Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Ventspils University College

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

Experts:

1. Nedas Jurgaitis (Chair of the Experts Group)
2. Irine Darchia (Secretary of the Experts Group)
3. Marina Platonova
4. Elīza Anna Ozola (Student Union of Latvia)
5. Vasilijs Ragačevičs (Employers' Confederation of Latvia)

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 aims and goals of the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes” are well defined. This study field, along with its three associated study programmes, aligns closely with the mission of the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter - VUAS) and fits into the institutional strategy for 2021-2027, corresponding to the main directions of its strategic development. In 2021, major changes were made to the Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in “Intercultural Communication” and “Strategic Intercultural Communication” and a new joint doctoral study programme “Language and Literature Studies” was established. The three interlinked study programmes enable a smooth transition from professional tertiary education into a research career.

The VUAS has established a quality policy and management system, as well as regulations for the development and review of study programmes. These regulations are publicly available and involve various internal and external stakeholders. However, a lack of appropriate communication and implementation of the existing regulations leads to a lack of quality culture and has a negative impact on the effective functioning of the quality management system.

The study field generally satisfies the criteria for cooperation and internationalisation, but the vaguely defined international cooperation strategy hinders the development of the international profile of the study programmes. VUAS should further develop or update this strategy, giving priority to and detailing participation in the European Universities Alliance COLOURS, as it serves as a strategic tool for enhancing institutional capacity and the study field overall. Additionally, cooperation with national professional associations of public relations specialists or other communication and PR organisations needs improvement.

The low enrolment in both the Bachelor's and Master's study programmes prevents them from reaching the break-even point. Addressing the absence of specific measures to enhance the cost efficiency of these programmes is crucial to prevent long-term unsustainability. Additionally, the study field relies heavily on guest lecturers, which may cause inconsistencies in teaching quality and course delivery, as well as higher staff turnover. Therefore, implementing a comprehensive academic staff workload management strategy and a more robust, distinctive support system for academic staff is essential. The study field is supported by modern technical equipment, facilities and resources and has great potential to be expanded in the coming years.

Both the Bachelor's and Master's study programmes are important for regional development, even if they only marginally fit into the scientific field. Research takes place mainly in the field of Linguistics. There is no obvious data on research activities conducted in areas of Public Relations and/or Communication Studies. Furthermore, there is no demonstrable correlation between the scientific and academic framework, the content and learning outcomes of the study programmes and the Professional Standard.

Both the professional Bachelor's and Master's programmes are well-structured, interconnected, and current, though the cultural component requires further development. The programmes prioritise language and business as their main elements. The content of both programmes aligns generally with the Professional Standard for public relations managers. Despite that, there needs to be greater consistency between the competencies, skills, and knowledge outlined in the Standard and the content, structure, and organisation of the Bachelor's and Master's theses. The design of the course content for both programmes considers the needs of the labour market. The study methods adhere to the principles of student-centred learning and teaching, contributing to the achievement of the courses' and programmes' aims and learning outcomes, although opportunities for students to personalise their studies are limited. Mechanisms for recognising students' prior learning and professional experience are in place, but lack flexibility and ease of use.

The Bachelor's and Master's study programmes generally comply with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulations. Nevertheless, the alignment of these programmes with the current study field should be carefully reconsidered. It is strongly recommended to shift these programmes to the field of Information and Communication Sciences, as the degrees obtained and professional qualifications granted would be more appropriate. This change would necessitate some modifications to the programmes' content, such as revising the curriculum and encouraging students to focus their graduation papers on topics that align with the Professional Standard.
The joint doctoral study programme implemented at VUAS is highly relevant for the regional and national development of scientific and research excellence in the field. This programme promotes the advancement of the national language from both monolingual and multilingual perspectives, positively impacts literary studies, and contributes to the preservation of national identity. The programme's relevance is anchored in the exploration of contemporary issues in linguistics and literary studies at both national and international levels. Its intradisciplinary nature and strong connections with local partners ensure that graduates have excellent employment opportunities. The content of the study programme is up-to-date and comparable to similar domestic and international programmes, incorporates the use of modern digital tools and is based on the latest research in the Humanities. By addressing regional needs and developing local research niches, the programme establishes a robust framework for its future development.
The translation of the SER is poor. Some of the chapters seem to have been written without paying full attention to the proper use of legislative terms as well as to the terminological, lexical and grammatical aspects of the text formation, which is particularly significant considering that the study programmes are conducted in English. When referring to Latvian legislation, the term Section should be used instead of Article, the title Augstskolu likums translates as "Law on Higher Education Institutions" instead of "Law on Higher Education" or "Higher Educations Act", the Paragraph instead of Article, when referring to the Cabinet's regulations.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

