scientific engagement and exposure.
5) Extend the offering of elective courses to foster personalised learning pathways.
6) Assign a specific position/person to support the professors of the study field in applying for international research projects.
7) Establish an interdisciplinary research group that brings together scholars from different language and literature fields.
8) Establish a formal mechanism to translate collaborations into programme-wide changes and to regularly gather external feedback from industry experts, alumni, employers and international academic colleagues and incorporate it into the programme development process.
9) Encourage the adoption of digital tools and technologies in language and literature research.
10) Introduce measures to provide students with personalised career advice, mentorship and job placement resources.
11) Improve partnerships with municipalities, industry organisations and professionals to invite more guest lecturers and industry representatives to provide real-world insights.
12) Provide more resources to help teaching staff improve their teaching methods and course preparation.
13) Improve descriptions of the procedures for the defence of Bachelor's and Master's theses to provide students with a clear breakdown of assessment.
14) Continue to work on the previous long-term recommendation to improve JDSP course descriptions.
15) Promote the recognition of work experience, particularly prior formal and non-formal education to improve access to higher education in the Liepāja region.
16) Address the dropping out of students in the BA programme "European Language and Culture Studies" to prevent the numbers from becoming unsustainable in the long term.
17) Ensure that the reported qualifications of staff members accurately reflect their actual skills and competencies.

## II - "European Language and Culture Studies" ASSESSMENT

### II - "European Language and Culture Studies" ASSESSMENT

## 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

### Analysis

2.1.1. The Academic bachelor study programme “European Language and Culture Studies” (43227) equips graduates with the knowledge and skills to advance to MA programme in “Writing Studies” or other humanities and arts fields, or to pursue careers in teaching, translation, etc., and other sectors where proficiency in their native language, foreign languages, and cultural knowledge is essential. According to the SAR report, the revised aim of this BA programme is to provide students an overall focus on theoretical knowledge, independent research skills, and competencies in European Language and Culture Studies. The programme prepares students for professional roles requiring proficiency in English (up to C1 level) and French, Spanish, or German (up to B2 level), which is rather well for a BA programme, or advanced competence in Latvian language and culture, developing both professional and generic competencies, e.g., global, digital, research-oriented and innovative, entrepreneurial, and civic skills. The necessity of such graduates in today’s job market of Latvia cannot be overstated, as their unique skill set meets the growing demand for multilingual and culturally adept professionals across various sectors, especially in education institutions where, until now, Russian was dominant. Graduates can also enter higher education, research institutions, and various sectors of the academic market, as the conversation with graduates has shown us. In an increasingly globalised world, employers seek individuals who not only possess technical skills but also demonstrate a deep understanding of diverse cultures and languages. The integration of multilingual capabilities with cultural insights makes these graduates valuable, particularly in roles that require cross-cultural communication and international collaboration. Most of them are fluent in at least two languages but, as the conversation with them has proved, are willing to pursue their formal and informal education. After the conversation with BA students (and graduates), many of them are willing to continue their education, and they admit they have acquired all the skills they need for entering the labour market. They are thus able to use this specialised knowledge in humanities and at least two languages, including English and either French, Latvian, Spanish, or German, along with key concepts in these fields; conduct professional, innovative, and research activities in foreign languages and culture, applying acquired theoretical knowledge; critically analyse, synthesise, and evaluate information in linguistic, literary, and cultural studies, and apply knowledge for argumentation and research; utilise research theories and methodologies in foreign, comparative, and applied linguistic and cultural studies; manage their own learning, pursue professional development, approach problem-solving scientifically; show responsibility and initiative in individual and team settings, making decisions and finding creative solutions, etc. Representatives from the employers’ sector, whether they are primary and secondary school managerial staff or members of institutions, NGO’s, and creative sector, fully appreciate this new orientation of “once exclusively Latvian” programme, and even overemphasise the need for this kind of experts. In view of the above information, the content of the programme is fully in line with the study field.

2.1.2. The BA programme forms a crucial part of the full cycle study field "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Language Studies, and Language Programmes" at RTU LA, and this is visible in the number of students that are willing to study it (even though the dropout rate is rather high).

The Bachelor’s study programme “European Language and Culture Studies” (with degree: Bachelor of Humanities in Language and Culture Studies) has been designed with a clear and cohesive structure that directly links its title, objectives, degree to be obtained, learning outcomes, and admission requirements.

The programme’s framework ensures a logical progression from admission to graduation, reflecting the interrelated nature of its components. The duration, scope, and implementation options of the study programme, as well as the language of instruction, are carefully structured and justified in

accordance with both Latvian and European higher education standards.

The title "European Language and Culture Studies" accurately reflects the focus of the programme on developing expertise in European languages and their cultural contexts. Students earn a Bachelor's degree in Humanities, with specialisations in language pairs such as English-French, English-Spanish, English-German, or English-Latvian, tailored to the demands of both local and European labour markets. This focus ensures that the degree is aligned with professional requirements in sectors that value linguistic diversity and cultural competence.

The programme's aim is to provide a comprehensive academic education that prepares students for professional roles requiring advanced language skills and cultural understanding. This is achieved by teaching theoretical knowledge and independent research abilities in European languages and culture. The objectives, which include improving the quality and competitiveness of the programme, responding to transformations in contemporary higher education and labour market needs, and maintaining an interdisciplinary orientation, directly support the achievement of this aim. Each objective is interrelated with the programme's broader goal of aligning linguistic competence with the cultural and interdisciplinary demands of today's job market.

Furthermore, the learning outcomes of the programme are fully aligned with its aims and objectives. Upon completing the programme, students will have acquired: 1. Proficiency in English and a second language (up to B2 level), with a deep understanding of European cultural studies, supporting the programme's title and goals; 2. Ability to conduct professional research and innovative activities in language and cultural studies, fulfilling the objective of equipping students for professional roles in these fields; 3. Critical thinking and analysis skills, essential for addressing complex linguistic and cultural challenges, directly tied to the aim of fostering independent research abilities; 4. Research methodologies in linguistics and cultural studies, reinforcing the academic and interdisciplinary nature of the programme; 5. Leadership and collaborative skills, essential for success in both individual and team-based professional environments, further demonstrating the programme's comprehensive approach to student development.

The admission requirements are structured to ensure that students entering the programme have the potential to succeed and meet its learning objectives. Initially, applicants were required to have prior knowledge of a second foreign language (French, German, Russian, or Spanish). As the programme evolved, admission criteria were expanded to include an interview in the second language, ensuring candidates have the necessary language aptitude. These adjustments align the admission process with the programme's overall objective of producing graduates with multilingual competencies. Foreign students were included in the programme to expand its reach, though recent adjustments have focused on local recruitment due to issues with international student retention and success.

The programme was initially offered as both a three-year and four-year option, depending on the student's prior language knowledge. Since 2024, the programme has been fully integrated into the ECTS, now structured as a three-year, 180 ECTS credit programme. This ensures a standardised approach to higher education across Europe, reflecting the programme's aim to align with EU educational standards. The implementation of the programme includes 90 ECTS in compulsory courses, covering both English and Latvian, ensuring students acquire the foundational knowledge required for success in language and culture studies. The 72 ECTS in elective courses provide flexibility, allowing students to specialise in French, German, Spanish, or Latvian, while the remaining credits cover free electives and the Bachelor's thesis, ensuring a well-rounded academic experience. This language choice is justified by the programme's aim to equip students for professional activity in the multilingual EU labour market. By setting teaching in English as its goal and offering specialisation in a second language, the programme fulfils the EU's emphasis on multilingualism, preparing students to compete in a globalised professional environment.

The programme's structure - three years, 180 ECTS, with specialisation options - provides a balanced, reasonable approach to delivering a high-quality education. The carefully designed

progression of courses and specialisations ensures that students gain comprehensive linguistic and cultural competence, supporting the interrelation between the title, degree, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements. The transition to ECTS further strengthens the programme's alignment with EU standards, ensuring its competitive positioning both nationally and internationally.

In conclusion, the "European Language and Culture Studies" programme demonstrates a strong alignment between its title, code, degree to be obtained, learning outcomes, and admission requirements. The structure, duration, scope, and language of the programme are justified and tailored to meet the demands of higher education and the multilingual European labour market, ensuring students are well-prepared for both academic and professional success.

It provides a comprehensive academic foundation, preparing students for both advanced studies and professional careers in the fields of humanities, philology, and culture, although it lacks comparative perspective, and more subjects offered in English. Nevertheless, the programme aligns with contemporary higher education trends that emphasise a combination of interdisciplinary learning and research, with a way to pursue the MA "Writing Studies" and the PhD "Language and Literature Studies" afterwards. Problem is that the overall programme of this BA studies is somewhat reluctant to implement research in its structure, often subdued only or exclusively to "acquiring foreign language". The curriculum is thus designed to focus on in-depth knowledge of at least two languages and cultures, alongside fundamental training in linguistics, literary and cultural studies, and translation. Students can therefore choose from specialisations in English and French Language and Culture Studies, English and Spanish Language and Culture Studies, English and German Language and Culture Studies, English and Latvian Language and Culture Studies. This structure aligns well with current educational trends, including personalised learning pathways and research-focused education. The programme supports students in developing both theoretical knowledge and practical research skills, essential for pursuing further academic studies or, later on, entering professional fields such as teaching, translation, interpretation, but it lacks in their education towards managerial/leadership skills.

Experts suggestion is, besides fostering academic generic competencies, to even deepen BA students' intercultural, global, digital, entrepreneurial, and civic skills - which could be done by increasing internationalisation activities.

Regarding its duration and scope, this programme is structured in accordance with most of the European HEI's programmes of that sort. However, the programme could benefit from a more pronounced orientation towards the labour market, which was emphasised during meetings with students, graduates and even employers. While this BA curriculum provides a solid academic foundation, there is a noticeable lack of structured workshops and extracurricular activities designed to enhance employability, job-awareness, new work opportunities, etc. Incorporating industry-oriented workshops, internships, and real-world projects could better align the programme with labour market needs, but it could also provide students with practical experience that complements their academic learning in the real-life sector. So, there is still room for improvement in integrating more extensive career preparation or professional development opportunities.

Overall, the "European Language and Culture Studies" programme meets its objectives and aligns with contemporary higher education trends, including research orientation, personalised learning experiences, and global competence. In addressing the identified weakness of a lack of new and innovative approaches in language learning, this HEI did not still develop a clear and comprehensive strategy to revitalise and enhance their language programmes. The current landscape of language education demands a "fresher" perspective and innovative methodologies to meet the evolving needs of students and the global job market. To this end, RTU LA is adopting a multi-faceted approach that integrates advanced technologies, e.g., Moodle, modern pedagogical methods, but without any strategic partnerships fulfilled, e.g., in a position of foreign teaching staff, native speakers, etc.

Nevertheless, there were few interesting examples of integration of cutting-edge technologies, incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) into language-learning curriculums to create a more engaging and effective learning experience. Project-based learning is of central importance in this BA curriculum, which is applaudable, encouraging students to apply their language skills to real-world projects and collaborate with peers. These methods are intended to make the learning process more dynamic and student-centred, promoting active participation and practical usage of language skills. After experts' meeting with students, graduates as well as teaching staff, experts got the impression that curriculum development in this BA is an ongoing process, although with very few updates that would go in the direction of contemporary language use and global standards. Faculty training is another crucial component of RTU LA strategy. They are investing in professional development to ensure that their staff is well-versed in the latest teaching methodologies and technologies that would enable them to deliver high-quality instruction and effectively support students in their learning. Student feedback played a vital role in this continuous improvement efforts, and the expert group got the impression that students are relatively pleased with the teaching staff, but seeing some place for improvement in the curriculum per se. By actively listening to their students and responding to their needs, this BA programme aims to enhance the overall learning experience and address any areas of concern, which is quite possible to do because of small groups.

However, there are several internal and external risks that this BA programme must navigate. Internally, resistance to change from faculty or staff could pose challenges to the adoption of new methods or technologies. This could be resolved by incorporating some elements of RTA's STEAM orientation to their own programme, or even by creating mutual modules. Resource constraints, including budget limitations, may also impact ability to fully implement and sustain innovations. Ensuring the maintenance of high educational quality amid these changes will be a critical focus in the next couple of years, as merging is still relatively fresh. Externally, the competitive landscape of language education, including the rise of online platforms, poses additional risks, as it was addressed during the meeting with the teaching staff. Again, returning to internationalisation and cooperation issue, to mitigate these risks and enhance RTU LA language programmes, forming strategic international partnerships is crucial, e.g., collaborations with global academic institutions will enhance the credibility and reach of programmes, partnerships with renowned language institutes will provide additional expertise and opportunities for joint initiatives, working with technology companies will ensure that we integrate the latest tools and platforms into our curriculum, connections with cultural organisations will offer students practical language use and cultural immersion experiences, etc.

2.1.3. Since the accreditation of the academic bachelor study programme "European Language and Culture Studies" (43227) BA programme in 2013, while the objectives and developmental principles have remained constant, according to the HEI's report, several significant changes have been introduced. These modifications are designed to align the programme with current higher education trends, national and EU policies, as outlined in the RTU LA Development Strategy 2024-2027 (see: Annex 02 of the List of Internal Regulations). The overarching goals of these changes were to enhance the overall quality and competitiveness of the programmes; to adapt to shifts in higher education supply and labour market demands with a greater emphasis on interdisciplinary development; and to stabilise students' enrolment and optimise programme implementation. The adjustments to the "European Language and Culture Studies" programme at Liepaja University reflect a well-analysed and justified response to educational and labour market needs. These revisions align with current Latvian and EU planning documents, showing a commitment to continuous improvement in higher education. Key enhancements include the expansion of language offerings, such as the introduction of English and Spanish studies, and a flexible structure accommodating diverse student backgrounds. The establishment of both three-year and four-year

programmes promotes inclusivity, allowing a broader range of students to pursue their academic goals. Additionally, the integration of the "Baltic Philology, Culture and Communication" programme into "European Language and Culture Studies" streamlines resources and stabilises enrollment while preserving valuable academic traditions. This strategic merger optimises programme implementation, fostering sustainability. The programme emphasises interdisciplinary studies and multilingual competencies, preparing graduates for varied professional opportunities in the EU's multilingual environment. By focusing on practical skills alongside theoretical knowledge, the curriculum aligns with modern principles, ensuring students are both knowledgeable and employable. The introduction of Latvian language and culture modules for foreign students enhances cultural integration, enriching the academic experience. Furthermore, the transition to ECTS credits in 2024 allows for better credit recognition and facilitates student mobility. In terms of learning outcomes, the programme equips students with essential linguistic and cultural competencies, critical thinking skills, and research abilities. This focus prepares them for broader societal contributions, emphasising global, digital, and entrepreneurial skills. Overall, these changes enhance the programme's relevance and accessibility, positioning it as a strong contender in higher education and enabling students to thrive in a competitive and interconnected world. Introduction of a Four-Year Programme is a relevant change, implemented on February 26, 2014 (No. 288), whereas the Study Accreditation Commission approved significant revisions of the Bachelor's programme "European Language and Culture Studies." A four-year programme (200 credits before transitioning to ECTS) was introduced to accommodate students without prior knowledge of French, German, Russian, or Spanish. This complemented the existing three-year programme (120 credits before ECTS), whereas new programme structure began in the 2014/2015 academic year, allowing students to earn degrees in various language combinations, such as English and French, English and Russian, English and German, or English and Spanish. This was an excellent and applaudable decision, in experts opinion, because it will fill an important gap on the labour market, where different language experts (except in Russian) are needed. During the conversation with the representatives of the labour market, the expert group got the impression that this was a good decision, and that RTU LA even needs more language experts and graduates. Furthermore, on February 6, 2015, the Study Accreditation Commission approved a modification (No. 343) to the admission requirements for the three-year Bachelor programme, incorporating an interview in a second foreign language as part of the entrance examination. This change aimed to better assess students' language proficiency and preparedness for the programme. After close reading of the BA curriculum, indeed, the expert group saw that the programme is rather ambitious but nevertheless tailored to students' needs and demands. During the conversation with BA students and graduates a problem related to daily division of classes occurred, i.e., students they think it is indeed difficult to have lectures in 2 or even 3 different languages in one day, or one morning, often creating confusion or exhaustion. This is, in experts opinion, closely related to equal distribution of ECTS, that could be grouped in different modules, or modular subjects, with different professors contributing. This could also be connected with the internationalisation problem, whereas foreign students - often used to these kinds of modules with larger numbers of ECTS - hereby encounter lots of small "subjects". On August 17, 2016, the Study Accreditation Commission approved further revisions to the study programme, even allowing foreign students to study all specialisations (English-French, English-Russian, English-Spanish, English-German), which should also be applauded, not only from the standpoint of the comparative advantage of this HEI's language programmes, but also from the perspective of their competitiveness on the labour market, e.g., in primary and secondary education. Latvian language was introduced as an optional specialisation, thus creating an equilibrium towards foreign philology programmes.

The fact that all admission requirements were adjusted to include an entrance exam in various languages, and the programme was expanded to offer new elective modules in Latvian language and culture, shows that this HEI is willing to internationalise its core, but there is a lack of structural

and strategic algorithms for this to happen. In 2016/2017 the programme introduced the "English and Spanish Language and Culture Studies" specialisation and began enrolling foreign students. To streamline resources and maintain core philological and cultural studies, ultimately, the "Baltic Philology, Culture and Communication" programme was integrated into "European Language and Culture Studies". Starting in the 2023/2024 academic year, this integration led to the elimination of separate admissions for "Baltic Philology" and the discontinuation of English and Russian Language and Culture Studies specialisation. The programme now focuses on a three-year BA with 180 ECTS credits, transitioning to ECTS from 2024. The updated curriculum includes compulsory courses in English and Latvian, with elective specialisations in French, Spanish, and German, or Latvian Language and Culture Studies. The overall satisfaction of the students and graduates stems not only from the programme structure but from other factors as well, e.g., motivated teaching staff, well-equipped facilities, small groups, responsiveness of teachers, tailor-made curricula, etc. Aforementioned problem of ECTS points is maybe the only one, and it emerges on both BA and MA levels (the study programme implementation regulations are outlined in the Regulation on Higher Education Studies on January 30, 2024, valid until June 30, 2024, before transitioning to RTU regulations).