I - Assessment of the Study Field

1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1. According to SER p. 15, the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes” aims to prepare highly qualified specialists and European-level researchers in literary science, linguistics and translation with knowledge and skills that would provide them with the opportunity to use the acquired knowledge and skills in the current changing labour market conditions, to prepare students for educational programmes of the next levels, as well as for scientific activities in the relevant field, developing and strengthening the scientific potential of Latvia.
The aims are clearly formulated, even if the phrase “European-level researchers” requires further definition. Given the fact that the three study programmes are interlinked and allow a seamless transition from professional tertiary education into a joint PhD programme, the aims of the study field are achievable. Moreover, they are clearly related to the VUAS mission to provide a modern, research-based and inclusive education adapted to the changing conditions of the labour market, and become a platform for educational excellence and innovation, where young professionals discover their talents and professionals spread their knowledge.
The study field and the study programmes correspond to the three development goals A1-A3 and the four horizontal goals H1-H4 of the Strategy of VUAS for 2021-2027, as they overlap with the goals and tasks of the three study programmes. A detailed overview of the alignment with the

strategic goals of the VUAS development is provided in the SER on p. 17-19. The Strategy of VUAS for 2021-2027 includes the assignment Z1 “To strengthen scientific excellence in VUAS specialisation fields” (VUAS Strategy p. 42) which is commendable, although the specialisation fields do not include Public Relations, which is of crucial importance for the Bachelor's and the Master’s study programmes. The areas included (“Word and text in composition, contact and translation”; “Lexicography and terminology;” “Translation and society”) show that the Bachelor's and Master’s degree programmes are geared more towards Linguistics than Public Relations.
The three programmes correspond 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 like Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia 2030, The National Development Plan 2021-2027, regional strategic documents, e.g. Kurzeme Planning Region Sustainable Development Strategy 2015-2030, Ventspils' development program 2021-2027 and are carried out in cooperation with stakeholders from Latvia and beyond.
Students in the study field benefit from the logical transition from professional Bachelor's programme to a professional Master’s programme to develop and deepen their knowledge, skills and competences in intercultural aspects, followed by academic career opportunities offered by the joint PhD programme.

1.1.2. The SER contains a comprehensive SWOT analysis (SER p. 19-23) that identifies the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the study field. The analysis is well structured and covers all important factors such as organisational issues, human, material and financial resources as well as market trends. It reveals the most important internal and external threats (risks) to the study field, even if the VUAS management and other staff members were unable to clearly identify the most important risks to the implementation of the Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes during the experts on-site visit (14.-15.05.2024) discussions. The identified threats are considered in the Strategy of VUAS for 2021-2027 with concrete countermeasures, e.g. horizontal objective H3 provides for the development and effective management of VUAS resources, including human resources, in order to improve the academic staff support system and thus create the motivation for associate professors to become professors and associate professors (SER p. 22), but during on-site meetings there was no evidence gathered on concrete actions regarding this. According to SER, staff members are actively working to prevent weaknesses and avoid threats. For example, the Directors of the study programmes and the Dean of the faculty were involved in drawing up the development plan for the study field which has been recently revised and updated in the 2023/2024 academic year in accordance with the review and re-approval of the VUAS strategy (SER p. 22).

1.1.3. The management structure of the study field and the corresponding study programmes follows the VUAS organisational structure. All important decision-making bodies at various levels (Senate of the VUAS, Vice Rector for Studies, The Dean of the Faculty, The Study Program Director, The Administrative Assistant, The Study Methodologist, FoTS Council (hereinafter Faculty of Translation Studies), Study Program Council) are integrated into the bottom-up management strategy. This approach enables rapid implementation of adjustments to study programmes, ranging from minor modifications to fundamental changes. The current structure enables direct cooperation between the various decision-making bodies as described in SER p. 25. The functions of the Study Methodologist could be revised in order to effectively avoid possible overlaps in the responsibilities of the participants in the management structure.
During the on-site meetings, the expert group observed a kind of disruption in the internal flow of information, probably due to staff turnover and the lack of a well-thought-out staff turnover policy. Numerous issues, such as efforts to recruit new teachers, are based on personal communication rather than established and well-described mechanisms, which emphasises the individual approach

on the one hand, but hinders the functioning of the QA system on the other.
The study field and the corresponding study programmes enjoy the technical support of the Faculty Administrative Assistant, the Study Department and the Infrastructure Department (SER p. 25). The expert group is impressed by the modern facilities, technical equipment and resources, especially the e-learning environment that supports the delivery of the three study programmes.

1.1.4. VUAS implements a well-developed admissions system supported by the national e-service Unified Admission to the basic study programmes. Enrolment in master's and doctoral programmes is subject to the internal information technology resources of the VUAS. An application system “The DreamApply” is used for the admission of foreign students (SER p. 26). An Admission Commission is responsible for monitoring the process.
There are mechanisms for recognising students' previous education and professional experience at VUAS. These mechanisms are mainly the recognition of formally acquired study courses completed at the VUAS or of study outcomes achieved during Erasmus+ mobility periods. Information for potential applicants is available on the VUAS website. According to SER p. 26, there was no recognition of competences acquired outside formal education in the reporting period, as there were no applications. The reason for this problem could be a lack of information about the recognition procedures and a complicated procedure itself. The expert group noted during the on-site meetings that the system for recognising prior learning is logical but lacks flexibility and user-friendliness to provide better access to education and employment for prospective students, to motivate them more to continue their professional careers and at the same time to promote lifelong learning. This applies in particular to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as the European Union (hereinafter EU) considers validation of non-formal and informal learning as an alternative access route to higher education.

1.1.5. The assessment process for evaluating student performance is objectively designed and documented to ensure transparency and fairness. VUAS implements clearly defined regulations for the procedure for organising tests and assessing students' knowledge as well as regulations for the study procedure. Both documents are publicly available to students on the VUAS website. A widely used criteria-based ten-point assessment system and cumulative assessment is applied, which is fully compatible with the grading systems used internationally. The qualitative criterion is supplemented by a quantitative criterion – the scope of the study subject in credit points - whereby a successful assessment of the acquisition of the compulsory content of the study programme is achieved (SER p. 27).
The methods of assessment of teaching and knowledge are based on six principles to ensure openness, clarity and appropriateness of assessment and to provide students with the opportunity to challenge examination results. Teaching staff have the discretion to choose assessment methods that are consistent with the aims of the programme and specific courses. There is no overarching study philosophy. Each course is planned with clear aims, expected outcomes, content, calendar plan and assessment methods. 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.
The course descriptions in Annex 3.7. indicate that practical work (individual and group work), in-class performance, mid-semester tests, presentations of the topic of the study course, study course tests (reports, tests, essays, control works), study work development are frequently used in the assessment of student performance.
It is not clear from the SER and course descriptions whether final examinations are written or oral or a combination (written and oral). Internships are assessed by the internship supervisor at the company, the internship supervisor/reviewer at the VUAS and the internship report defence commission. The assessment of Bachelor’s and Master’s theses consists of the supervisor's

evaluation, reviewer's evaluation and the evaluation by the state examination board. This multilateral approach ensures a fair assessment. Stakeholders are involved in the thesis defence procedures and final examinations, applying best practices and strengthening links between academia and industry.