Despite these updates, there remains a notable national orientation in the study programme, which could limit their international appeal and competitiveness. The focus on Latvian language and culture topics exclusively in Latvian, while important, may restrict the programme's attractiveness to students from diverse international backgrounds. Even though most members of the teaching staff are involved in research, the ambition to publish globally, in English, is still insufficient. A more balanced approach that integrates a broader range of global topics, as well as a more comparative perspective in cultural studies, could enhance the programme's appeal and better reflect the increasingly international nature of modern HEI. Emphasising global language skills and intercultural competencies alongside national elements could attract a more diverse student body and better prepare graduates for a globalised job market, as well, on the other hand, enhance "global visibility" of this institution.

2.1.4. According to the self-assessment report, the BA has enrolled 45 students for the academic year 2023/2024, including 6 international students. While recent years have seen a noticeable decline in student numbers, there has been a slight uptick in 2023/2024, especially compared to the previous academic year.

The distribution of students by specialisation for this year is as follows: English and French: 3 students; English and Spanish: 23 students; English and German: 11 students; English and Latvian: 7 students.

From 2017 to 2020, the number of students showed an increase, with foreign student enrolment rising from 5 to 13. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic years of 2020-2022, there was a slight decrease in overall student numbers, and the number of foreign students has fluctuated; 5 enrolled in 2020, 14 in 2021, and 9 in 2022. This fluctuation was primarily due to the pandemic and the associated travel restrictions. HEI's report states that, on average, about 7,3 students annually leave the programme voluntarily, most commonly during the first semester or after the first year. Reasons for departure include family and financial issues or a mismatch with the programme's offerings. Foreign students, in particular, often leave early due to difficulties adapting to the study environment or because they did not view studying at RTU LA and in Latvia as their primary goal. Additionally, around 14 students are expelled each year due to academic failure, which may stem from a lack of motivation or difficulties balancing studies with work commitments. The percentage of foreign students who graduate from the programme remains low (see: Other Annexes 3.1.4. for detailed statistical data).

At RTU LA, foreign students dominantly opt to study English alongside a second foreign language. Their curriculum also includes Latvian language, culture, and history as part of their study plan.

Between 2016 and 2024, a small number of foreign students have enrolled specialisations within the European Language and Culture Studies programme. Considering the dropout rates, both voluntary and involuntary, along with the low number of foreign graduates, changes have been implemented for the academic year 2023/2024. The revised admission criteria now require that the language of instruction for the programme be Latvian, with proficiency in English at the C1 level, and a second foreign language at the B2 level. In alignment with former Liepaja University's development strategy, which aims to reduce the number of small programmes and minimise fragmentation, a decision was made to integrate the core elements of the old BA programme "Baltic Philology, Culture, and Communication" into the new BA programme. This integration, along with the introduction of a specialisation in Latvian language and culture, is intended to optimise resource use and increase student enrolment in the BA degree programme. Thus, the current number of students is deemed appropriate for the available space at RTU LA.

The above-mentioned procedures, in experts opinion, are good, even though it could be improved by including more subjects offered in English, as well as by suggestions already mentioned in the paragraph on internationalisation activities. As well, other BA language programmes could also be developed in the future, which could attract students. Although the number of students is rather low, and the professor-student ratio is good, during the conversation with the members of teaching staff and the BA programme management, the expert group have noticed that the workload of some professors is rather high. This could easily lead to burnout, but could also be less stimulating for students, because they are forced to listen to the same professors all over again on different subjects.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

The academic Bachelor's study programme "European Language and Culture Studies" (code: 43227) has undergone significant changes since its initial accreditation in 2013, with a primary focus on enhancing its quality, competitiveness, and alignment with labour market needs. Key updates include the introduction of a four-year programme, modifications to admission requirements, and a stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches. These revisions have allowed the programme to better serve a diverse student body, including international students, by expanding its language specialisation options in English, French, German, Spanish, and Latvian. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, such as complexities in ECTS distribution and a curriculum that maintains a strong national focus, particularly on Latvian language and culture. This national orientation could limit its appeal to international students. To increase its global attractiveness and better prepare students for a globalised workforce, greater integration of international topics and intercultural competencies is recommended. The programme is an essential component of RTU LA's academic offerings and plays a vital role in regional development strategies. It provides students with a solid foundation in languages, culture, and the humanities, offering flexibility through specialisations in key European languages. The curriculum is aligned with current trends in higher education, blending interdisciplinary learning with a focus on research. This prepares students for further academic pursuits, including the Master's in "Writing Studies" and the PhD in "Language and Literature Studies." However, despite its strengths, the programme faces few challenges. A key concern is the relatively high dropout rate, despite the programme's ability to attract students. Additionally, the programme's lack of a comparative perspective and the limited number of courses offered in English impact its international appeal, making it less attractive to foreign students who may seek a broader, more global curriculum. While the programme equips students with valuable linguistic, cultural, and research competencies, it does not place enough emphasis on developing managerial, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills—critical for today's labour market. Student and

graduate feedback has pointed to the need for more structured career preparation, including opportunities for internships and practical projects. By incorporating these elements, the programme could better align with the expectations of employers and the demands of the labour market. Furthermore, expanding its internationalisation efforts, such as by fostering partnerships with foreign institutions and integrating innovative language learning methodologies (e.g., advanced technologies), would significantly enhance the programme's appeal and effectiveness. In terms of compliance with the study field, the programme effectively fulfils the requirements by offering a well-rounded academic foundation in the humanities with a clear focus on language and culture studies. It provides students with both specialised linguistic skills and broader competencies in research and cultural analysis, aligning with the programme's overall aim. The learning outcomes clearly reflect this, as students gain proficiency in English (up to C1 level) and a second language (up to B2 level), along with critical research and analytical skills applicable to the fields of linguistics, literature, and cultural studies. However, the national focus, particularly the strong emphasis on Latvian language and culture, could be seen as limiting its potential for international reach. Incorporating more globally relevant content and intercultural competencies would make the programme more attractive to international students and better suited for a global labour market. The curriculum's integration of interdisciplinary perspectives is in line with the EU's multilingualism principles, but further expansion of its international dimension and collaboration with foreign experts would enhance its relevance and appeal on a broader scale. In conclusion, the programme's revisions reflect a commitment to keeping pace with national and international educational trends, but more focus on internationalisation, career development, and innovative teaching methods will be crucial to elevating its global competitiveness. Despite current challenges, the programme contributes significantly to regional development and is aligned with Liepaja's vision of becoming a hub for education, culture, and research. By addressing these areas for improvement, the programme has the potential to not only strengthen its regional impact but also increase its visibility and attractiveness on a global stage.

Strengths:

- 1) Diverse language specialisations.
- 2) Interdisciplinary focus.
- 3) Strong foundation in language and culture.
- 4) Alignment with advanced studies (master and doctoral level).
- 5) Attracts a diverse student body.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Complexity of ECTS distribution.
- 2) National focus limitations.
- 3) Limited subjects in English.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The content of the Academic bachelor study programme "European Language and Culture Studies" provides a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and competences in the field of Language and Culture Studies and offers a high degree on interdisciplinarity. The study programme is designed in accordance with the "Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia (Latvia 2023)", which emphasises interdisciplinarity of studies and the concept of creativity education. The structure of the programme (180 ECTS) includes all obligatory parts: compulsory part (90 ECTS), specialisation (72 ECTS), state examination (Bachelor thesis of 15 ECTS), free elective study courses (3 ECTS) and complies with the State Standard for Academic Education (Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 May

2014 No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education"). The interrelation of the obligatory parts is logical and complementary. During the reporting period the programme outcomes were aligned with the Cycle Descriptors for the Latvian Qualifications Framework (EQF Level 6), as included in the 2017 Cabinet Regulation No 322 "Regulations on the Latvian Classification of Education".

The content of the programme is interrelated, comprehensive and reflects the latest achievements in Humanities. The specialisations offered (English and French Language and Culture studies; English and Spanish Language and Culture Studies; English and German Language and Culture Studies; or English and Latvian Language and Culture studies) make the programme attractive to current and prospective students, as they not only contribute to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences, but also increase the students' chances on the job market. The programme offers students a good balance of theoretical knowledge and practical skills and is closely linked to the national and international labour market. The programme content reflects the needs of the labour market - students have the opportunity to acquire their professional competences in synchronic and diachronic aspects of languages, historical and modern aspects of literature and culture, translation methodology and practise. The decision to offer courses in Ethnolinguistics and Sociolinguistics is admirable as it helps students to broaden their understanding of culture, language and society. Also, students learn about digital media, virtual society, artificial intelligence in contemporary culture, etc. The programme could include more topics on Digital Humanities to be up to date. The programme is updated annually to keep up with the latest trends in language teaching methodology, technological developments and current events in the Latvian and European cultural space, as indicated in the SAR on p. 95.

2.2.3. The study programme is currently undergoing the transition to ECTS credits system, which is well known as a student-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer. The study programme envisages various active and cooperative study implementation methods that are specified in the course descriptions (e.g. creative work, writing letters, oral presentations, text and discourse analysis, speech and grammar exercises, conducting research, recording audio interviews, roleplay, review of audiovisual materials, translation, critical analysis of theoretical literature etc.). There is no overarching study philosophy or prescribed guidelines for teaching methodology. Lecturers are free to design course content and choose teaching methods. The methods applied in this study programme correspond to the essential provisions of a student-oriented studies and enable students to achieve the intended study outcomes and reflect on their performance. According to SAR p. 96, the programme promotes students' self-reflection, involvement in the organisation of the study process, individual responsibility for the study process, and the possibility of an individual approach. The student-centred approach is also integrated into the assessment system. As indicated in this report section 1.1.5, summative assessment is complemented by the use of formative assessment (SAR p. 27) to contribute to a student-centred approach and to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses. Continuous cumulative assessment (intermediate examinations) contributes to the creation and provision of feedback. The SAR describes seven student-centred principles (p. 97) followed in the assessment of the course and the programme as a whole. Students can get feedback from their professors not only in class or individual consultations, but also via e-mail or online tools, as well as in the Moodle environment. However, considering that the student-centred approach should focus on the needs of the individual student, little information is provided on the individualisation of studies (students with disabilities, individualised study plans, assessment and crediting of study outcomes achieved through formal as well as non-formal and informal learning). The SAR states on p. 96 "the programme promotes students' self-reflection, involvement in the organisation of the study process, individual responsibility for the study process, the possibility of an individual approach, etc"). At the on-site meetings with the students, the expert group gained the impression that student feedback is not consistently taken into account in the study programme.

Measures should be taken to address this problem.

2.2.4. Not applicable. The study programme "European Language and Culture Studies" does not include an internship. The introduction of internships could elevate the applied profile of the programme to a higher level and let the students face professional situations before they get employed.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6.

15 ECTS (420 contact hours) are allocated for writing the Bachelor's thesis. The number of credit points may be sufficient for the student, but for the supervisors of the Bachelor's thesis the number of hours for the supervision of student work is insufficient (SAR p. 21). According to the course description on p. 394 (Appendix), the Bachelor's thesis can be written in Latvian, English, Spanish, French and German. Judging by the four Bachelor's theses provided during expert visit, the typical volume of a Bachelor's thesis is 50-60 pages, although one example was only 34 pages. The topics of students' theses reflect the main research areas of the study programme and deal with a variety of linguistic, literary and cultural phenomena covered by study courses of the study programme. It is evident that students analyse both synchronic and diachronic aspects of linguistic research, e.g. "The most prominent British surnames and their importance in Britain", "Personal names in Latvian, Russian and English: Insight into chronology, recognition and semantics", address topics relevant to the labour market, e.g. 'Use of humor in the "This is Sports Center" ad series', "Linguistic diversity of perfume names in French", although the number of theses produced in collaboration with companies is not specified. The SAR states in this regard (p. 98): One of the reasons for the programme redesign is the need to adapt the study content to the requirements of the labour market and potential further education interests. For this reason, the programme focuses more on the development of various basic professional skills (translation, editing, criticism) and research skills needed to operate in an academic and cultural environment. The expert group agrees with this statement and encourages RTU LA to strengthen cooperation with public institutions and business enterprises in the Liepāja region and beyond in order to provide students with better opportunities to write more Bachelor's theses on topics closely related to the needs of the labour market.

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

The Bachelor's programme includes all obligatory parts and fully complies with the State Standard for Academic Education. The mapping of the study courses for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme is appropriate. The content of the study programme is well structured and connected. The needs of the job market are taken into account when designing the course content. The study methods are consistent with the principles of student-centred learning and teaching. There are opportunities for students to individualise their studies, but they are not sufficient. The topics of the Bachelor's theses are relevant to the study field and are in line with the study programme, although more topics closely related to the needs of the labour market would be desirable.

Strengths:

- 1) Well-structured and interrelated content of the study programme.
- 2) The content of the programme reflects the needs of the labour market.
- 3) The specialisations offered make the programme attractive to current and future students.
- 4) The combination of summative and formative assessments is admirable.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The programme lacks topics on Digital Humanities.
- 2) Student feedback is not consistently taken into account in the study programme.
- 3) Lack of information on the number of Bachelor theses produced in collaboration with companies.
- 4) Insufficient opportunities for students to individualise their studies.

### **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

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The Academic bachelor study programme "European Languages and Culture Studies" benefits from a comprehensive and well-maintained resource base shared across the "Languages and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" study field. This shared infrastructure creates a robust foundation for achieving the programme's learning outcomes and maintaining a high-quality study process (SAR, p. 102).

The library's holdings are well-aligned with the programme's focus, offering literature in key areas such as English, French, Spanish, and German languages and literatures, as well as Latvian language, literature, and culture. Approximately 18% of the 63,400 information resources at RTU LA Library directly support the subjects taught in the programme. Subscribed digital resources significantly enhance the programme's informative provision and are easily available on-line for every student and teacher. The high usage rate of these databases, with 23,700 access sessions in 2023 (SAR, p 41), indicates their value to students and faculty. The ongoing consolidation process with RTU is expected to further enhance resource availability and accessibility. In addition, each classroom dedicated to a particular language and culture has a separate extensive collection of books, maps and film on-site, ensuring ample resources for student research and learning (expert visit). Studies are successfully organized in a shared Moodle learning environment. However, experts' interview with students discovered that usage intensity and quality of materials vary among courses provided by various members of the teaching staff.

Financial and material-technical provisions for the programme appear adequate, as evidenced by the positive assessments in graduate surveys, during the experts' visit, and interviews with staff. While the current resource base is strong, continued investment in updating and expanding both physical and digital collections is crucial to maintain the programme's standards and adapt to evolving academic needs.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The study programme "European Languages and Culture Studies" demonstrates a sustainable funding model that ensures the full implementation of the study process and facilitates programme development. To ensure profitability and sustainability, the programme has established a minimum enrolment of 18 full-time students. This threshold helps maintain the economic viability of the programme while allowing for quality education delivery.

The programme's funding is primarily based on state budget allocations, with the cost per study

place for 2024/2025 set at €1,867.60. This figure is derived from the base costs for 2024 and applies the coefficient of 1.0 for the "Humanities" thematic area, as determined by the Ministry of Education and Science. The total cost for the three-year programme amounts to €5,602.80 per student.

For the 2024 academic year, the state budget finances 46 study places, providing a solid financial foundation for the programme (SAR, p. 103). The programme also generates additional revenue through tuition fees. For the 2023/2024 academic year, the tuition fee for domestic full-time students is €1,780 per year (€5,340 for the entire programme), while international students pay €2,300 annually (€6,900 total). These fees remain constant throughout the study period, providing financial predictability for students and the institution.

The inclusion of courses specifically designed for international students, such as Latvian Language for Foreign Students and Introduction to Cultural Studies, enhances the programme's appeal and competitiveness in the education market.

Overall, flexible multi-level financial planning (SAR pp. 33–39) ensures the programme's ability to fully implement its study process, maintain quality, and support ongoing development. However, continued monitoring of enrollment and drop-out trends is crucial to adapt to potential changes in the near future and maintain the programme's financial sustainability.

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

The resources, materials and provision of the study programme correspond to the conditions of its implementation and achievement of the learning outcomes.

Strengths:

- 1) Well-equipped and accessible on-site and on-line learning environment.
- 2) Stable financial provisions.
- 3) Diverse and easily accessible library resources, including subscribed databases, and study materials in classrooms.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Practice and quality of MOODLE e-learning environment usage differs among teaching staff members.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The resources, materials and provision of the study programme correspond to the conditions of its implementation and achievement of the learning outcomes.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. The Bachelor's study programme is led by 28 lecturers, 50 percent of whom are elected to the permanent staff. The elected members include 9 professors and associate professors. The majority of the full-time lecturers have a doctorate. According to SAR p. 104, 18 lecturers, i.e. 64% of all lecturers in the programme, have a doctorate. 4 of them are doctoral students and 1 is a doctoral

student in Linguistics and Literary Studies. The numbers presented meet the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the third paragraph of the first part of Article 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which states that "the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited optional part shall be carried out by not less than five professors and associate professors together, who have been elected to academic positions at the respective higher education institution". The SAR contains an officially signed RTU confirmation on this subject. Considering that 50 percent of the staff are elected, it should be noted that RTU LA relies on part-time or visiting professors to provide expertise and skills to programme students. This is not necessarily a negative, as guest lecturers include locally and internationally known language and culture specialists, translators and poets (SAR p. 104). Analysis of the CVs submitted left no doubt that the lecturers on the programme are experts in their field. Their qualifications make it possible to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. The teaching staff are very committed to the implementation of the programme and are committed to its development, as the expert group was able to see for themselves at the on-site meeting. The majority of the teaching staff have an adequate level of English and some of the teaching staff have very good knowledge of German, Spanish, French and Russian. The study programme includes teachers with practical experience in various companies and/or in the public sector, which is an advantage for the implementation of the study programme.

2.4.2. According to SAR p. 105, the changes in the composition of the teaching staff of the Bachelor's study programme can be attributed to several factors: the introduction of new courses, the expansion of the teaching staff, adjustments to the guest lecturers and the integration of teaching staff from the former "Baltic Philology, Culture and Communication" degree programme into the "European Linguistics and Cultural Studies" study programme. The changes in the composition of the teaching staff during the reporting period can be summarised as positive. Several lecturers have gained higher qualifications and have been elected to higher academic positions, and some doctoral students have participated in the implementation of the study programme. In addition, guest lecturers have been recruited, including German and Spanish native speakers, which is an advantage given the specialisations of the Bachelor's programme, as well as Fulbright guest lecturers, which demonstrates a very competitive level of teaching. The core staff of the study programme is supplemented by teaching staff from other faculties - the Faculty of Science and Engineering, the Faculty of Management and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Pedagogy and Social Work. The latter measure has a positive effect on the interdisciplinary aspect of the study programme. Several important internal RTU rules are available to manage the teaching staff composition issues such as the Procedure for the election of scientific assistants, researchers, and leading researchers to academic positions at the RTU, the Procedure of Involvement and Employment of Visiting Academic Personnel at RTU, Regulation on Election to Academic Positions of former Liepaja University and Regulation on Election of Professors and Associate Professors, Evaluation Procedure and Councils of Professors at the former Liepaja University.

In light of all this, it can be concluded that RTU LA is successfully taking steps to manage changes in the composition of the teaching staff. As stated above in chapter 2.4.1., the numbers of teaching staff meet the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the third paragraph of the first part of Article 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. According to the SAR annexes provided to the expert group, the academics of RTU LA involved in the Bachelor's programme have impressive publication records and whose bibliographies formally fulfil the requirements of the law. Each member of the academic staff of RTU LA involved in the Bachelor's programme has published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions,

in the last six years, thus fulfilling the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. Despite this, there are not enough internationally cited academic publications. With all due respect to the tradition of Latvian linguistics to publish in Latvian, RTU LA should consider administrative and financial measures to make the important research visible to the European research community by publishing more in English. The strategies and results for publication differ among the representatives of the teaching staff – according to CV's provided in SAR among the members of the teaching staff there are examples of publishing regularly in the international peer reviewed journals, there are examples of publishing mainly in national and local academic journals, and also there are cases when publishing is dominated by articles written for popular media or CV's dominated by the entries of artistic achievements.

According to SAR, teaching, research, and administrative workload, and the intensity is generally reasonable. The exception is some academic staff members who either have a significant overload on some of the areas, e. g. teaching, administration, or research or even in multiple of those fields. According to on-site interviews some of the members of teaching staff carry a disproportionate workload as lecturers, and academic publishing is not included and has to be added to an almost full workload which consists of lecturing. The evening of the time spent in lecturing would be a solution for improvement of the possibilities to publish and even the number and quality of publications delivered by members of the teaching staff. Given the lecturing workload for some of the members of the teaching staff, possible burnout should be addressed as a serious issue.

The typical solution lies in two areas: re-planning the dissemination of workload among actual staff members, thus relieving the overloaded employees and purposefully attracting new members of either teacher, research, and administrative staff. The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses.

2.4.5. The teaching staff participates in the scientific research proposals and carries out mutual research projects and programmes. There is strong cooperation in place with several academic and research-based institutions, some of them are among the leaders in the respective fields in Latvia. The study field has a history of effective partnerships with both domestic and international collaborators. It has been among one of the priorities of the institution. The study programmes of the study field and research behind it is developed in cooperation representing both scientific and professional backgrounds. The interaction between the members of the teaching staff also takes place on the basis of cooperation by forms of mutual research projects, development of study programmes, board meetings and informal ties. The knowledge and skills acquired during the collaboration are used in the development of the programme and to improve both the research directions and the study programmes. Study programme development and study quality improvement are at the forefront of the mutual cooperation policy. The preparation of the final thesis in the study field is backed by the systematic approach to the programme and strong involvement of the academics which also indicates the quality and mutual collaboration of the teaching staff.

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

The teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme meet national requirements, ensuring that the programme's aims and learning outcomes are effectively achieved. They are dedicated to both the delivery and ongoing development of the programme. Changes in the teaching staff do not adversely impact the quality or compliance of the Bachelor's programme, on the contrary, effective management of these changes enhances programme quality and enriches

the student experience. Additionally, all faculty members have published in peer-reviewed journals, including international ones, meeting the standards set by the national law.

Strengths:

- 1) The composition and qualifications of the teaching staff exceed the statutory national requirements and ensure the smooth running of the Bachelor's programme.
- 2) Local visiting staff contribute significantly to the delivery of the programme and enrich the student experience.
- 3) The involvement of staff from other faculties has a positive effect on the interdisciplinary aspect of the study programme.
- 4) Staff with experience in the labour market contribute to the applied and practical knowledge in the study programme.

Weaknesses:

- 1) There are not enough internationally cited academic publications.
- 2) Some members of the teaching staff carry a disproportionate workload as lecturers.
- 3) Amount and quality of publishing differ among the representatives of the teaching staff.

### **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 the teaching staff complies with the conditions for the implementation of the Bachelor's study programme and requirements of the regulatory framework, despite the low number of publications in top-level international outlets.

### **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

Annex "III.3.2.Compliance with the National Standard for Academic Education.docx" generally confirms that the study programme complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 240 "Noteikumi par valsts akadēmiskās izglītības standartu". Civil and Environmental protection course is present in the programme (3 ECTS amount).

- 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

Attached study course descriptions (“3.2. Study course descriptions.docx.pdf”) are prepared in Latvian. Descriptions comply with regulations set forth in 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 provided Diploma sample (“EVKS\_diploma un diploma pielikumu paraugi.pdf”) complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 202 “Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus 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

9 professors and associate professors elected at RTU participate in the implementation of the academic study programme. (SAR 3.4.1)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Attached resumes of staff (“Academic staff\_CV\_ENG.pdf”) and confirmation (“Confirmation - knowledge of the state language.edoc”) verifies that state language proficiency is compliant with Cabinet Regulation No. 733 “Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi”.

- 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

Sample of attached study agreement ( "Sample of study agreements.zip") complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi".

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Attached contracts ("Cooperation agreements on continuing studies at another university.pdf") confirms that the institution provides the possibility to continue studies within the following options -

[1]University of Daugavpils academic bachelor programme "Eastern European Culture and Business Relations". Offered study programme is reasonably comparable to ABSP "European Language and Culture Studies".

[2]Latvian Academy of Culture academic bachelor programme "Arts" subprogramme "Intercultural relations" within specializations of "Latvia-Great Britain", "Latvia-Germany" and "Latvia-France". However, as of now there is no specialization of "Latvia-Great Britain" in Latvian Academy of Culture instead there is specialization "Latvia-anglophone countries", therefore contracts must be updated.

- 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

RTU confirmation ("Confirmation - on compensation for losses.edoc") states, that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Study programme complies with regulatory enactments, however provided contract on opportunities to continue education in another study programme in case of programme closure must be updated.

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

The programme has undergone significant changes since its accreditation in 2013, enhancing its quality, competitiveness, and alignment with labour market demands. Major updates include revised admission criteria, and a stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary development, catering to a diverse student body, including international participants. The programme offers multiple language specialisations such as French, German, Spanish, and Latvian, equipping students with essential linguistic, research, and professional skills. Despite a high dropout rate, the programme attracts students by providing a strong foundation in language, culture, and humanities, with pathways to further studies. Programme, while strong in many areas, faces several challenges. The complexity and somewhat unbalanced distribution of ECTS credits, along with its national focus, limit its broader international appeal. The programme offers limited subjects in English and lacks emphasis on managerial and entrepreneurial skills, which are crucial for today's job market. Additionally, there is a noticeable need for more structured career preparation, internships, and collaboration with companies for Bachelor theses. The absence of Digital Humanities topics and insufficient opportunities for students to individualise their studies further impact the programme's modern relevance. Moreover, student feedback is not consistently integrated into programme improvements, and the usage of the MOODLE e-learning platform varies in quality among teaching staff. The study programme meets to a great extent the specified requirements and shows clear positive changes in the reporting period and demonstrates future development potential. The weaknesses identified have no significant impact on the overall effectiveness and competitiveness of the study programme and can be remedied in the coming years. Addressing these areas could significantly enhance the programme's overall effectiveness and competitiveness, therefore the programme is evaluated as "good".

**Strengths:**

- 1) Diverse language specialisations and strong foundation in Language and Culture.
- 2) Well-structured and interrelated content of the study programme.
- 3) Well composed and competent teaching staff.
- 4) Stable financial provisions and appropriate resources.

**Weaknesses:**

- 1) The programme is reaching the limits of its national orientation.
- 2) The ECTS distribution needs fine-tuning.
- 3) The number of internationally cited academic publications is low.
- 4) The modern relevance of the programme is impaired by some disadvantages.

**Evaluation of the study programme "European Language and Culture Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## 2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "European Language and Culture Studies"

### Short-term recommendations

- 1) Measures should be taken to adjust the structure of the study programme and to consolidate the most important courses into larger modules with more credits in order to counteract the unbalanced distribution of ECTS credits.
- 2) The number of students dropping out must be addressed to prevent the numbers from becoming unsustainable in the long term.
- 3) Promotion of the programme requires a well thought out plan or strategy involving students, alumni, faculty and stakeholders.
- 4) Contract on opportunities to continue education in another study programme in case of programme closure features study programme must be updated.

### Long-term recommendations

- 1) A stronger integration of global topics and intercultural competences is recommended to increase the attractiveness of the study programme and prepare students for a globalised working world.
- 2) Further efforts are recommended to internationalise the core of the programme and improve ambitions for global publications to increase its competitiveness and visibility.
- 3) The study programme should focus more on the development of management, leadership and entrepreneurial skills.
- 4) Consider administrative and financial measures to make the important research RTU LA conducts visible to the European research community by publishing more in English.
- 5) Students should be given more opportunities to individualise their studies, e.g. through individualised study plans in which credit is given for study outcomes achieved through formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- 6) It is recommended that student feedback is consistently taken into account.
- 7) Introduce more courses in English to raise the international profile of the programme.
- 8) Strengthen cooperation with public institutions and business enterprises in the Liepāja region and beyond to provide students with better opportunities to write more bachelor theses on topics closely related to the needs of the labour market.
- 9) Consider introducing internships to raise the applied profile of the programme and expose students to professional situations before they are employed.

## II - "Writing Studies" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Writing Studies" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. According to the SAR, the academic master study programme “Writing Studies” stands out as the sole humanities-based postgraduate option in Latvia that integrates academic knowledge on creative writing and research with creative skill development. Unlike creative writing courses offered by schools, the Latvian Writers’ Union, literary academies, or individual writers, this MA provides a foundational core in humanities while fostering creative abilities. The programme’s growing number of applicants and students highlights its economic and social relevance. Students come from across Latvia, from different BA backgrounds, not only in Humanities, thus with a strong representation from Riga and its surrounding areas. The programme attracts individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, many of whom are already employed in various fields upon entry. These fields include journalism, publishing, media, cultural management, theatre, museums, NGOs, schools, and libraries. The employment rate for graduates is notably high, with many having embarked on successful careers in the Latvian cultural sector, including literature (prose, poetry, children’s literature), drama, criticism, literary translation, research, book publishing, and screenwriting. For example, HEI’s self-analysis shows employment data, indicating 77.8% of graduates were employed in 2020, a figure that rose to 100% in 2021, although the impact of Covid-19 on the cultural sector should be noted.

To ensure that the programme aligns with market demands, ongoing engagement with graduates is essential, and RTU LA has probably the most successful strategy of graduates’ engagement from the 3 programmes expert group had the chance to evaluate. As stated in the SAR, RTU LA actively tracks their graduates’ career progress and gathers feedback to assess the programme’s relevance. Indeed, as seen from the conversation with MA students and this programme’s graduates, this process of “word of mouth” promotion and recommendation is really proactive. They also noted that their feedback had been considered in subsequent programme adjustments. Even more, each year this MA programme is adjusted according to a diverse body of applicants, coming from different BA (or primary MA) fields, which is again applaudable. Alumni surveys have been conducted regularly since then, with increasing participation over the years. For instance, in 2018/2019, twelve graduates participated in the survey, all expressing a willingness to recommend the programme. Although the number of respondents has fluctuated in recent years, satisfaction with the programme remains high. Specific suggestions for improvements, gathered from surveys, often align with student feedback and have been used to make adjustments to the programme. Consistently, as stated in the report and supported by the survey statistics, alumni have shown a readiness to recommend this MA programme, furthermore, with teaching staff referees at entrance interviews corroborating these endorsements.

In view of the above information, the content of the programme is fully in line with the study field.

2.1.2. The "Writing Studies" master's programme covers a wide array of disciplines, including creative writing, technical writing, literary theory, cultural studies, dramatic theory, rhetoric, and more. This interdisciplinary approach allows students to engage with diverse forms of writing, ranging from fiction and poetry to academic and professional writing. A key innovative feature of the programme is its ability to integrate traditional literary studies with contemporary practices and technologies, ensuring that students not only gain expertise in classical writing techniques but are also well-versed in digital media and emerging communication forms. This broad-based training prepares graduates for a wide range of careers. The programme aligns closely with Creative Writing-oriented MA programmes, placing a strong emphasis on originality and personal voice. Students are encouraged to develop their unique writing styles and experiment with various genres and forms. The inclusion of workshops and peer reviews fosters a collaborative learning environment, offering constructive feedback essential for building professional portfolios and networks within literary and publishing sectors. In addition, the programme frequently incorporates practical elements like internships and project-based learning, bridging academic study with real-world experiences. This practical focus enhances graduates' preparedness to navigate the professional landscape. However,

feedback from students and graduates highlights concerns related to the internationalisation strategy of the higher education institution (HEI). There is a desire for greater engagement with visiting teaching staff, more residential programmes, and enhanced collaboration with sectors beyond academia. In terms of curriculum compliance with the relevant study field, "Writing Studies" aligns with the broader scheme of "Languages and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes."

The programme is carefully designed to meet the requirements of the field, ensuring coherence between the programme code, degree level, professional qualifications, and admission criteria. The aims, objectives, and learning outcomes are well-structured to meet both academic and professional qualifications. Furthermore, the duration and structure of the programme, including the availability of different implementation options, have been evaluated as useful for providing flexible pathways to meet the diverse needs of students. This adaptability, coupled with continuous curriculum updates, ensures that the programme remains relevant and effective in preparing students for careers in an ever-evolving, digitally dynamic field.

The programme title "Writing Studies" – although it could have been just "Writing" or "Creative Writing" – was selected to encapsulate the comprehensive scope of the curriculum and the degree awarded (Master's Degree of Humanities in Literature and Linguistic Studies). It covers a broad spectrum that includes literary and linguistic disciplines, as well as inter-related fields of humanities, arts and social sciences, which is especially applaudable. The focus areas in this programme thus encompass various aspects of writing, including: writing as an art form, the craft of literature and artistic expression, study of written works across diverse fields such as science, technology, journalism, and the arts; style and language as a primary tool for creating and conveying texts, etc.

The programme aims to provide individuals with a robust foundation in writing, allowing them to develop personalised goals that support their future professional and creative endeavours. This alignment ensures that the programme adheres to the broader objectives of the "Languages and Culture Studies" strand as its possible predecessor. As it is obvious from the curriculum, but also from conversations with students and graduates, development of skills is more than crucial in this MA, e.g., emphasising research skills, practical competencies, and creative abilities needed in the writing sector. This encourages active and independent participation of students, adapting study methods to individual academic and professional growth, and creating a culture of self-education and professional development, but, on the other hand – which was often emphasised by students – it creates a creative eco-system where they work together on different projects, even with other departments, thus preserving their own diversity. The programme's structure includes both compulsory and optional components. The compulsory courses develop essential skills in text production, literary and cultural analysis, creative thinking, and research methodology. The optional courses offer advanced skills in creative writing (prose, poetry, drama), translation of fiction, literary editing, and journalism, guided by field professionals. The only thing emphasised as lacking by the students is more contact with different institutions from the labour market, which, in their opinion, would give them more practical soft skills for future writing profession, whether they pursue it inside of the institution, e.g., theatre, or as self-employed professionals.

The programme is designed to achieve its goals and outcomes within the planned duration of 2 years and 120 credit points. During this period, graduates will demonstrate advanced knowledge by gaining a comprehensive understanding of literature, linguistics, cultural processes, and the role of language in writing. Graduates will independently formulate and critically analyse complex issues, integrate knowledge from various disciplines, and contribute to the advancement of writing and cultural studies. Graduates will apply their skills in both creative and critical writing, making significant contributions to literary research and engaging in literary creativity tailored to their individual abilities and goals. Graduates will exhibit professional competence by taking initiative, making decisions, and finding innovative solutions, whether working independently or as part of a team. Additionally, graduates will have the opportunity to direct and specialise their acquired skills

according to their professional interests in writing.

As most of them enter this programme from the position of self-employed or employed professionals, and this is usually their second MA, their motivation is really high. In this sense, the entrance procedure is also tailor-made for them, which is applaudable. As stated in HEI's report, to be admitted, applicants must have a background in humanities, arts, social and humanitarian sciences, information and communication sciences, or educational sciences. Admission thus includes an entrance test with an interview to assess suitability based on prior education, relevant experience, and future goals in writing studies. The selection process considers academic performance and the applicant's potential for success in the programme. This means that the programme is very open, towards diverse applicants from different backgrounds, which definitely innovates and modernises this MA, and will continue to do so in the future. From the conversation with graduates and employers, furthermore, expert group realised how – in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape – MA programmes in Writing Studies hold significant relevance, equipping graduates with essential skills that are increasingly valuable across various fields. The explosion of digital media has created a high demand for skilled writers capable of producing compelling content for websites, social media, blogs, and digital publications. MA in Writing Studies prepares students to create high-quality, engaging content tailored to diverse digital platforms. Moreover, effective copywriting is crucial for successful marketing campaigns.