1.1.6. The expert group is confident that the VUAS respects the principles of academic integrity and has mechanisms in place to ensure compliance at the highest level. Academic integrity is seen as a core value in the strategy of VUAS for 2021-2027. The statistics on plagiarism cases in the SER p. 29 and the information gathered during the on-site interviews with the management of the study programmes suggest that plagiarism cases are effectively avoided. A Unified Computerised Plagiarism Control System (PLAG3) has been set up to detect academic offences. Students are systematically informed about plagiarism prevention and use the regulations “Test organisation procedure and student knowledge assessment in Ventspils University of Applied Sciences”, “Regulations on academic integrity in Ventspils University of Applied Sciences” and the methodological instructions for the presentation and defence of final thesis. The threshold value of 15 per cent overlap is comparatively strict, but fair. If the overlap threshold is exceeded, appropriate measures are taken, e.g. the student is suspended from defending the thesis, it is returned for revision or to write another thesis and defended the following year (SER p. 29). VUAS is considering creating a regulation for the use of artificial intelligence in academic work, as this has become an important topic in recent years.

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

The aim and goals of the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes” are well defined. The study field and the three study programmes are clearly related to the mission of the VUAS, fit into the VUAS strategy for 2021-2027 and correspond to the main directions of the strategic development of the VUAS.
The SWOT analysis addresses all key internal and external factors related to the study field. The main threats are well reflected in the VUAS strategy for 2021-2027. The management structure of the study field and study programmes is well developed and focused on the development of the study field. The bottom-up approach enables rapid implementation of adjustments in the study programmes. Direct cooperation between the various decision-making bodies is well ensured, even if a certain fragmentation of the internal flow of information was observed, which is probably due to staff turnover.
The system for the admission of students is well developed and is supported by the national e-service Unified Admission to the basic study programmes. Mechanisms for recognising students' prior learning and professional experience are in place at the VUAS, but lack flexibility and ease of use.
The assessment of student performance is aligned with the aims of the study programmes and the needs of the students. The methods and principles of student performance assessment are objective and documented to ensure transparency and fairness. They are fully in line with national requirements and are internationally comparable. VUAS applies a variety of methods to assess student performance. The involvement of employers in thesis defence procedures and final examinations is a commendable practice to promote collaboration between business and academia.
Academic integrity is well respected at VUAS. Students are well informed about plagiarism prevention. Computerised plagiarism detection tools are available, although there are no regulations on the use of AI.

Strengths:

1) The study programmes serve the regional needs of Ventspils, the applied character of the programmes is the hallmark of this field of study and proof that the programmes are in demand.
2) The study field comprises three interlinked study programmes that enable a smooth transition from professional tertiary education into a research career.
3) The involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation of students' knowledge and competences follows best practices and fosters links between HEI and industry.

Weaknesses:

1) The crediting of informal and non-formal achievements and recognition of competences is not sufficiently developed to facilitate students' acquisition of the desired qualifications while strengthening their motivation to learn and improve and encouraging their involvement in the learning process.
2) Despite a well-prepared SWOT analysis, immediate and long-term risks that could affect the successful development of the study field and specific study programmes have not been identified.
3) The internal information flow is fragmented and there is a lack of a well thought-out staff turnover policy. Numerous matters are based on personal communication rather than established and well-described mechanisms, which emphasises the individual approach on the one hand and hinders the functioning of the quality assurance system on the other.
4) Course descriptions are well structured but do not provide students with information about the type of examination (oral or written).
5) There is a lack of regulation for the use of artificial intelligence in academic work.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1. VUAS has developed and approved by the Senate the quality management system - regulatory documents describing the quality assurance rules, processes and procedures - which is publicly available to the staff and students in the section "Quality Management System" of the e-learning platform Moodle. According to the SER and its supporting documents, the Senate, the Strategy, Quality Management and Risk Monitoring Commission of the Institution, other administrative departments, commissions and councils are involved in the quality assurance processes and “Each VUAS study program has a study program director who is responsible for the quality of the content and implementation of this program” (SER, p. 31).
The regulatory framework of the quality management system of the VUAS is designed following the excellence model of the European Quality Management Fund Excellence Model (EFQM Excellence Model), following the development strategy of the VUAS, as well as the quality criteria set by the European Union and the Republic of Latvia, but there are some gaps in its practical implementation, which may have negative impact on full achievement of planned aims and learning outcomes, continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes.
The HEI has invested a considerable effort into the development of the quality assurance documentary base, subcontracting the agency (as mentioned during the meetings), organising the existing processes, establishing the processes, etc. However, it is strongly recommended that HEI elaborates on building the internal communication flow, which would not just provide access to the documents written by the agency, but would also explain to all parties involved 1) how they can contribute to achieving the excellence in science, studies, cooperation with industry; 2) what is considered to be efficient performance of the study field, study programme, study course; 3) what markers would indicate the fact that the quality was compromised; 4) what actions should/could they take to improve situation, etc.