Graduates of Writing Studies programmes learn to write persuasive and impactful messages that resonate with audiences, enhancing brand communication and consumer engagement. As the volume of written content increases, the need for precise proofreading and editing has never been greater. These programmes cultivate meticulous attention to detail, enabling graduates to ensure clarity, accuracy, and consistency in various types of written material. The media landscape is also dynamic, with traditional journalism evolving to include digital and multimedia formats. Writing Studies graduates are well-equipped to adapt to these changes, contributing to investigative journalism, feature writing, and multimedia reporting. Additionally, the focus on creative writing within these programmes fosters innovation and artistic expression, preparing graduates for careers in fiction writing, scriptwriting, and literary criticism, and contributing to the cultural and creative industries. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary nature of MA programmes in Writing Studies supports advanced research skills, which are essential for academic careers or professional roles in research institutions, cultural organisations, and policy-making bodies.

Hence, this study program is designed with a clear interdisciplinary approach, aligning itself with contemporary cultural developments. It integrates traditional literary studies with complementary fields such as linguistics, art, philosophy, and information technology. Under the guidance of highly qualified academic staff, this model reflects current trends and offers students a well-rounded, innovative educational experience. A key focus of the program is to cultivate research skills, professional-practical expertise, and creative abilities—skills that are highly valued in the modern labor market, particularly in the field of writing. Another important aspect of the program is its emphasis on student engagement. It encourages active, independent participation, tailoring study methods to support both academic and professional development. This hands-on, flexible approach fosters an environment in which students are empowered to take charge of their own learning and growth. Furthermore, the program motivates students to continue their self-education and professional development after graduation, fostering a lifelong commitment to learning and career advancement. As a result of this well-rounded curriculum, students develop both professional writing skills and broader, transversal competencies. These include global awareness, research capabilities, innovation, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement.

Graduates emerge from the program with a deep understanding of contemporary cultural and writing processes, and with language as their essential tool, they develop advanced skills in communication and writing. They also gain insight into how literature intersects with other disciplines like art, philosophy, and communication. Critically, students are equipped to analyse

complex issues in the humanities, particularly in the domain of writing. The program fosters an ability to integrate knowledge from various branches of the humanities, encouraging contributions to new knowledge in literary and cultural studies. Alongside these intellectual skills, students also hone practical abilities in creative and critical writing, engaging in literary creativity and research according to their personal goals. The program not only prepares students for individual work but also for collaborative environments. They develop leadership skills, take initiative, and find creative solutions, whether working independently or as part of a team. Moreover, the flexible structure of the curriculum allows students to continue refining their competencies after graduation, guiding their professional specialisation in writing as they pursue future career goals. This ensures that they are well-prepared to navigate the evolving profession in writing and related fields.

2.1.3. Since the accreditation of the study field "Languages and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes" in 2013, the core objectives and principles of the Academic Master study programme "Writing Studies" (code 45226) have largely remained consistent. Nevertheless, minor adjustments have been made to reflect the evolving educational environment, student and graduate feedback, and the latest trends in higher education planning. These changes, as asserted by the self-assessment report, also align with current Latvian and EU policy documents. The revisions made to the programmes aim to enhance the quality and competitiveness of the programmes, which is clearly visible in MA structure. Although at first glance, expert group got an impression that this innovative MA curriculum is rather traditional and conservative, after beneficial conversations with students and graduates, have realised that the content of the programme is in deep accordance with the students' needs and interest, mainly because they are coming from different fields of humanities, and even from dissociated fields of law. This means that the programme is not only up to date and competitive, but it is also tailor-made to students' interests and their fields of work (most of the students of this master programme are already employed in cultural and creative industry, different cultural and education institutions, or self-employed as writers, journalists, dramaturgs, etc.). Furthermore, this MA has been changed in order to adapt to shifts in national higher education offerings and labour market demands, with a focus on interdisciplinary development, which has, evidently, increased students' enrolment and satisfaction with the study programme. Almost all students praise this programme as well as its teaching staff, mainly because of its diverse structure, which gives them knowledge in different fields of theory, storytelling, prose narrative, dramaturgy, poetic expression, etc. It also gives them the opportunity to cooperate with other programmes, i.e., different art MA's at the same HEI, that way learning to collaborate in a contemporary group-oriented eco-systems. Firstly, to improve job prospects for graduates and to streamline studies within a single field at RTU LA, content from the "Latvian Philology" MA programme was integrated. The programme's specialisations and elective section (B) were expanded to include new modules: "Theory and Practice of Linguistics" (19 CP), "Latvian Literature and Culture Research" (10 CP), "Latvian Language Research" (10 CP), and "Journalism" (10 CP). Consequently, the "Latvian Philology" programme was discontinued. Afterwards, to broaden specialisation opportunities and the scope of the MA programme, the elective section (B) was enriched with the introduction of the module Translation of Fiction. Additionally, preparations were made to include the module Dramaturgy in the 2017/2018, which was, previously developed as an elective, later on officially incorporated into this MA. In 2022, in response to student feedback and accreditation expert recommendations, the programme transitioned from a modular system to offering all Part B courses as free electives.

During the accreditation process, the programme code and degree were updated, and the degree title was revised from MA of Humanities in Writing Studies to MA in Humanities Studies in Literature and Linguistics. Updating MA curricula is vital in maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of higher education programmes. As the field of academic knowledge and industry demands evolves, academic programmes must adapt to ensure they provide students with the most current and

applicable skills. Changes in curriculum not only reflect advancements in the field but also respond to emerging trends and needs within the profession. In the context of MA studies, such updates often involve integrating new modules, revising course content, and aligning with current research and industry practices, which is all visible in this MA programme. Students emphasise that they indeed gain specialised knowledge that can help them in their professional engagement, and the quality of this programme is constantly improving, especially because of diverse candidates that enrol it – often by oral recommendation. This responsiveness ensures that graduates are well-equipped to meet the challenges of their chosen fields and contribute meaningfully to their professions of copywriters, journalists, professional writers, dramaturgs and directors, playwrights, translators, etc. Additionally, curriculum updates can enhance the programme's attractiveness to prospective students by offering cutting-edge content and opportunities for specialisation.

This specific feature of the “Writing Studies” academic master study programme was emphasised by the employers as well, praising it to be versatile and different from other MA’s of this HEI. MA programmes in Writing Studies and Creative Writing are particularly noteworthy for their innovative nature. These programmes are designed to foster advanced skills in writing, critical thinking, and creative expression, essential in today’s diverse and rapidly changing media landscape. Expert group has noticed from the MA curriculum analysis that intermedia dramaturgy and digital writing courses are missing in this programme, so experts strongly advise for them to be included, because this would ultimately make this MA even more attractive.

2.1.4. Statistical data on the students of the respective study programme, according to the HEI’s self-assessment report, including trends in student enrolment and the factors affecting these changes, is analysed across various study forms. For the academic master study programme “Writing Studies”, which is exclusively available in full-time, on-site mode and conducted in Latvian, there is clear evidence of growing and stable demand, underscoring its competitiveness within the humanities and arts sector. The dynamics of student enrolment, as stated in the report, shows notable trends: in the academic year 2013/2014, there were 8 enrolled students, increasing to 23 in 2022/2023 and reaching 28 in 2023/2024. The total number of students grew from 20 in 2013/2014 to 46 in 2022/2023. The number of fee-paying students has been relatively low, ranging from 0 to 3 per academic year, while the number of graduates increased from 5 in 2013/2014 to 19 in 2022/2023. Attrition rates have varied between 0 and 6, with reasons for dropout including increased work responsibilities, changes in family situations, and deteriorating health.

The rise in master study programme student numbers is attributed to high satisfaction with the programme's unique orientation in Latvia. But, in conversation with students, graduates, and even employers, experts have realised that it is not only because of that. Hence, the engagement of teaching staff and their individual approach to project-cantered syllabi is of utmost importance, as well as great flexibility of the programme, which can easily adjust to different professional directions, including editing, proofreading, translation, copywriting, dramaturgy, journalism, content-creating, etc. Centralised surveys conducted at the end of each academic year reflect this satisfaction (see: Annex 2.2.4 of the Direction Report "Analysis of the Results of the Graduate-Student-Employer Surveys") has consistently shown high satisfaction levels, with approximately 97% of students being fully or partially satisfied with the programme’s choice and content.

Students value the programme’s uniqueness, its ability to enhance their academic and creative skills, and its comprehensive and practical content. For example, strengths highlighted by students, as seen from the conversations during expert on-site visit, include the experienced and knowledgeable faculty, the interdisciplinary approach, the diverse subject offerings, and the integration of knowledge and creativity. This only means, in experts opinion, that the programme's ability to accommodate graduates from various fields, its well-structured course planning, and the balance between lectures and independent work, are all essential tools for sustaining this programme’s uniqueness. However, some small weaknesses have been identified. These include an

imbalance between theory and practice, a lack of creative courses, certain teaching styles, and the scope of some courses, such as literary editing, etc., which is again probably connected with a problem of ECTS, aforementioned. Suggestions for improvement include increasing creative activities inside of the local institutions, introducing internships in publishing, museums, theatres, etc., expanding practical critical writing courses through one or two-week long residential programmes, reassessing course relevance and balancing it with ECTS, or even regrouping it into bigger modules. Collaboration with employers, including cultural and literary organisations like the Latvian Writers' Union and various publishing houses, has contributed to the programme's success. Positive feedback from the industry, both formal and informal, is crucial for promoting the programme – and so has been stated in the employers meeting during expert on-site visit. Nevertheless, with no dedicated resources invested in promotional activities, this will be hard, so, maybe, some extra-finances could be found through local institutions.

In experts opinion, several factors can contribute to student dissatisfaction and dropout rates, in general. Mismatched expectations between students and the programme can lead to dissatisfaction if the programme does not meet students' initial hopes. This is definitely not the case here, which is applaudable. Secondly, inadequate support services, such as insufficient academic advising or mental health resources, could also negatively impact students' experiences, leading to study-withdrawals. As experts have seen, the relations between teaching staff and MA students of this programme are based on almost individual approach, so advising is probably done in a proper manner.

Nevertheless, an overly demanding workload might overwhelm students, especially when balancing academic responsibilities with personal commitments, which was emphasised by a couple of students. In our opinion, this is perfectly normal on the MA level, especially here, where most of the students already contribute to the labour market, either in institutions, fully employed, or self-employed. Addressing these issues through regular feedback and continuous programme improvements – e.g., finding a way to validate their individual work in a form of ECTS – is essential for maintaining and enhancing student satisfaction and reducing dropout rates, as well. The first alumni survey, conducted in June 2013, included graduates from the summer session of 2012. Out of three respondents, two were generally satisfied with the programme, and one was completely satisfied. At the time of the survey, one graduate was not employed, while the other two were working in roles related to their qualifications (a journalist and a literary editor). All respondents found the knowledge gained through the programme beneficial for their careers and were more than willing to recommend it to prospective students and collaborate with RTU LA in the future.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

The academic master's programme "Writing Studies" (code 45226) has evolved significantly since its accreditation in 2013, maintaining a strong connection between its core objectives and the ever-changing demands of both the educational sector and the professional writing industry. This programme exemplifies the thoughtful interrelation between its title, degree, learning outcomes, and admission requirements, ensuring a cohesive educational pathway for students. The programme's primary aim of providing high-quality, relevant education has been consistently supported by its flexible structure and adaptability, which are essential for meeting the needs of both students and employers in today's dynamic landscape. One of the most notable strengths of the programme is its responsiveness to stakeholder feedback, particularly from students and graduates. This feedback has guided the programme's alignment with national and EU educational standards, ensuring that the curriculum remains innovative and adaptable. Such an iterative process

has allowed the programme to cater to students from various academic and professional backgrounds, fostering an interdisciplinary approach that is in line with industry trends. Although initially perceived as more traditional, the programme has successfully modernised itself through strategic updates, such as integrating modules from the "Latvian Philology" programme and offering new specialisations. The transition from a modular system to the inclusion of free electives and updates to the degree title demonstrate the programme's commitment to staying competitive and relevant. This evolution ensures that the aims and objectives of the programme remain aligned with the desired learning outcomes and market expectations.

The duration and scope of the programme, including the various implementation options, are well-structured and justified. Offering both full-time and part-time study options, the programme provides flexibility that accommodates diverse student needs. The programme's interdisciplinary focus on cultural and creative sectors has not only attracted more students but has also resulted in high levels of graduate employability and satisfaction.

Despite its many strengths, there are areas identified for further improvement. Feedback indicates a need for greater internationalisation and practical exposure, including more opportunities for collaboration with industry professionals and residential programmes. Additionally, the absence of courses in intermedia dramaturgy and digital writing highlights areas where the programme could expand to remain competitive and comprehensive. Addressing these gaps could significantly enhance the programme's appeal, especially in light of the growing importance of digital media in writing. Overall, the MA in Writing Studies offers a well-rounded and dynamic curriculum that equips students with essential skills in writing, literary and cultural analysis, and creative thinking. The balance between academic rigor and practical experience ensures that graduates are well-prepared for a range of careers in fields such as journalism, creative writing, and media. The programme's continuous adaptation, informed by stakeholder feedback and market demands, positions it as a leading choice for students seeking advanced studies in writing. By addressing the identified gaps and enhancing its international and practical components, the programme can continue to build on its success and its uniqueness in the field.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The study programme has evolved significantly since its 2013 accreditation, adapting to educational and industry demands.
- 2) The programme integrates feedback from students and graduates.
- 3) It combines interdisciplinary learning and practical application, enhancing relevance and appeal.
- 4) Positive changes, including new specialisations and the shift to free electives, reflect a commitment to maintaining competitiveness.
- 5) The programme's growth in enrollment, high satisfaction, and employment rates underline its success and effectiveness.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a need for increased internationalisation and practical exposure, such as more industry interaction and residential programmes.
- 2) The lack of courses in intermedia dramaturgy and digital writing indicates areas for potential expansion.
- 3) Initial perceptions of the programme as traditional may hinder its appeal despite curriculum updates.
- 4) Feedback suggests that more focus is needed on practical exposure to industry professionals.
- 5) The programme could benefit from expanding its offerings to include emerging areas within writing studies.

## 2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

## Analysis

2.2.1. The content of the Master's study programme "Writing Studies" provides students with a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and competences in the fields of humanities, literature and linguistics. The programme awards students a Master's degree in Humanities Studies in Literature and Linguistics. The recent change in the degree to be awarded is logical. The structure of the programme (120 ECTS) includes all obligatory parts: Compulsory Part A (63 ECTS), Restricted Elective Part B (24 ECTS), State Examination (Master's Thesis 30 ECTS), Free Elective Part C (3 ECTS) and complies with the State Standard for Academic Education (Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 May 2014 No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education").

The study programme consists of 38 study courses, of which 19 are in Part A, 15 in Part B and 4 in Part C. The interrelationship between the compulsory parts is logical and complementary, but the distribution of ECTS credits in the programme is somewhat unbalanced. Practically all courses are allocated 3 ECTS, regardless of their type. The expert group believes that updating the curriculum and consolidating the most important courses into larger modules with more credits would be a logical option for the development of the programme. Dedicating more hours to the most important courses would invest in students' future prospects.

The structure of the programme is interrelated. The mapping of the study courses for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme is appropriate (Annex 8). According to SAR p. 117, it enables a gradual progression from the theoretical and analytical (research) orientation of the general humanities (literature and linguistics) and the field of writing to the acquisition and development of professional specialisation and creative skills in the field. The programme offers students a good balance of theoretical knowledge and practical skills as both theoretical and specialisation courses include up-to-date content alongside knowledge of the fundamentals of the field.

The content of the programme reflects the needs of the labour market – Master's students have the opportunity to acquire professional skills in the fields of digital humanities, social communication, text editing, journalism, advertising, text stylistics, translation, academic writing, poetry writing, etc. A commendable decision is to supplement the regular courses of the study programme with extracurricular events such as lectures at the Seaside Literary Academy or the annual study trip to the Ventspils International House of Writers and Translators.

2.2.2. A prerequisite for the successful awarding of a Master's degree in "Writing Studies" is the completion and defence of the Master's thesis. Students are required to undertake an innovative piece of research based on developments and findings in the study field, develop a reasoned theoretical basis for the research and conduct an independent study of the chosen research problem. As indicated in SAR on p. 119, the Master's thesis may consist of an original literary work or a literary translation or fragments thereof, supplemented by a theoretical rationale or analysis. Looking at the six Master's theses submitted and their bibliographies, it can be concluded that they are based on the achievements and findings of the respective field.

Based on the results of the analysis of the course descriptions, the titles of the teaching staff's publications, the research projects and the conference presentations, the expert group concludes that the Master's programme is linked to the latest developments in research in the literature, culture and linguistics.

2.2.3. The Master's study programme, like the Bachelor's study programme in the same study field is currently in the process of converting to the ECTS credit system, which is known as a student-centred system for the accumulation and transfer of credits. According to SAR p. 120, students' independent work (papers, micro-research, creative work, team projects, etc.) plays an important role in the Master's programme. This assertion is confirmed when analysing the course descriptions

(Appendix 10). The study programme envisages various students' independent work methods as well as active and cooperative study implementation methods that are specified in the course descriptions (e.g. review and analysis of papers, publications, monographs, Practical work on word binding and punctuation problems, oral social text analysis, creation and analysis of a text card index, comparison and analysis of poems, creating new words, creating glossaries, creation of individual characters, their gallery, plot development, preparation of stage texts, short film screenplays, creative trainings, discussion, oral presentations etc.). There is no overarching study philosophy or prescribed guidelines for teaching methodology. Lecturers are free to design course content and choose teaching methods. The methods applied in this study programme correspond to the essential provisions of a student-oriented studies and enable students to achieve the intended study outcomes and reflect on their performance. It is commendable to apply principles of choosing specialised courses based on the experience of students' creative activity and development ideas of individual creating and professional work. The student-centred approach is also integrated into the assessment system. As indicated in this report section 1.1.5, summative assessment is complemented by the use of formative assessment (SAR p. 27) to contribute to a student-centred approach and to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses. Continuous cumulative assessment (intermediate examinations) contributes to the creation and provision of feedback. The SAR describes seven student-centred principles (p. 122) followed in the assessment of the course and the programme as a whole. Students can get feedback from their professors not only in class or individual consultations, but also via e-mail or online tools, as well as in the Moodle environment. The SAR states on p. 121 that the interests of the students are taken into account in the organisation of the study process. In this respect, the SAR focuses on the flexible organisation of studies. However, considering that the student-centred approach should focus on the needs of the individual student, little information is provided on the individualisation of studies (students with disabilities, individualised study plans, assessment and crediting of study outcomes achieved through formal as well as non-formal and informal learning). During the on-site meetings with the expert group, the programme students indicated that there is still scope to tailor the programme more to the needs of the students. There is room for improvement regarding career support for students, enhancing networking options to provide students with better employment options.

2.2.4. Not applicable. The study programme "Writing Studies" does not include an internship. The introduction of internships could raise the applied profile of the programme to a higher level and expose students to professional situations before they are employed, especially given the creative nature of the programme.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. A sufficient amount of 30 ECTS (840 contact hours) is allocated for writing the Master thesis. According to the course descriptions (Appendix 10), the courses "Introduction to Writing Studies", "Scientific Research and Academic Writing" support students formulating the topic, object, aims, research question, tasks, identifying sources and literature to be used, methodological approach for a master's thesis, developing the initial draft of the introduction for a master's thesis and preparing a presentation on the scientific research corresponding to the chosen topic of a master's thesis. The writing of the Master's thesis is supported not only by the supervisor, but also by the programme director, the professors of the study programme who foresee the integration of certain research aspects in their course. Master's thesis is usually written in Latvian judging by the six Master's theses provided. The typical volume of a Master's thesis is 60-65 pages. The topics of students' theses reflect the main research areas of the study programme and deal with literary, dramaturgical and cultural phenomena covered by study courses of the study programme. The range of topics analysed by students is impressive. Some of the theses cover highly original

research problems, e.g. “Different models of societal governance and organisation and their representation in science fiction literature”, “Writing old age: literary gerontology in co-creation”, “Self-publishing – the non-traditional way of publishing books” and others.

The SAR does not provide any information on the number of theses produced in collaboration with companies. It states that employers are involved in the supervision or review of Master's theses and are present at the Master's thesis defence. It is obvious that the supervisors and reviewers of theses dedicated to the translation of poetry have been selected from among the best professionals in the field. The expert group agrees that the involvement of professionals ensures that theses are linked to current developments in the field and that the overall standard of Master's thesis development and defence is raised.

However, it also encourages RTU LA to further strengthen cooperation with public institutions and business enterprises in the Liepāja region and beyond in order to provide students with better opportunities to write more Master theses on topics closely related to the needs of the labour market. The average final grade (8) of 99 graduates is moderately high, but does not indicate grade inflation. On the contrary, it testifies to the students' dedication to their research interests and to appropriate supervision by the lecturers.

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

The aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the programme are aligned with the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study field. The Master's programme includes all obligatory parts and fully complies with the State Standard for Academic Education. The mapping of the study courses for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme is appropriate. The awarding of a Master's degree is based on the achievements and findings of the relevant field of science or artistic creation. The programme enables a gradual progression from the theoretical and research orientation of the general humanities and the field of writing to the acquisition and development of professional specialisation and creative skills in the field. The content of the study programme is well structured, connected, but the distribution of ECTS credits in the programme is somewhat unbalanced. The needs of the job market are taken into account when designing the course content. The study methods are consistent with the principles of student-centred learning and teaching. There are opportunities for students to individualise their studies, but they are not sufficient. There is also room in the programme for improvement regarding career support for students, enhancing networking options to provide students with better employment options. The topics of the Master's theses are relevant to the study field and are in line with the study programme, although more topics closely related to the needs of the labour market would be desirable.

Strengths:

- 1) Well structured and interconnected content of the study programme.
- 2) The content of the programme reflects the needs of the labour market.
- 3) Master students are offered the opportunity to participate in high-quality extracurricular events that are relevant to the study programme.
- 4) The writing of the Master's thesis is supported multilaterally by the supervisor, the programme director and the professors of the programme.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The distribution of ECTS credits in the programme is somewhat unbalanced.
- 2) Career support for Master students is not sufficiently developed.
- 3) Lack of information on the number of Master theses produced in collaboration with companies.
- 4) Insufficient opportunities for students to individualise their studies.

## **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 study programme courses, the writing of the Master's thesis and the extracurricular activities are firmly based on the academic findings of the field, and are linked to current research in Humanities.

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

#### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The Academic master's programme "Writing Studies" benefits from a sufficient resource base that aligns well with the specific features and implementation conditions of the programme. This infrastructure is adequate for achieving the intended learning outcomes and maintaining a high-quality study process. The availability of project management and support services indicates a well-rounded approach to the curriculum, potentially preparing students for various career paths in writing and related fields.

The programme utilises a variety of well-equipped spaces of different sizes at RTU LA. The availability of a 200-seat assembly hall (Room 413) provides ample space for larger gatherings or performances, which is particularly relevant for a writing studies programme that may incorporate elements of performance or public readings enhancing the public image of the programme.

The programme's flexibility is enhanced through the use of online learning platforms (MOODLE and MS Teams). This hybrid approach allows for a more diverse and accessible learning experience, catering to the needs of different learners. Studies on-site are efficiently organized in three consecutive days a week. That maximises admittance of students travelling from other sites; however, no particular support mechanisms are provided for short term accommodation during those days.

The library's holdings are well-aligned with the programme's focus, offering literature in key areas such as literature, linguistics, culture, theatre, drama, art, audiovisual communication, creativity, acting and speech, Latvian language culture, and academic writing.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The Master's programme "Writing Studies" demonstrates a sustainable funding model that ensures the full implementation of the study process and supports programme development. To ensure profitability and sustainability, the programme has established a minimum enrolment of 9 full-time students (SAR, p. 131). This threshold allows for the implementation of 2-4 elective courses per semester, maintaining programme diversity while ensuring economic viability. Due to the programme's exceptionally good reputation (praised in student and employer surveys as well as interviews during the assessment), a much larger number of students is competing for admission and the number of actual students is well-above the threshold.

The total cost for the two-year programme amounts to €5,602.80 per student. For the 2024 academic year, the state budget finances 37 study places, providing a solid financial foundation for the programme (SAR, p. 131). The programme also generates additional revenue through tuition fees. For the 2023/2024 academic year, the tuition fee for full-time students is €2,000 per year (€4,000 for the entire programme). These fees remain constant throughout the study period,

providing financial predictability for both students and the institution. The allocation of funds across various budget items, as detailed in Annex 3.3.3, likely ensures that all aspects of the programme, from teaching staff salaries to infrastructure maintenance, are adequately supported.

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

The resources, materials and provision of the study programme correspond to the conditions of its implementation and achievement of the learning outcomes.

Strengths:

- 1) Exceptionally good reputation leading to a competition among applicants and highly motivated admitted students
- 2) Well-equipped and accessible on-site and on-line learning environment;
- 3) Stable financial provisions;
- 4) Diverse and easily accessible library resources, including subscribed databases, and study materials in classrooms.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Lack of additional support mechanisms for accommodation in Liepāja.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The resources, materials and provision of the study programme correspond to the conditions of its implementation and achievement of the learning outcomes.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. The Master's study programme is led by 20 lecturers, 50 percent of whom are elected to the permanent staff. All the elected members have a doctorate, seven of them are full professors or associate professors. According to SAR p. 132, 13 lecturers, i.e. 65% of all lecturers in the programme, have a doctorate. The numbers presented meet the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the third paragraph of Section 55, paragraph one of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which states that "the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited optional part shall be carried out by not less than five professors and associate professors together who have been elected to academic positions at the respective higher education institution". The SAR contains an officially signed RTU confirmation on this subject. Considering that 50 percent of the staff are elected, it should be noted that RTU LA relies on ten part-time or visiting professionals to provide expertise and skills to programme students. This is not necessarily a negative, as the guest academics include specialists involved in the fields of playwright, communication and journalism, philosophy, digital humanities, children's literature, poetry analysis, artistic creativity by writing and publishing prose works, writing and publishing poetry, creating dramatic material and writing scripts for film and theatre, organising cultural events

(SAR p. 132). According to SAR p. 133, three of the guest academics have a PhD, 6 are in the process of upgrading their qualifications. Analysis of the CVs submitted left no doubt that the lecturers on the programme are experts in their field. Their qualifications make it possible to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. Research interests of the teaching staff cover a broad range of topics related to linguistics, theatre science, journalism, Latvian literature, including feminism and postmodernism, literature translation, literature and drama, literature and theatre criticism, drama theory, drama and literary history, and postcolonial criticism, memory and trauma studies etc. The teaching staff are very committed to the implementation of the programme and are committed to its development, as the expert group was able to see for themselves at the on-site meeting. The majority of the teaching staff have an adequate level of English and some of the teaching staff have very good knowledge of German, Spanish, French and Russian. The study programme includes teachers with practical experience in various companies and/or in the public sector, which is an advantage for the implementation of the study programme. Both elected and visiting academics regularly improve their qualifications by completing a doctorate or working on a dissertation, attending conferences and other training events.

2.4.2. According to SAR p. 105, the changes in the composition of the teaching staff of the Master's programme can be attributed to several factors: introduction of new modules and courses, consideration of student and alumni recommendations and lecturers' qualifications and experience, integration of graduates (teachers) into the labour market, the rotation principle in offering creative writing courses. For the above reasons, the changes in the composition of the teaching staff during the reporting period had a relevant positive impact on the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements laid down in the legal provisions. In particular, the consideration of recommendations from students and alumni is a clear sign of a student-centred approach. The qualifications and experience of the teaching staff also play an important role, as does the implementation of the principle of teacher rotation. Teacher rotation allows students to experience different study methods and approaches to study topics, which can help to deepen their understanding of Writing subjects and avoid a one-sided learning experience. The rotation of teaching staff can also encourage collaboration between faculty members, which can lead to an enriching learning experience for students. The qualifications and experience of lecturers are regularly analysed, taking into account data from annual reports on academic staff research activities, student satisfaction surveys and information on creative output. Several lecturers on the Master's programme have experience in the labour market and are therefore able to impart more applied and practical knowledge to students on the study courses. They can link theory to practise by providing real-world examples, case studies and stories from their own professional experience. The core staff of the study programme can be supplemented by teaching staff from other faculties - the Faculty of Science and Engineering, the Faculty of Management and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Pedagogy and Social Work. The latter measure has a positive effect on the interdisciplinary aspect of the Master's programme. Several important internal RTU rules are available to manage the teaching staff composition issues such as the Procedure for the election of scientific assistants, researchers, and senior researchers to academic positions at the RTU, the Procedure of Involvement and Employment of Visiting Academic Personnel at RTU, Regulation on Election to Academic Positions of former Liepaja University and Regulation on Election of Professors and Associate Professors, Evaluation Procedure and Councils of Professors at the former Liepaja University. In light of all this, it can be concluded that RTU LA is successfully taking steps to manage changes in the composition of the teaching staff. As stated above in chapter 2.4.1., the numbers of teaching staff meet the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the third paragraph of the first part of Article 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. According to the SAR annexes provided to the expert group, the academics of RTU LA involved in the Master's programme have impressive publication records and whose bibliographies formally fulfil the requirements of the law. Each member of the academic staff of RTU LA in the Master's programme has published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions, in the last six years, thus fulfilling the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. Despite this, there are not enough internationally cited academic publications. With all due respect to the tradition of Latvian linguistics to publish in Latvian, RTU LA should consider administrative and financial measures to make the important research visible to the European research community by publishing more in English.

2.4.5. The teaching staff participates in the scientific research proposals and carries out mutual research projects and programmes. There is strong mutual cooperation in place with several academic and research-based institutions, some of them are among the leaders in the respective fields in Latvia. The study field has a history of effective partnerships with both domestic and international collaborators. It has been among one of the priorities of the institution. The study programmes of the study field and research behind it is developed in cooperation representing both scientific and professional backgrounds. The interaction between the members of the teaching staff also takes place on the basis of cooperation by forms of mutual research projects, development of study programmes, board meetings and informal ties. The knowledge and skills acquired during the collaboration are used in the development of the programme and to improve both the research directions and the study programmes. Study programme development and study quality improvement are at the forefront of the mutual cooperation policy. The preparation of the final thesis in the study field is backed by the systematic approach to the programme and strong involvement of the academics which also indicates the quality and mutual collaboration of the teaching staff. The academic staff works mutually to ensure that student's needs are met and the shortcomings detected through student questionnaires or lecturer student interactions are discussed between the teaching staff and resolved collaboratively. Teaching staff work in close connection and communicate regularly to ensure that the aims of the study programme are achieved and that the study courses are interconnected, apply to the programme but at the same time they don't overlap. This is ensured by regular and systematic communication within the organisation.

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

The teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme meet national requirements, ensuring that the programme's aims and learning outcomes are effectively achieved. They are dedicated to both the delivery and ongoing development of the programme. Changes in the teaching staff do not adversely impact the quality or compliance of the Master's programme, on the contrary, effective management of these changes enhances programme quality and enriches the student experience. Additionally, all faculty members have published in peer-reviewed journals, including international ones, meeting the standards set by the national law.

Strengths:

- 1) The composition and qualifications of the teaching staff exceed the statutory national requirements and ensure the smooth running of the Master's programme.
- 2) Local visiting staff contribute significantly to the delivery of the programme and enrich the student experience.
- 3) The involvement of staff from other faculties has a positive effect on the interdisciplinary aspect of the study programme.

4) Staff with experience in the labour market contribute to the applied and practical knowledge in the study programme.

Weaknesses:

1) There are not enough internationally cited academic publications.

### **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 the teaching staff complies with the conditions for the implementation of the Master's study programme and requirements of the regulatory framework, despite the low number of publications in top-level international outlets.

## **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

Annex " P(6) ENG.docx.pdf" generally confirms that the study programme complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 240 "Noteikumi par valsts akadēmiskās izglītības standartu". Civil and Environmental protection course is present in the programme if students have not had it before (3 ECTS amount).

- 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

Attached study course descriptions ("P(10)ENG\_21.06.docx") are prepared in Latvian. Descriptions complies with regulations set forth in 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 provided Diploma sample ("RS\_diploma un diploma pielikumu paraugi.pdf") complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus 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

7 professors and associate professors elected at RTU participate in the implementation of the academic study programme. (SAR 3.4.1)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Attached resumes of staff ("Academic staff\_CV\_ENG.pdf") and confirmation ("Confirmation - knowledge of the state language.edoc") verifies that state language proficiency is compliant with Cabinet Regulation No. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi".

- 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

Sample of attached study agreement ("Sample of study agreements.zip") complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi".

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Attached contracts ("Cooperation agreements on continuing studies at another university.pdf") confirms that the institution provides the possibility to continue studies within the following option - Latvian Academy of Culture academic masters programme "Arts" subprogramme "Cultural and Intercultural studies", however LKA does not feature such programme, therefore clarification is needed.

- 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

RTU confirmation ("Confirmation - on compensation for losses.edoc") states, that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Study programme generally complies with regulatory enactments, however provided contract on opportunities to continue education in another study programme in case of programme closure features study programme that is not currently implemented.

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

The academic Master's programme "Writing Studies" has evolved considerably since its accreditation in 2013, adapting to the demands of education and industry without abandoning its core objectives. The programme's interdisciplinary focus and updates such as new specialisations and free electives have strengthened its academic and professional relevance. The success of the

programme is reflected in the growing number of students, high employment rates and positive feedback from students and employers. The programme is characterised by a good balance between academic rigour and practical application. Whilst there are areas for improvement, the weaknesses outlined are recommendations for improvement rather than critical shortcomings. These include the need for greater internationalisation and practical relevance, e.g. through more interaction with industry, residential programmes and courses in new areas such as intermedia dramaturgy and digital writing. Although the curriculum has been updated to reflect modern trends, the initial perception of the programme as traditional or conservative may affect its appeal. Feedback also emphasises the need for greater practical engagement with industry professionals and further development of career support for Masters students. Other areas for improvement include a more balanced distribution of ECTS credits, opportunities for students to individualise their studies and the need for additional support with accommodation in Liepāja. In addition, RTU LA must provide updated confirmation that students will be offered the opportunity to continue their education in another study programme or at another higher education institution or college (agreement with another accredited higher education institution or college) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated. Nevertheless, these points do not represent fundamental weaknesses, but opportunities for growth. Considering the overall quality, positive feedback and unique scope of the programme within the broader academic offer in Latvia, the programme can be rated as “excellent”.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Significant evolution since its 2013 accreditation, adaptation to educational and industry demands.
- 2) Integration of feedback from students and graduates, alignment with national and EU educational policies.
- 3) Combination of interdisciplinary learning and practical application, enhancing relevance and appeal.
- 4) Positive changes, including new specialisations and the shift to free electives, reflect a commitment to maintaining competitiveness.
- 5) Well structured and interconnected content of the study programme.
- 6) Opportunities to participate in high-quality extracurricular events.
- 7) Adequate support for the writing of the Master's thesis.
- 8) Exceptionally good reputation leading to a competition among applicants and highly motivated admitted students.
- 9) Stable financial provisions and modern learning environment.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a need for increased internationalisation and practical exposure, such as more industry interaction and residential programmes.
- 2) The lack of courses in intermedia dramaturgy and digital writing indicates areas for potential expansion.
- 3) Initial perceptions of the programme as traditional may hinder its appeal despite curriculum updates.
- 4) Feedback suggests that more focus is needed on practical exposure to industry professionals.
- 5) The programme could benefit from expanding its offerings to include emerging areas within writing studies.
- 6) The distribution of ECTS credits in the programme is somewhat unbalanced.
- 7) Career support for Master students is not sufficiently developed.
- 8) Lack of information on the number of Master theses produced in collaboration with companies.
- 9) Insufficient opportunities for students to individualise their studies.