Currently there is a certain lack of agreement between the documented and the actually implemented QA processes. It is also recommended to reconsider staff turnover policy, making sure that newly employed staff is aware of the QA policy development process, has data on challenges faced previously and knows if possible solutions offered proved to be efficient or not and why.
The interviews with different internal stakeholders also revealed that the quality assurance processes are highly bureaucratic and paper based, centralised with mainly formal involvement of students and teaching staff, which means that proper attention is not paid to the development of quality culture, which is among the priorities of current quality assurance trends in the EHEA and which is a set of group values that guide how improvements are made to everyday working practices and consequent outputs. Therefore, it is recommended to support development of quality culture, in which everybody in the organisation, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality, which contributes to the development of effective and efficient care for constant improvement.

1.2.2. The Senate of VUAS has approved the "Regulations on the Procedure for the Development, Licensing and Improvement of Study Programmes at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences", according to which the relevant responsibilities are shared between the Dean, the Programme Directors, the Faculty Council and the Senate in collaboration with other administrative departments, feedback given by the students, teaching staff, graduates and employers should be taken into account in accordance with the ESG 2015 and good international practices.
Although the regulatory framework is logical, well determined and publicly available for all stakeholders via the website and other online platforms of the Institution and although the procedures for the development and review of the study programmes are documented, a better correlation between the documented algorithm and implemented processes should be established empirically. Three study programmes assigned to the given study field seem to develop in rather derived ways, since there is no head of the study field appointed, the administration, supervision and management mechanisms of all study programmes seem to be rather fragmented. The influence of the employers on the development of the study field is rather limited, they have no information on the awarded occupational standard and how learning outcomes of the study programmes are achieved, as well as what criteria should be observed and well reflected in the graduation papers to award not only the degree, but also professional qualification.
It is also worth mentioning that the vast majority of examples discussed during the interviews portray how the processes are implemented in the field of economics rather than in the field under investigation.
During the meetings with both students and graduates of the study programmes they confirmed that the feedback provision mechanisms are in place and fully available, however, just a few examples specifying how feedback results have been taken into account were provided (e.g. suggestion by the students to strengthen the practical component and development of practical skills needed in the labour market, as well as the proposal of the students and employers to shift from the academic to professional programme). Students and graduates have positively highlighted the individual approach to resolving any issues.
To ensure efficient functioning of the existing quality management system, it is recommended to secure more consistent implementation of the internal regulations on development and review of study programmes by further strengthening involvement of various internal and external stakeholders.

1.2.3. VUAS has a well-developed and effective system to address the students' complaints and suggestions. There are regular meetings of all managerial levels with the students (the Rector, the Vice Rector of Studies, the Dean, the director of the study programme, the representative of the study department, the chairperson of the Student Council, etc.). Written complaints can be

submitted in accordance with the document “Regulations for the Submission and Examination of Student Proposals and Complaints at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences”. Except for the meetings and regulations mentioned above, student representatives of the course are nominated for quicker and more effective communication via different online platforms. Due to the small size of the Institution, informal communication between the administration, teaching staff and students is also functional for solving some operational issues.
The HEI has provided information confirming that the mechanisms for submission of student complaints and suggestions have been developed, students are informed about them and use them. The efficiency of the elaborated mechanisms can be assessed as rather high, as the usual response rate exceeds 50%. During the meetings with students and graduates they have confirmed the cases of employing these mechanisms and have reported that their suggestions were taken into consideration. The Director of the bachelor and master study programme has recalled a case of resolving a topical issue highlighted by the students (e.g. following the complaints of the students, a teacher with non-satisfactory English language skills has been replaced, an academic profile of the master programme has been changed to the professional one).

1.2.4. The HEI has provided necessary data substantiating that the statistical data collection mechanism established is efficient, ensures regular collection and analysis of information on the study programmes corresponding to the given study field. The most important statistical indicators are collected and compiled in the study administration information system, released or manually through Google forms and data analysis tools. Namely, student, graduate and employer surveys, Student exmatriculation number of cases and causes, student enrollment results, student grades, number of graduates, moodle usage activity, etc. Feedback provision mechanisms are clearly set. Students are strongly encouraged if not obliged to fill in the surveys held by the HEI. During the meetings with students and alumni of the study programmes they have confirmed their readiness and willingness to participate in the surveys, providing honest and critical remarks with the aim to improve quality of the study process. During the meeting with employers, it has become evident that employers are motivated to get involved into the supervision and improvement of the study process, providing their valuable suggestions via internship reports, at graduate paper committee sessions or through individual communication channels. The Directors of the study programme have access to the needed data and can operate with it to improve the quality of the study process.
The expert panel agrees with the statement of the self-evaluation team that although information and feedback is collected from employers and graduates, it would be advisable to introduce a system through which graduates and employers would receive information about the results of surveys and planned changes (SER, p. 39). As it was revealed during the interviews, the internal and external stakeholders are not always informed if and how their feedback is used for the improvement of the study programmes.

1.2.5. The information published on the website of the higher education institution about the study programmes corresponding to the study field corresponds to the information available in the official registers, i.e. VIIS and E-platform. Information available in Latvian, if compared to information given in English, seems to be provided in a more detailed way on the website of the VUAS. It is especially evident when comparing sections on Job opportunities in both languages, which is logical due to the specificity and target audience of the information provided.
Information on the PhD study programme available in Latvian and English differs considerably in terms of volume and highlighted data. No information about successfully developed Doctoral Theses is available in English, as well as no data on proceedings of the international young linguists conference “VIA SCIENTIARUM” is available in English, which seems to be illogical since the main idea of the doctoral studies is to promote excellence in scientific and academic research and stimulate best practices exchange and efficient knowledge transfer. The Expert Group recommends

aligning the content of the website in both languages, making sure that available information is appropriate, complete and does not mislead potential students.

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

The VUAS has established a quality policy and quality management system, regulations for development and review of study programmes, which are publicly available, envisage involvement of different internal and external stakeholders and to some extent contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes and continuous improvement and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes. There is a lack of proper communication and proper implementation of the existing regulatory framework, which results in the lack of quality culture and has a negative impact on effective functioning of the quality management system.
The VUAS has designed, approved and properly implemented the mechanisms for submission of student complaints and suggestions, statistical data collection and analysis, including getting feedback from the internal and external stakeholders, but the effective system through which graduates and employers will receive information about the results of surveys and planned changes is still to be developed.
The information provided on the website of the VUAS about the study programmes corresponds to the information available in the official registers (VIIS and E-platform), but important information for applicants and students about implementation of study programmes is less informative in English, than in Latvian.
Although the procedures for the development and review of the study programmes are documented, a better correlation between the documented algorithm and implemented processes should be established empirically.

Strengths:

1) The HEI has provided information confirming that the mechanisms for submission of student complaints and suggestions have been developed, students are informed about them and use them.
2) The efficiency of the elaborated feedback mechanisms can be assessed as rather high, as the usual response rate exceeds 50%.
3) Open and transparent communication of the administrative and teaching staff with the students which ensures a friendly atmosphere and may serve as a good prerequisite for the development of quality culture.