10) Lack of additional support mechanisms for accommodation in Liepāja.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Writing Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Excellent

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Writing Studies"**

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

- |   |
|---|
| 1) Adjust the structure of the study programme and combine the most important courses into larger modules with more credits to counteract the unbalanced distribution of ECTS points. |
| 2) Introduce courses in Intermedia Dramaturgy and Digital Writing.  |
| 3) Contract on opportunities to continue education in another study programme in case of programme closure features study programme must be updated.                                  |

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

- |   |
|---|
| 1) Strengthen cooperation with public institutions and business enterprises in the Liepāja region and beyond to improve practical relevance of the programme.   |
| 2) Introduce one or two-week long residential programmes for practical critical writing courses.  |
| 3) Increase students' contact with different institutions in the labour market to provide them with more practical soft skills for their future profession as writers.  |
| 4) Consider introducing internships to raise the applied profile of the programme and familiarise students with professional situations before they are hired.  |
| 5) Highlight the programme's cutting-edge content and opportunities for specialisation to move beyond traditional perceptions.  |
| 6) Update the programme to offer more content on emerging areas of writing such as digital media.   |
| 7) Introduce measures to provide students with personalised career advice, mentorship and job placement resources.  |
| 8) Provide students with more opportunities to individualise their studies, e.g. through individualised study plans in which study outcomes achieved through formal, non-formal and informal learning are credited. |
| 9) Provide additional support for short-term accommodation for students travelling from other cities.   |

## **II - "Language and Literature Studies" ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Language and Literature Studies" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

2.1.1. The joint doctoral study programme "Language and Literature Studies" (51226) has undergone changes, reflecting a proactive approach to ensuring its continued relevance and alignment with global academic standards. Since its initial licensing, the programme has evolved significantly, with a major milestone in February 2024 when the study plan was updated to comply with the ECTS. This shift underscores the programme's commitment to standardising academic credit systems and improving international comparability. By adopting ECTS, the programme enhances the mobility of its students and ensures that their academic achievements are recognized across European and global institutions, thereby reinforcing its international credibility and fostering a globally relevant educational framework. In addition to these curricular advancements, institutional restructuring has played a critical role in the programme's evolution. On March 1, 2024, Liepaja University merged with Riga Technical University, resulting in the formation of RTU LA. This merger created a new tripartite agreement involving Daugavpils University (DU), RTU LA, and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeA). This agreement not only ensures the continued operation of the joint doctoral programme but also facilitates broader collaboration among the participating institutions. The consolidation of academic resources, research networks, and diverse expertise enhances the educational experience for doctoral students, creating a more robust and interdisciplinary approach to higher education. The merger, as it was emphasised during the visit, is a strategic move that reflects a shared vision of fostering interdisciplinary research and expanding academic opportunities. Experts involved in the programme have noted that this consolidation has the potential to develop transdisciplinary doctoral modules, enriching the academic landscape. The tripartite agreement between DU, RTU LA, and VeA strengthens this collaboration by promoting joint research projects, resource sharing, and offering students diverse perspectives and research opportunities. This partnership is further supported by transparent financial management, with a commitment to funding initiatives such as creating employment opportunities for PhD students, supporting research activities, and enhancing staff mobility and international collaboration. At its core, the joint doctoral programme in "Language and Literature Studies" aims to train professional scientists with high research potential in the fields of linguistics, literary studies, and translation studies. By fostering original and cutting-edge research within the programme's three sub-fields, the programme contributes to the creation of new knowledge, using interdisciplinary approaches to address critical contemporary issues. This, in turn, strengthens Latvia's scientific potential and positions graduates to influence both national and European intellectual landscapes. Graduates from this programme are expected to play a key role in shaping the future of linguistics, literary studies, and translation studies, while actively contributing to the formation of intellectual elites in Latvia and beyond. The programme offers three distinct sub-programmes, Linguistics, Literature and Cultural Studies, and Translation Studies, each designed to produce scholars with deep expertise and interdisciplinary competence in their chosen field.

Across all sub-programmes, the objectives of the doctoral programme are unified in their focus on producing scholars with high-level knowledge, skills, and competencies. These objectives include providing doctoral students with a thorough understanding of current theoretical and methodological problems in their fields, fostering the ability to carry out independent research, and supporting the dissemination of research findings through international conferences and publications. Additionally, the programme promotes the development of students' scientific and academic careers by encouraging collaboration with potential employers and entrepreneurial ventures, and by offering opportunities for international mobility and cooperation.

The programme is designed to ensure that students achieve comprehensive results, including mastery of key research paradigms and methodologies, the ability to independently formulate and solve research problems, and the competence to lead research teams and academic projects. Graduates will not only publish their findings in internationally recognized journals but also integrate their research into academic curricula, thereby contributing to the academic development of future scholars.

The structural changes within the doctoral programme, coupled with the merger and the new tripartite agreement, emphasise an innovative approach to higher education. These developments reflect a commitment to academic excellence, international alignment, and collaborative innovation. The programme's alignment with ECTS, its interdisciplinary approach, and its institutional partnerships position it as a dynamic and competitive offering in the global academic arena, ensuring that it continues to produce high-quality researchers who will make significant contributions to their fields both in Latvia and internationally. In conclusion, the recent changes in the "Languages and Literature Studies" doctoral programme, coupled with the institutional merger and the new tripartite agreement, signify a strategic and forward-thinking approach to HEI. These developments reflect a commitment to academic excellence, international alignment, and collaborative innovation, all of which are essential for sustaining a high-quality and impactful doctoral programme.

2.1.2. A thorough evaluation of the study programme's adherence to its field involves an in-depth analysis of how the programme's framework aligns with its objectives. This includes examining the interconnections between the programme title, code, degree awarded, professional qualifications, specific aims, learning outcomes, and admission criteria. The analysis also encompasses the programme's duration, scope, and implementation options while assessing its practical value. RTU exemplifies academic excellence with its Language and Culture Studies programme, particularly its national philology orientation. The faculty is committed to delivering high-quality education in the humanities, languages, and cultural studies, as evidenced by its interdisciplinary study programmes designed to foster independent, creative research and professional activities. At the core of RTU LA's academic offerings is a Joint Doctoral Study Programme (JDSP) that encompasses a comprehensive academic cycle, including a BA in European Language and Culture Studies, an MA in Writing Studies, and the Joint Doctoral Study Programme in Language and Literature Studies.

The JDSP reflects RTU LA's commitment to providing a robust and flexible PhD programme meticulously structured to meet the specific tasks and objectives outlined for doctoral studies. This alignment is consistent with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level 8, corresponding to PhD-level education, as articulated in the Cabinet Regulation on Latvian Classification of Education, No. 322, 13.06.2017. Each sub-programme is aligned with the overarching goals of the academic programme, ensuring the intended outcomes of scientific research are met in accordance with Article 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The programme is structured for three years of full-time, on-site study, a duration proven optimal for third-cycle studies in the humanities.

RTU's PhD programme exemplifies academic excellence and flexibility, representing an ideal model of higher education that can inspire other institutions across Latvia. The interrelation of the title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualifications, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements is clear and well-communicated to candidates. The programme also provides transparent information on expected outcomes and labour market positioning.

One of the programme's most impressive features is its balance of rigorous academic standards with notable flexibility. Alignment with the European Qualifications Framework ensures adherence to international doctoral education standards. This flexibility allows students to tailor their research and coursework to their interests and career aspirations, a crucial factor in the rapidly evolving academic and professional landscape where interdisciplinary research and dynamic skill sets are increasingly valued.

The interdisciplinary nature of the programme stands out by integrating Linguistics, Literature and Cultural Studies, and Translation Studies, offering a comprehensive understanding of language and literature from multiple perspectives. This approach enriches research depth and equips graduates with diverse skills applicable across various professional fields. In our interconnected world, the ability to navigate multiple domains of knowledge is a significant advantage. The PhD programme is designed with a global perspective, ensuring it meets international standards and enhances

graduates' employability. It already features international PhD projects and foreign mentors, highlighting its global reach and commitment to fostering a diverse academic environment.

The programme's commitment to directing PhD students to conferences is crucial for their development and visibility within the academic community. RTU LA actively encourages students to present their research at international conferences, and this supportive environment is further enhanced by a structured approach to co-publishing. In the early years of the PhD, professors often take the lead on publications, guiding students through the research and writing process. As students progress, they increasingly assume leading roles in co-authoring publications, reflecting their growing expertise and independence. This structure not only supports skill development but also ensures recognition and meaningful contributions to their field.

The nurturing research environment provided by the programme is exemplary, offering extensive resources, expert supervision, and collaborative research opportunities. While students have expressed interest in increasing mutual subjects and cooperation with peers from other fields, they acknowledge existing opportunities to enroll in joint courses.

Additionally, the diversity of the teaching staff at RTU is a critical asset to the PhD programme's success. Faculty members are qualified and experienced, bringing a rich array of international profiles and projects. Enhancing the presence of international faculty members could further enrich the programme, providing students with unique insights from diverse academic traditions and research practices. This international dimension fosters a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to research and learning.

The JDSP not only advances academic knowledge but also significantly contributes to the professional development of its graduates. By focusing on research excellence and aligning with international standards, the programme prepares its graduates for leadership roles in academia, industry, and beyond. Future graduates will leave the programme equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to drive innovation and make meaningful contributions to their fields on a global scale. The three-year full-time implementation of the JDSP highlights the programme's effectiveness, with a carefully chosen duration reflecting the demands of third-cycle studies in the humanities. Positive outcomes from previous cohorts underscore the programme's success in delivering high-quality education and research opportunities..

2.1.3. The JDSP represents a significant advancement in doctoral education, building on established offerings in "Linguistics" from RTU LA and fostering collaboration with VeA and DU. By integrating the unique strengths of these regional institutions, RTU LA's expertise in linguistics and literary science, VeA's focus on translation studies, and DU's specialisation in literary science and cultural studies—the JDSP presents three distinct sub-programmes designed to promote a rich and interdisciplinary educational experience.

While each institution holds primary responsibility for specific sub-programmes, the collaborative nature of the JDSP encourages faculty from all partner universities to contribute based on their expertise and capacity. This cooperative approach not only enhances the quality of education but also broadens the research methodologies and areas covered in the programme. The decision to collaborate was influenced by the unique focus areas of each institution's prior doctoral offerings, as well as their regional characteristics. In the context of program assessment, the JDSP has undertaken a deep analysis of its study parameters, making necessary corrections to enhance its framework. These modifications have been carefully analysed and justified based on the evolving demands of the academic landscape and the specific needs of doctoral students. The adjustments are expected to receive broad support, demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement in response to both internal and external evaluations. This stance on program assessment ensures that the JDSP remains aligned with contemporary educational standards and expectations. Following the accreditation of the JDSP across all three institutions, efforts will shift toward the development of a unified internal quality management system, streamlining oversight and enhancing the

programme's quality. Until that system is fully implemented, the JDSP Council will supervise quality assurance processes. As part of the consolidation plan, existing doctoral programmes, and VeA have been discontinued, ensuring a smooth transition for current students into the new programme while preserving their budget-funded positions and ensuring continuity in their studies.

The JDSP offers numerous benefits that significantly elevate the quality and appeal of doctoral education. By leveraging the diverse expertise and resources of the participating institutions, students gain access to a comprehensive educational experience that would be difficult to achieve within a single university. The programme fosters a rich interdisciplinary environment, allowing students to explore a broad spectrum of research areas and methodologies.

Enrolled students can take advantage of the collective academic resources and excellent facilities offered by the partner institutions. This diversity enriches the doctoral experience, fostering a well-rounded and innovative approach to research. Additionally, the involvement of more institutions expands students' professional networks, creating greater opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and career development. Joint PhD programmes can also attract a wider range of grants and sponsorships, as mentioned in discussions with the doctoral school's managerial staff, ultimately leading to enhanced support for students through scholarships and research grants essential for advancing their studies and research projects. The commitment to developing a unified internal quality management system will further improve the JDSP's effectiveness and coherence once accreditation is achieved. This collaborative governance model encourages innovation and creativity by merging various academic traditions and research practices, paving the way for novel approaches and advancements in knowledge.

With a growing emphasis on interdisciplinarity within the humanities in Europe, the JDSP aligns with contemporary trends by integrating various research areas, applying social science methodologies, and developing innovative approaches. As they progress through the programme, students will independently formulate and critically analyse research problems, developing appropriate methodologies and interpreting results within broader contexts, thus contributing to the advancement of knowledge through original research. They will engage with the scientific community and society, effectively presenting and defending their research while collaborating on international projects. Students will also integrate their research findings into various educational contexts, guiding scientific work at different levels. Active participation in national and international conferences will enable students to publish their research results, while ongoing engagement with current trends will foster continuous professional development. They will have opportunities to lead research teams, organising activities ethically and improving their digital competencies. Each sub-programme within the JDSP contributes uniquely to this overarching educational framework. In the Linguistics sub-programme, students will master linguistic processes, scientific theories, and methodologies, gaining a thorough understanding of interdisciplinary connections. The Literature and Cultural Studies sub-programme will enable students to comprehend literary and cultural paradigms while effectively integrating research into educational frameworks. Meanwhile, the Translation Studies sub-programme will focus on the fundamental principles and methodologies of translation science, preparing students for critical analysis of research issues and engagement in significant projects.

In summary, the JDSP presents substantial advantages by connecting the strengths of RTU LA, VeA, and DU, providing students with access to diverse expertise, resources, and professional networks. The interdisciplinary nature of the programme, along with increased funding opportunities and a commitment to maintaining high educational standards, cultivates a dynamic academic environment. In essence, the JDSP embodies a holistic approach to doctoral education, creating a new generation of scholars equipped to make contributions to their fields and the broader academic community. The analysis and justification of program adjustments reflect a commitment to excellence and adaptability, ensuring that the JDSP remains a leader in advancing doctoral education. Despite the global shift towards STEM fields, there is a strong and rising demand for

humanities specialists. Academic programmes in the humanities in Latvia, as experts have understood from the conversation with the PhD managerial structures, remain competitive with those in other fields, even those in STEM fields. As stated in the self-assessment report, in Latvia, recent years have seen a heightened focus on STEM education (see: <https://nextwavestem.com/stem-resources-news/stem-resources-and-news/why-stem-education-should-be-a-priority> ; <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-curriculum/national-stem-education-resources-toolkit/introductory-material-what-stem/why-stem-important> , <https://ort.org/en/improving-our-stem-education-is-a-national-priority/> ).

However, foreign experts view this trend as somewhat narrow-minded, arguing for the necessity to strengthen the humanities and social sciences, including the arts (see: <https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/position-papers/priorities-for-strengthening-ssah-research-in-horizon-europe.pdf> ). The humanities play a crucial role in cultivating a critically thinking, educated, and creative society. The current shortage of humanities teachers and university lecturers, combined with the aging academic workforce, underscores the pressing need for individuals educated in the humanities.

Since the study programme in question has yet to produce graduates, an analysis of their employment outcomes is not currently available, but most of the graduates are already active on the labour market. Nevertheless, as experts have noticed from the meeting with the academic staff, they fully encourage students' interdisciplinary research, and this will definitely reflect on their future PhD thesis, as well as on their employability later on. Support from the RTU LA is, until now, experienced both academically and socially in a highly positive manner.

Academically, the university provides extensive resources, including access to state-of-the-art research facilities, a wide range of academic databases, and a comprehensive library system. Faculty members are highly engaged and offer valuable guidance and mentorship. Although there is no PhD defended yet, experts have noticed that the mentorship element is on a high level, e.g., meetings with the supervisor are held regularly, typically on a monthly basis, where discussing research progress, addressing any challenges, and receiving constructive feedback occurs. The frequency of these meetings ensures that the research stays on track and that any issues are promptly addressed. The supervisor's availability and guidance are highly applaudable, providing a structured framework for ongoing research development.

For research activities, a variety of databases are utilised, including but not limited to Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, and PhD students are quite familiarised with them. Furthermore, consultation regarding the development of the study programme is an integral part of the doctoral experience. Applicants are actively involved in discussions about the programme's evolution and have provided feedback on various aspects, including curriculum design and research opportunities. Future career plans are also being constantly discussed with PhD students, and they are, as far as experts understood, quite diverse and reflective of the broad opportunities available, including possibility of remaining at RTU LA for an academic position, applying for postdoctoral positions abroad, or exploring other professional opportunities. This flexibility is indicative of the broad scope of career options that the doctoral programme supports, preparing graduates for various roles within academia and beyond.

To improve this joint doctoral programme further, several measures could be considered, i.e., enhancing opportunities for international collaboration and networking, as well as increasing availability of interdisciplinary research options, and offering more workshops (asked by students) on emerging research methodologies could add significant value. Additionally, ensuring that the programme continues to evolve in response to feedback from current students and alumni will help maintain its relevance and effectiveness. Furthermore, while there may be limited contact with other joint-programme members, the programme still offers "research hubs" and opportunities for collaboration, so students should be encouraged to use them.

2.1.4. The statistical data on student enrolment and dynamics within the study programme reveal a gradual but steady increase since its inception, as seen from the HEI's report. The programme commenced in 2022 with two students. By the following year, 2023, enrolment had decreased to one new student. However, the current year, 2024, saw a notable adjustment when a student transferred from VUAS to RTU LA. This student, who joined the programme in the second semester of their third year, contributes to the current total of four PhD students. Notably, none of these students are on sabbatical leave, and there are two candidates actively pursuing their degrees. All enrolled PhD students are pursuing their studies full-time and their coursework is conducted exclusively in Latvian. This reflects the programme's commitment to providing instruction in the national language, aligning with its educational and cultural objectives. The study programme offers flexibility in terms of institutional choice and specialisation, allowing students to select from three participating institutions: DU, RTU LA, and VUAS. Students may also choose among three distinct sub-programmes: linguistics, translation studies, or literature and cultural studies, which is not so often, and, in experts opinion, should be somehow stimulated.

The programme's structure and the dynamics of student enrolment are influenced by various factors. Key among these is the appeal and reputation of the participating institutions, which offer distinct academic environments and resources. The choice of study location and sub-programme, as stated by the HEI, can be influenced by personal preferences, academic interests, career aspirations of the applicants. The diverse offerings and institutional flexibility aim to cater to a broad range of academic pursuits and professional goals. Moreover, the current dynamics indicate a relatively small but stable cohort of PhD students. This stability is reflective of the programme's niche nature and the specialised areas of study it covers. The modest growth in enrolment figures might also be attributed to the competitive nature of PhD programmes, the specific focus of the sub-programmes, and academic demands associated with advanced studies in the humanities. As the programme continues to develop, it may attract more students, particularly as awareness of its offerings increases and as prospective students become more familiar with the unique opportunities it provides.

The programme's emphasis on Latvian as the language of instruction also plays a role in shaping enrolment patterns. While this focus supports national linguistic and cultural preservation, it should also influence the programme's attractiveness to potential international students or those from non-Latvian-speaking backgrounds. The choice of language impacts not only the accessibility of the programme, but also its alignment with broader international academic and professional networks. Additionally, the broader trends in higher education, such as the increasing focus on STEM fields and the evolving needs of the job market, may also affect student enrolment in humanities-based PhD programmes. Despite these external pressures, the programme's commitment to interdisciplinary studies and its role in fostering critical thinking and cultural understanding remain pivotal in its academic strategy (see: Annex 3.1.4).

To effectively promote PhD programmes at RTU LA and enhance their visibility and appeal, a strategy should be implemented that targets both prospective students and the academic community. A successful promotional strategy would leverage the university's strengths, address potential challenges, and employ a range of tactics to reach a broad audience. An online presence is crucial for reaching potential PhD candidates. This joint programme, as far as experts understood, is good in enhancing its website with comprehensive information about the PhD, including detailed descriptions of each specialisation, faculty profiles, research opportunities. It should eventually, after some years, maybe include success stories of current and past students.

Social media platforms are also actively used to promote the PhD programme, which is applaudable. Virtual open days and webinars were also mentioned during the managerial meeting, and they are indeed effective ways to reach a global audience and provide prospective students with an in-depth understanding of the PhD programmes.

It is worthy to mention that this PhD joint programme already has nine international students.

Building partnerships with academic and professional networks can significantly enhance the visibility of the PhD programme. Collaborating with relevant academic associations, research institutes, and professional organisations can provide opportunities for cross-promotion and networking. RTU LA, as experts understood, is good in sponsoring conferences, workshops, and seminars related to its PhD specialisations, and PhD students' curriculum demands also include their participation in organising committees. Attracting high-quality candidates often depends on the availability of financial support. Offering competitive funding options, such as scholarships, research grants, and assistantships, can make the PhD programmes more appealing to prospective students. As far as experts understood, a new strategy of PhD support is implemented in Latvia, whereby all PhD students have to participate on projects and/or be employed by the universities. This HEI, as well as others in Latvia, are still adapting to this system but their openness in financially supporting PhD candidates is more than evident.

2.1.5. The JDSP received its license on October 17, 2022 (Decision No. 2022/27-L) and operates as a joint study programme in accordance with Section 551 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (refer to Annex 4 for details on Compliance with Legal Requirements). This programme is built upon the collaborative doctoral study programme in "Linguistics" established by RTU LA and VeA, in partnership with DU. This collaboration assures and equalises the strengths of each regional higher education institution, e.g., RTU LA focuses on linguistics and literary studies, VeA specializes in translation, and DU is dedicated to literary and cultural studies. Consequently, three specialized sub-programmes have been created within the JDSP. While each HEI holds responsibility for its respective sub-programme, this does not imply that the delivery of these sub-programmes rests solely with its faculty. Instead, lecturer involvement is determined based on each institution's capacity in linguistics, literary and cultural studies, or translation studies, thereby ensuring a comprehensive and collaborative educational offering for PhD students. The choice to cooperate stems from the unique characteristics of previous doctoral study programmes, which emphasized language and literature studies, as well as the regional context of the three universities. Once the JDSP is accredited at all three HEIs, efforts will commence to establish a unified internal quality assurance system. In the meantime, the JDSP Council oversees the programme's quality management. In line with the approved consolidation plan aimed at minimizing the fragmentation of study programmes, the existing doctoral study programmes at DU, RTU LA, and VUAS have been phased out following the licensure of the JDSP in "Language and Literature Studies." Furthermore, as evident from the self-assessment documents, all current students have been transitioned into the new programme while maintaining their budget-funded placements.

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

The recent transformations in the joint doctoral programme in "Languages and Literature Studies" (51226) underscore a significant commitment to enhancing academic excellence and global alignment, particularly following the establishment of the Liepaja Academy of Riga Technical University (RTU LA) and the implementation of the ECTS system. Since the issuance of the previous accreditation form or study programme license, notable changes have been made to the parameters of the study programme. The merger of Liepaja University with Riga Technical University into RTU LA has resulted in the formation of a robust academic entity that fosters a more comprehensive and innovative doctoral education framework. This consolidation enhances institutional resources and research facilities while promoting an interdisciplinary and collaborative educational environment. The transition to the ECTS framework aligns the programme with international standards, enhancing its credibility and facilitating improved student mobility across Europe. As part of the evaluation procedure for the study field, ongoing changes aim to ensure the programme's sustainability and international competitiveness, emphasizing a proactive and strategic approach to doctoral

education. The programme's alignment with the European Qualifications Framework and its emphasis on interdisciplinary study reflect its responsiveness to the evolving academic and professional landscape. The analysis of the interrelation between the programme code, degree, professional qualification requirements, and the objectives reveals a structured approach to learning outcomes and admission criteria. The programme is designed to be flexible, with diverse options for implementation that accommodate varying academic and professional aspirations. It ensures that students develop a broad skill set and a comprehensive understanding of language and literature, preparing them for impactful roles in the global academic community. In terms of economic and social substantiation, the programme addresses the need for advanced skills in the humanities, especially as the importance of interdisciplinary approaches grows in the face of rising STEM emphasis in Europe. The programme is designed to respond to contemporary academic and professional demands, as evidenced by the positive feedback from current students and faculty regarding the integration of interdisciplinary research and career development opportunities.

Although the programme has yet to produce graduates, its strong alignment with job market requirements bodes well for future employment prospects. Statistical data on the students enrolled in the study programme reveal trends in enrollment dynamics. An analysis of the student population, categorized by different study forms, types, and languages, will highlight the factors influencing changes in enrollment numbers. The programme's collaborative nature and the commitment to a unified quality management system contribute to a conducive research environment, which is likely to attract more students over time. The development of the joint study programme is well-considered by a strategic partnership. This collaboration leverages the unique strengths of each institution, resulting in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary curriculum that enhances both academic depth and flexibility.

As the programme evolves, continuous evaluation of the partnerships and their effectiveness in delivering the joint study programme will ensure that it meets both institutional and student needs while maintaining high-quality standards. Overall, these developments reflect an initiative to enhance the doctoral programme's quality and international impact, ensuring that it continues to provide a dynamic educational experience for its students and preparing them for successful careers in academia.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The establishment of RTU LA through the merger of Liepaja University and Riga Technical University enhances academic resources and research capabilities at doctoral level.
- 2) The implementation of the ECTS framework aligns the programme with international standards, improving credibility and student mobility.
- 3) The tripartite agreement with Daugavpils University, RTU LA, and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences pools resources and expertise, enriching the programme.
- 4) The programme's alignment with the European Qualifications Framework and emphasis on interdisciplinary study ensure a broad and comprehensive skill set for students.
- 5) The JDSP offers a flexible, interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates specialised strengths from partner institutions.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a need to expand international collaborations and interdisciplinary options to enhance global reach and attractiveness.
- 2) Despite positive feedback, the programme must continue to adapt to evolving academic and professional needs to maintain competitiveness.
- 3) The development of a unified quality management system is planned but not yet achieved, which may affect programme consistency.

## 2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

2.2.1. The contents of the study programme correspond to the requirements imposed by the state regulations for the joint study programmes implemented at the doctoral level based on information provided in SAR and appendices. The distribution of ECTS credits is harmonious, so that a considerable number of hours are available for research work (~ 75% of full-time study time). According to SAR p. 145, the structure of the JDSP is designed in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers' Order No 345 On the Conceptual Report "On the Introduction of a New Doctoral Model in Latvia" (25.06.2020), which determines the distribution of credits for research work (approx. 70 % of full-time study time) and for the acquirement of study courses (approx. 30 % of full-time study time), accordingly - 134 ECTS (~75 %) for research, 46 ECTS (~25 %) for study courses. The introduction of the "internationalisation and research validation" part will certainly promote the visibility of the programme abroad and increase the international impact of the doctoral students' research work. The study courses of the JDSP comprise the Common Interdisciplinary Courses (15 ECTS), the Compulsory Elective Courses i.e., Sub-programme Specialisation Courses (23 ECTS) and the Optional Course (8 ECTS). The interrelationship between the parts is logical and complementary.

Responsibility for the content of the joint doctoral study programme is shared equally by the partners and based on a tripartite cooperation agreement between the three HEIs. The agreement was recently updated after the attachment to RTU. RTU LA is responsible for the "Linguistics" sub-programme, VUAS carries out the "Translation Studies" sub-programme, while the Daugavpils University takes care of the "Literary and Cultural Studies" sub-programme. According to SAR p. 145, the three sub-programmes work by focusing on the common specificities and cross-disciplinarity of the field, by developing specialised scientific competences, and by giving PhD students the opportunity to learn from other specialisations. In addition to the existing tripartite agreement between DU, RTU LA and VUAS, a Joint Doctoral Programme Council has been established to manage the programme in collaboration between the partner universities. While the tripartite agreement facilitates cooperation between the participating universities and regulates essential issues such as roles and responsibilities of the parties, financial obligations, intellectual property, dispute resolution procedures and general rules, the Joint Doctoral Programme Council oversees the operation of the programme until the JDSP is accredited at all three universities. A unified internal quality system will be developed as of SAR p. 144.

According to the SAR p. 142, the programme follows current global trends in linguistics and literary studies and is characterised by the synergy between language, literature and cultural studies. The expert group appreciates the interdisciplinary approach of the JDSP, yet it should be noted that the study programme is rather intradisciplinary. The three sub-programmes "Linguistics", "Literary and Cultural Studies" and "Translation Studies" belong to the same branch of science "Humanities and Art Science". The study programme description emphasises the importance of socio-cultural context, hybrid genre research, cross-cultural, functional and applied aspects of languages. The curriculum included in the annexes confirms the topicality of the programme content. The study programme courses cover both synchronic and diachronic aspects of language research and offer a wide range of research topics in the Humanities. The topicality is ensured by comparing it with similar programmes in Latvia (University of Latvia) and Europe (DSPs at University of Verona (Italy), University of Helsinki (Finland), Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic), Vilnius University (Lithuania)). Based on the study programme SAR and on-site interviews with employers in the field, it can be concluded that the study programme content meets the needs of the labour market. Stakeholders are naturally involved in the study process and contribute to linking theory and practise. A unique and commendable practice is to include employer representatives into the Joint Doctoral Programme Council (currently representatives of the Institute of Latvian Language at the University of Latvia). The compulsory entrepreneurship practice is also a unique approach to an up-

to-date and modern study programme. According to SAR, the entrepreneurship practice aims to develop doctoral students' entrepreneurial skills and their understanding of the commercialisation of research results, based on concrete business experience. This is certainly a unique selling point of this joint doctoral study programme.

Post-doctoral positions or a post-doctoral programme would attract young scholars and raise the research profile of the implementing universities. Furthermore, a post-doctoral programme would increase employment opportunities for graduates and enhance the national and regional importance of the study programme.

2.2.2. Based on the information provided in SAR and during the meetings with academic staff and students in assessment visit, as well as alumni of the given study programme, it can be concluded that the content of the study programme is deeply rooted in the scientific achievements of the personnel, especially in the areas of language and literature, translation studies, including literary translation studies, terminology, language contact, scientific discourse studies in intercultural contexts, language learning, the presentation and practical use of modern digital tools. RTU LA runs several research projects relevant for doctoral study programme, e.g. National research programme project "Research on Modern Latvian Language and Development of Language Technology (LATE)", Latvian Council of Science project "Development of Learner Corpus of Latvian: Methods, Tools and Implementation". The academic staff of the study programme participates in various scientific conferences and seminars on a regular basis. Students have an opportunity to get immediate access to recent publications and scientific innovations discussed at RTU LA and partner universities. According to the study programme SAR (p. 146), a new section "Internationalisation and research validation" was developed to raise the international research profile of the joint doctoral study programme. Nevertheless, the RTU LA should consider participation in international scientific projects funded by the European Research Council (ERC), Horizon Europe, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions etc. From this it can be concluded that the awarding of the doctoral degree at RTU LA is based on the achievements and findings of the recent research in Language and Literature.

2.2.3. The study methods are tailored to the diverse needs of doctoral students and are characterised by flexibility. The JDSP offers various study methods, including distance learning via video materials, tutorials and flexible delivery of study content. The programme is highly adaptable and tailored to students' needs. It encourages independent work while providing faculty guidance. RTU LA utilises digital solutions and modern technological tools to enhance both theoretical and practical learning and support the training of skilled researchers. SAR emphasises the development of students' ability to work independently, with extensive guidance and support from faculty.

Diverse teaching/learning formats (interactive lectures by experienced professionals, guest lectures by foreign professors, seminars, practical classes and forms of work - consultations, individual and group work, discussions, field trips, analysis of audiovisual material, practical workshops) meet the essential provisions of a student-centred study programme and enable students to achieve the intended study outcomes and reflect on their achievements. As in the BA and MA study programmes, the seven principles of student-centred education are also applied in the JDSP. From the information in the SAR and the appendices, it can be concluded that students are actively involved in the study process. From the information in the SAR and the appendices, it can be concluded that students are actively involved in the study process. The methods used make it possible to increase students' motivation and commitment through a personalised approach and constant reflection. There is continuous collaboration between students and academic staff, which fosters a supportive learning environment.

A Joint Doctoral Programme Board has been established to manage the programme in collaboration between the partner universities, making decisions collegially and setting common requirements for implementation. The Board will evaluate the progress and results of the study process and formulate

recommendations for actions to improve the programme based on ongoing experience and quality assurance aspects.

2.2.4. Not applicable. According to the SAR p. 149, Internships are not provided for in the doctoral study programme. For students in the 1st semester of the second study year, in the second subsection of Part A "Internationalisation and research approval", an Entrepreneurship practicum is led by a lecturer at RTU LA with a corresponding doctoral degree (Dr. sc. adm.) in management science. Doctoral students choose the place of practice according to their research interests. In 2023, the practical tasks of doctoral students were carried out at the press "Kurzemes Vārds" and Skrivanek Baltic Ltd.

2.2.5. The implementation of the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" began in autumn 2022, when the programme licence was granted. It is not yet possible to provide information on the assessment of the dissertation process. Based on the information provided in the SAR and during the on-site interviews, the expert group has convinced itself that there is a Joint Doctoral Programme Council at RTU LA in cooperation with Daugavpils University and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, which creates doctoral opportunities. The analysis in the SAR on p. 150 focuses on two levels for the organisation, management and control of the doctoral thesis preparation: the regular cooperation with the academic supervisor and attestation at the end of each academic year. The description shows that the doctoral process and the achievement of the study results are guaranteed.

2.2.6. There are no defended doctoral theses at RTU LA as the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" is a newly licenced programme. The SAR states briefly on p. 150 "The implementation of the JDSP has started after the licensing decision (No. 2022/27-L,04.10.2022), so the process of doctoral studies is not complete yet.

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

The topicality of the programme is firmly rooted in the exploration of modern issues in linguistics and literary studies at the national and international levels. Its intradisciplinary character and close relations with local partners help to ensure that graduates have good employment opportunities. The joint doctoral programme is on a par with similar domestic and foreign programmes. The consideration of regional needs and the development of local research niches provide a future-proof framework for the further development of the JDSP. The major area of concern is the lack of a post-doctoral initiative to promote the career prospects of graduates. The joint study programme is considerably based on the topical scientific achievements and academic findings of the respective field of science. High-level scientific events and barrier-free access to scientific literature ensure that the doctorate is at the cutting edge of developments in language and literature. The science base is further supported by the shared resources of the partners. Doctoral students can benefit from national and international partnership activities, including lectures and seminars by guest lecturers, joint organisation of conferences and other scientific events, mobility of academic staff and students, joint elaboration and implementation of projects, joint research, scholarships among others.

Strengths:

1) The content of the study programme is up-to-date and comparable to good practice examples at home and abroad, incorporates the use of modern digital tools and is based on the latest research in the Humanities.

- 2) The introduction of an entrepreneurship practice facilitates the career prospects of the doctoral students.
- 3) The involvement of stakeholders in the study process is an added value for both the doctoral student and RTU LA.
- 4) Serving regional needs of Liepāja, Daugavpils and Ventspils and conducting research in niche areas is a prominent feature of the study programme.
- 5) The academic staff has considerable potential to raise the profile of the JDSP at the national and international level.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Limited involvement in international scientific projects.
- 2) The lack of a post-doctoral initiative to promote the career prospects of graduates.

### **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 joint doctoral study programme is firmly based on the current scientific achievements and academic findings in the field of Language and Literature.

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The RTU LA library houses approximately 63,400 information resources, with 4% directly relevant to the programme's focus areas. This includes substantial holdings in linguistics, literary studies, and cultural studies. Interlibrary loans are available for specific needs.

Digital resources significantly enhance the programme's informative provision. In May 2024, the consolidation of library information systems with RTU was started - transition from BIS ALISE to BIS ALEPH. Upon completion of the consolidation, information about the collection of the RTU LA library will be available in the general catalogue of libraries of national importance in Latvia (SAR, pp. 151-152). Library catalogue and databases are accessible remotely.

RTU LA, DU and VUAS have a developed e-study environment (Moodle), and as a result of providing direct communication (e-mail, consultations), methodological and scientific information is available in each study course. Students are provided with licensed software necessary for the study process.

2.3.2. Each HEI involved in the implementation of the joint doctoral study programme has its own study and research facilities and resources that meet the needs of the doctoral study programme, ensuring both the study process at each university and inter-institutional cooperation, internal and external mobility opportunities, and the opportunities of approbation of doctoral research in scientific conferences and internationally cited publications (SAR, p. 151)

The study programme is implemented in cooperation with a number of Latvian educational and scientific institutions in Latvia, and across Northern, Central and Eastern Europe (see. SAR p. 152 and the List of Cooperation Agreements). Thus, the cooperation agreements already signed and the experience of the lecturers' cooperation is a guarantee for the doctoral students to choose an institution for external mobility, an offer of international scientific conferences from these universities, a possible cooperation in projects or support in research. However, interviews with

students indicated an insufficient number of guest lecturers.

According to information provided upon request after the assessment visit, there are only two options for funding the student's research: employment (e.g. In research projects, limited to resources available in a project) and a grant scheme under European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility funded project No 5.2.1.1.i.0/2/24/I/CFLA/003 "Consolidation and Governance Changes Implementation at Riga Technical University, Liepaja University, Rezekne Academy of Technologies and Latvian Maritime Academy and Liepaja Maritime College for excellence in higher education, science and innovation". The latter provides employment for 1-2 years at RTU with an eligible amount of EUR 1792 per month. It is currently obtained by two PhD candidates in the study field.

2.3.3. The Joint Doctoral programme "Language and Literature Studies" at RTU LA is supported by a robust financial structure that ensures sufficient research and learning opportunities. The programme's funding model is based on state allocations, with the cost per study place for 2024/2025 set at €5,602.80. This figure is derived from the 2024 base cost of €1,867.60, applying the coefficient of 1.0 for the "Humanities" thematic area and a 3.0 coefficient for doctoral-level programmes. The total cost for the three-year programme amounts to €16,808.40 per student. For the 2024 academic year, the state budget finances 7 study places, providing a solid financial foundation. As of October 1, 2023, the programme had 5 enrolled students, indicating a good utilization of available resources. The programme accounts for 18% of the total cost allocation in its field.

Funding for scientific research is diversified, coming from several sources including basic funding for scientific activities, performance funding, and funds attracted through competitive procedures. The RTU LA Scientific Activity Development Fund also contributes to supporting research activities. This multi-faceted funding approach ensures the programme can maintain its research-intensive nature and support doctoral students' scholarly pursuits.

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

The resources, materials and provision of the study programme correspond to the conditions of its implementation and achievement of the learning outcomes. Programme has multiple international cooperation agreements with relevant institutions as well as a range of national level cooperations with experts and industry partners. It is supported by a robust financial structure based on predictable allocations from the state budget.

#### Strengths

- 1) Highly personalized approach to mentorship and student-support.
- 2) Well-equipped and accessible on-site and on-line learning environment.
- 3) Stable financial provisions.
- 4) Diverse and easily accessible library resources, including subscribed databases, and study materials in classrooms.
- 5) Multiple signed agreements with relevant HEIs and research institutions.

#### Weaknesses

- 1) The funding of student's independent research is currently limited to two options: larger research projects, where funds are shared with the whole team and used for various other means, and a temporal "Consolidation" framework.

## Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RTU LA provides the JDSP with all the necessary tools and resource material, technical as well as informative base for successful implementation of the study programme.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. The JDSP is run by 43 lecturers, 93 percent of whom have been elected to the permanent staff at their respective universities. All the teaching staff have a doctorate, 12 of them are elected professors and 9 are elected associate professors. The largest contribution is made by RTU LA with 10 elected full professors or associate professors. Some of the full professors at RTU LA are senior researchers. This proves their excellence in research and their ability to supervise high-quality doctoral theses. The numbers presented meet the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the third paragraph of the first part of Section 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which stipulates that "Not less than five professors and associate professors altogether, who are elected to academic positions in the relevant higher education institution, shall take part in the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited elective part of academic study programmes". According to SAR p. 154, in addition to the regular staff, professors (supervisors of doctoral theses) may be recruited from other higher education institutions, e.g. the Institute of Latvian Language of the University of Latvia, the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics of the University of Latvia and the RTA, depending on the specifics of the research topic of the doctoral thesis. Analysis of the CVs submitted left no doubt that the professors and associate professors at RTU LA are experts in their field. Scholars of the JDSP in RTU LA represent the high level of academic excellence in Linguistics and Literature Studies in the country and abroad. Their qualifications make it possible to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. Research interests of the teaching staff cover a broad range of topics related to Linguistics, Translation, Literature etc. The teaching staff are very committed to the implementation of the programme and are committed to its development, as the expert group was able to see for themselves at the on-site meeting. The majority of the teaching staff have an adequate level of English (70% of those involved in the implementation of the programme, have a C1 or C2 level of English) and some of the teaching staff have very good knowledge of German, Spanish, French and Russian.

2.4.2. According to the SAR, since the launch of the JDSP after the licensing decision (No. 2022/27-L, 04.10.2022), the programme has not seen any significant changes in the core staff of lecturers, but two graduates of the previous joint Liepaja University and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences doctoral study programme in Humanities and Arts have been involved in the provision of study process. For the above reason, the minor changes in the composition of the teaching staff during the reporting period had no significant impact on the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements laid down in the legal provisions. The expert group has no doubt that existing flexible possibilities of cooperation make it possible to recruit consultants and co-supervisors from partner scientific institutions if

needed. This is one of the specific and beneficial features of the JDSP – leading scholars can be involved even if they work in other institutions.

2.4.3. According to the SAR the academic staff involved in the implementation of the joint doctoral study programmes exhibit a strong commitment to advancing their knowledge and academic proficiency through their scientific publications and active participation in national and international research-related projects. This list of publications indicate the quality of research and dedication to creating an enriching academic environment that directly impacts the quality of the joint doctoral study programme. The academics involved in the doctoral programme add to an impressive publication list which formally fulfil the requirements of the law and demonstrate the high level of research and competences of the teaching staff. As indicated by SAR the involvement of the interdisciplinary academic staff in high-impact research not only keeps them abreast of the latest developments in their respective fields but also ensures that the curriculum of the joint doctoral study programme is informed by current trends and discoveries and stem from the current research. By integrating their research findings into the teaching, members of the teaching staff provide students of the doctoral programme with theoretical insights and practical applications of up-to-date concepts. The combination of scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals and engagement in national and international research-related projects significantly contributes to the implementation of a quality doctoral study programme. The synergy between research and education should cultivate a new generation of researchers well-equipped to make meaningful contributions to the future development of the study field.

2.4.4. According to the SAR annexes provided to the expert group, the JDSP relies on academics from RTU LA, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and Daugavpils University, who have impressive publication records and whose bibliographies formally fulfil the requirements of the law. Each member of the academic staff of RTU LA has published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions, in the last six years, thus fulfilling the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. Despite this, more internationally cited academic publications would raise the international visibility of the research related to the JDSP. According to SAR p. 155, of the 13 elected RTU LA lecturers involved in the implementation of the JDSP, 8 have the right of an LCS expert in the humanities and arts in the field of linguistics and literary science.

2.4.5. According to the observations of the expert group, the JDSP is carried out by the RTU LA teaching staff in close and constant cooperation with each other as well as with colleagues from two other partner universities and scientific institutions. Communication takes place face-to-face, by email and via the online communication platforms Zoom and MS Teams. According to SAR p. 165, JDSP lecturers collaborate both institutionally and inter-institutionally through the organisation of events to popularise science, the preparation of internationally peer-reviewed scientific publications, the exchange of information on current developments in scientific fields and administrative activities to ensure JDSP activities. Since the most important criteria for the selection of academic staff at RTU LA and the other two universities are scientific and professional expertise, there are firm prerequisites for successful cooperation between the academics. As the JDSP was approved in autumn 2022, the cooperation model between the partner universities is currently being validated and anchored. According to the expert group's observations, student satisfaction with the responsiveness of teaching staff is very high. Teaching staff maintain an individualised approach during the study process. In view of the above, it can be concluded that the current cooperation model ensures that the aims of the JDSP are achieved and that the courses within the programme are linked.

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

The teaching staff of the JDSP is dedicated and highly qualified, they work in close cooperation with each other and provide both adequate individual supervision and support in class. The teaching staff meet national requirements, ensuring that aims and learning outcomes of the JDSP are effectively achieved. All teaching staff members have published in peer-reviewed journals, including international ones, meeting the standards set by the national law. The flexibility in recruiting staff is admirable and can be seen as a good example for other universities in Latvia and abroad.

Strengths:

- 1) The academics involved in the implementation of the JDSP are top-class researchers who demonstrate their excellence and ability to supervise high-quality doctoral theses.
- 2) Flexible possibilities of recruitment and cooperation of staff is a unique advantage of this JDSP.
- 3) The academics are very committed to the implementation of the JDSP and its development.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The number of publications in top-level international outlets is moderate.
- 2) There is a lack of high-calibre international scientific projects.

### **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 the teaching staff complies with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and requirements of the regulatory framework, despite the moderate number of publications in top-level international outlets.

### **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

Attached study course descriptions ("Study\_courses\_EN.pdf") are prepared in Latvian and English. Descriptions complies with regulations set forth in 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 provided Diploma sample ("VallitStud\_diploma paraugi\_2024.04.pdf") complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus 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

In total 12 professors and 9 associate professors participate in the implementation of the academic doctoral study programme. Of them 10 are elected at RTU (SAR 3.4.1).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Currently there are 17 persons involved in implementation of the doctoral programme with Latvian Science Council expert status in the field of Humanities and Arts and 1 person with expert status in the field of Social Sciences. Of those 8 persons with expert status are RTU affiliated.

("Confirmation - on compliance of the academic staff of the doctoral study programmes.edoc", SAR 3.4.3)

- 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

Attached resumes of staff ("Academic staff\_CV\_ENG.pdf") and confirmation ("Confirmation - knowledge of the state language.edoc") verifies that state language proficiency is compliant with Cabinet Regulation No. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi".

- 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

Attached resumes of staff ("Academic staff\_CV\_ENG.pdf") and confirmation ("Confirmation - knowledge of the foreign language.edoc") verifies that language proficiency in English is at least B2.

- 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

Sample of attached study agreement ("Sample of study agreements.zip") complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi".

- 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

Attached contracts ("Cooperation agreements on continuing studies at another university.pdf") confirms that the institution provides the possibility to continue studies within the following option - University of Latvia doctoral programme "Language and Culture Studies". Study programme is comparable to the implemented joint doctoral programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RTU LA confirmation ("Confirmation - on compensation for losses.edoc") states, that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Fully compliant

Annex "3\_1\_5\_pielikums\_Atobilstība\_Augstskolu\_likumam\_LV.doc" confirms that the joint study programme complies with requirements set forth in Law on Higher Education Institutions. Study programme is coherent across involved institutions, has an agreement between involved institutions on implementation of programme and features a joint diploma.

- 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

Study programme complies with regulatory enactments.

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

The joint doctoral programme in "Languages and Literature Studies" has undergone significant improvements, particularly with the integration of the Liepaja Academy into Riga Technical University. The merger has created a more interdisciplinary and resource-rich environment. A collaboration between RTU LA, Daugavpils University, and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences strengthens the programme, pooling resources and expertise to provide a comprehensive and flexible interdisciplinary curriculum. The programme's focus on modern linguistic and literary issues ensures both academic rigor and practical relevance.

Overall, the programme is well-positioned for future growth through expanded international collaborations and interdisciplinary opportunities, promising strong contributions to the field.

In conclusion, the programme demonstrates strong potential but faces several areas that require attention for further enhancement. First, expanding international collaborations and interdisciplinary options is crucial for increasing the programme's global reach and attractiveness. The programme must continue to evolve in response to changing academic and professional demands to maintain its competitive edge. Additionally, the planned development of a unified quality management system is a critical step that remains incomplete, potentially impacting the programme's consistency and overall quality. The programme's limited involvement in international scientific projects also presents a challenge, as increased participation would strengthen its research profile and international standing. Moreover, the absence of a post-doctoral initiative is a significant gap that hinders the career development of graduates, and addressing this issue would greatly enhance post-graduate opportunities. Lastly, funding for student research is currently inadequate, and securing additional resources is essential to elevate the programme's research output. Given these considerations, while the programme shows promise, these areas of weakness suggest that the overall study quality could be improved, concluding to a final evaluation of "good".

Strengths:

- 1) The establishment of RTU LA through the merger of Liepaja University and Riga Technical University enhances academic resources and research capabilities.
- 2) The implementation of the ECTS framework aligns the programme with international standards, improving credibility and student mobility.
- 3) The tripartite agreement with Daugavpils University, RTU LA, and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences pools resources and expertise, enriching the programme.
- 4) The programme's alignment with the European Qualifications Framework and emphasis on interdisciplinary study ensure a broad and comprehensive skill set for students.
- 5) The JDSP offers a flexible, interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates specialised strengths from partner institutions.
- 6) The content of the study programme is up-to-date and comparable to good practice examples at home and abroad, incorporates the use of modern digital tools and is based on the latest research in

the Humanities.

7) The introduction of an entrepreneurship practice facilitates the career prospects of the doctoral students.

8) The involvement of stakeholders in the study process is an added value for both the doctoral student and RTU LA.

9) Serving regional needs of Liepāja, Daugavpils and Ventspils and conducting research in niche areas is a prominent feature of the study programme.

10) The academic staff has considerable potential to raise the profile of the JDSP at the national and international level.

11) Highly personalised approach to mentorship and student-support.

12) Well-equipped and accessible on-site and on-line learning environment.

13) Stable financial provisions.

14) Diverse and easily accessible library resources, including subscribed databases, and study materials in classrooms.

15) Multiple signed agreements with relevant HEIs and research institutions.

Weaknesses:

1) There is a need to expand international collaborations and interdisciplinary options to enhance global reach and attractiveness.

2) Despite positive feedback, the programme must continue to adapt to evolving academic and professional needs to maintain competitiveness.

3) The development of a unified quality management system is planned but not yet achieved, which may affect programme consistency.

4) Limited involvement in international scientific projects.

5) The lack of a post-doctoral initiative to promote the career prospects of graduates.

6) Limited funds and opportunities for PhD students' research.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Language and Literature Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Language and Literature Studies"**

### **Short-term recommendations**

1) Introduce a unified quality management system to ensure JDSP effectiveness and coherence.

### **Long-term recommendations**

1) Consider various options to participate in high calibre international scientific projects for this field of study as well as increase availability of interdisciplinary research options.

2) Introduce and support a postdoctoral initiative to promote the career prospects of graduates.

3) Offer more workshops on emerging research methodologies in the field.

4) Encourage teaching staff of the JDSP to publish more in high-impact, highly-cited journals involving a combination of support, incentives, and strategies aimed at improving the quality and visibility of their research.

5) Ensure that the JDSP continues to evolve in response to feedback from current students, alumni and stakeholders to maintain the relevance and effectiveness of the programme.

6) Introduce new funding opportunities for doctoral student's independent research.

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

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

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

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:	Partially compliant	RTU utilizes development and planning documents, supported by an internal Quality Management System (QMS), to meet its study area objectives. The QMS includes databases of internal regulations and processes, with effective programme development and internal approval mechanisms. While the Councils of Study Fields involve stakeholders in programme development and evaluation, there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of their review processes. Additionally, student feedback is inconsistently handled. Criteria for evaluating student performance are well-defined, and no issues were observed during the on-site visit. Academic staff qualifications meet requirements, though discrepancies in reported language skills were noted. Data collection and analysis meet standards, but there is potential to enhance employer engagement for more actionable insights.
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Partially compliant	Research activities are systematically developed, are in line with RTU LA development goals and are relevant to the field of study, even if there is a lack of internationally cited academic publications and participation in international research programmes and projects.

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Requirement Evaluation</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p>R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.</p>	<p>Partially compliant</p>	<p>RTU LA education has made notable strides in promoting collaboration and internationalisation within its academic programmes, particularly through strategic partnerships with institutions and organisations both within Latvia and internationally. While these efforts have proven successful in certain areas, such as the PhD programme, they have not yet resulted in significant programme-wide enhancements or a stronger international presence. Despite building a strong network of partners and engaging in numerous national and regional initiatives, the institution struggles to fully capitalise on these collaborations to boost global engagement and academic influence. Challenges such as the limited number of foreign students, low levels of international faculty exchanges, and inadequate incorporation of external feedback into programme development signal key areas for improvement. To overcome these obstacles, RTU LA should focus on expanding its international outreach by incorporating hybrid learning models, increasing faculty involvement in global research collaborations, and establishing deeper international partnerships.</p>
<p>R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.</p>	<p>Partially compliant</p>	<p>Short-term recommendations have largely been addressed, though some long-term recommendations remain outstanding, particularly concerning course descriptions in the doctoral programme, the expansion of elective course offerings, and the exploration of opportunities for collaboration with the municipality, as well as the possibility of offering mandatory courses in English.</p>

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

<b>No.</b>	<b>Study programme</b>	<b>R5</b>	<b>R6</b>	<b>R7</b>	<b>R8</b>	<b>Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)</b>
1	European Language and Culture Studies (43227)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good
2	Writing Studies (45226)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Excellent
3	Language and Literature Studies (51226)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

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

There are no dissenting opinions of the experts.