Weaknesses:

1) Information circulation and data exchange channels should be established in a more designated way. The same issues are addressed differently if not controversially at different levels of administration.
2) A well pronounced approach to managing the workload of the academic staff is needed.
3) A better developed and more pronounced academic staff support system should be introduced. The data provided by the faculty members differs considerably.
4) A better thought-off staff turnover policy is needed, making sure that the quality of the study, research and administrative processes is not compromised if the staff changes.
5) A lot of things are based on personal communication rather than on established mechanisms and elaborated processes, which on the one hand highlights individual approach, while on the other hand hinders the functioning of the QA system.
6) A more detailed analysis of the potential risks and challenges should not only be performed at all levels and with the involvement of all parties, but the results of it should be incorporated into study

field development strategy and transferred into individual KPIs.
7) The academic staff employment policy should be developed to ensure sustainability of the study field. No clear evidence of career development policy and motivational mechanisms. Election processes are blurred.
8) There is a well elaborated regulatory framework for quality management system, but there are some gaps in its practical implementation, which may have negative impact on full achievement of planned aims and learning outcomes, continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes.
9) The quality assurance processes are highly centralised and bureaucratic and lack sharing responsibilities among different internal stakeholders in practice.
10) The internal regulations on development and review of study programmes are not always consistently implemented.
11) Information provided in English on the website of the VUAS is not always aligned with the Latvian version.

Assessment of the requirement [1]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The better pronounced correlation between the QA system documented and implemented should be introduced. It is recommended to eliminate all the shortcomings and weaknesses identified, as well as establish a better correlation between the documented processes and the actually implemented ones.

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

Although the policy and procedure are established, it is recommended to improve information flow and more consistent implementation.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The mechanisms are not clearly empirically pronounced. It is recommended to establish a better organised information flow, which is rooted in the proposed algorithm for the supervision of study programmes performance. While involvement of different internal and external stakeholders in the study programmes development is envisaged by the regulatory framework, their more efficient engagement is recommended.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The criteria, conditions and procedures for the evaluation of the students' results are available, they are developed, approved and published online.

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

Although the mechanisms and procedures are documented and seem to be established, it is recommended to improve information flow concerning career development policy and motivational mechanisms. Election processes seem to be blurred for the young researchers. The prevailing number of the guest lecturers over the elected staff members might question the sustainability of the study field.

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

The HEI has provided the required data confirming that the collection and analysis of the information are organised accordingly.

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 better pronounced management of the study field should be established. Currently there is no evident data substantiating the unified development strategy for the given study field due to the issues identified in the implementation of the quality management regulatory framework.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1. The structure of the funding sources of the study field and its programmes is provided by the state budget-financed student places, revenue from tuition fees, municipal budget funds and other revenue from paid services Faculty of Translation Studies (hereinafter FoTS) provides. During the on-site visit meetings the Expert Group made sure that the main source of funding for the study field is the state budget grant for the implementation of accredited and licensed study programmes and student scholarships. Each year, an agreement is concluded with the Ministry of Education and Science on the financing of a certain number of study places. From the moment of its establishment, as a regional higher education institution the VUAS has received significant financial support from the Ventspils State City Municipality Council.

Based on the interview with the representative of the Ventspils State City Municipality Council and also meeting with the Rector of the VUAS it forms around 10% of the total VUAS budget. The Ventspils State City Municipality Council finances only bonuses for lecturers and researchers with doctoral degrees. During the interview the representative of the Ventspils State City Municipality Council confirmed that priority study fields for the municipality are Computer Science and Business Administration. In addition to the state budget funding, the VUAS attracts financial resources through the implementation of international and local projects:

1. Scientific and infrastructure projects co-financed by the EU Structural Funds, which are implemented through the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy and other ministries and their subordinate agencies;
2. Scientific and infrastructure projects co-financed by the EU Structural Funds, which are

implemented within the framework of the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme;
3. Research projects funded by grants of the Latvian Council of Science.
During the interview with the Rector and the Vice Rector of the VUAS Expert Group were informed that each year VUAS performance funding and 25% of the revenues of any unit go to utilities, infrastructure maintenance and administration functions directly related to these works.
Lecturers' wages according to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 445 of July 5, 2016 "Regulations Regarding Remuneration of Teachers" are determined following the VUAS Regulations on a Unified Remuneration System and in accordance with the VUAS budget. The budget is approved at the VUAS Council meeting, which is based on the academic loads reviewed and approved by the VUAS collegial decision-making bodies – the Faculty Council meeting and the VUAS Senate meeting. The remuneration of the study programme directors is determined in accordance with the VUAS regulations on a unified remuneration system and in accordance with the VUAS budget, which is approved by the VUAS Council meeting, taking into account the criteria attached to the indicators of each study programme. Management of VUAS confirmed that the amount of remuneration of the general and administrative staff of the FoTS is known precisely and, when calculating the costs of the study programme, is divided among the study programmes in proportion to the number of students in each study programme. Management of the VUAS, as well as the Dean of the FoTS during the on-site visit informed Expert Group that the financial break-even point of the every study programme is 10 students per group. During the interviews with the students, the Expert Group found out that groups are usually smaller - around 7 students.
Other additional costs for the activities of the FoTS, are related to the missions of the pedagogical staff, such tax expenses as non-labour taxes (for example, VAT or fees related to the processing of documents for foreign students), as well as health insurance expenses of the employees of the FoTS study process. These FoTS costs are distributed in proportion to the number of students studying in each study programme. Traditionally, the largest part of the expenditure of study programmes consists of remuneration (remuneration and employer's mandatory state social insurance contributions) for lecturers – about 75%. Other expense items consist of the above-mentioned utilities and maintenance services, book purchase expenses, business trip expenses, and other services. The allocation of funding for the research activities of the academic staff is determined by the following regulations (internal circulation documents of the VUAS, available to venta domain users on the VUAS server):
1. VUAS regulations on a unified remuneration system (approved by VUAS Senate Resolution 42 No. 18-98 of 21.11.2018);
2. Regulation on 2. additional remuneration for VUAS employees (approved by the VUAS Senate on 11.01.2012, Resolution No. 12-02);
3. Regulations on the procedure for granting funding for business trips to participate in conferences (approved by the VUAS Senate on 24.05.2017, Resolution No. 17-83)
4. Regulations on the granting of funding for the publishing of educational materials, scientific monographs and collections of scientific articles (approved by the VUAS Senate on 21.06.2017, Resolution No. 17-104
5. Regulations of the competition "Development of scientific activity at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences" (approved by the VUAS Senate on 24.05.2017, Resolution No. 17-86).
The planning and use of the financial resources planned for the study field is supervised by the Dean of the Faculty, controlled by the Finance Department and the Executive Director.
The expert group studied the financing of the Joint doctoral study programme as well. Based on the results of the interview with PhD students and taking into consideration the best international practices, the expert group believes that the existing monthly scholarship is not motivating students to work more on serious scientific research and not to think about survival.

1.3.2. During the on-site visit at VUAS Expert Group verified that lectures are held at VUAS premises

in Ventspils, Inženieru iela 101 and 101a. Study provision consists of modern classrooms and laboratories, and library, high level study provision technical equipment (projectors, interactive whiteboards, monitors), several computer classes, two modern amphitheatre classrooms with 190 and 140 seats equipped with multimedia audio-visual equipment, as well as lecturers' work offices with computerised workplaces.
For the provision of theoretical and practical training in the study field 2023/2024 academic year, there are 6 computer classes with 25-31 computer workstations each, and three with 16-24 workstations, as well as 3 laboratories with 10-13 computer workstations each. All audiences are equipped with computers and projectors, in many places there has already been a transition from projectors to interactive whiteboards, both because of image quality and energy savings. The total number of computers in the university network for the learning process is about 300. All the University's computers are connected in a single network. In addition, a wireless network, as well as an EDUROAM network, are available in the premises of the university and also in the dormitory. The Expert Group believes this is a strong advantage of VUAS.
Several projects were implemented and continued to strengthen the infrastructure, of which the projects of the Latvian Academic Network and “Strengthening Excellence and Capacity of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences as a Scientific Institution” played a significant role in the modernization of the IT infrastructure.
In 2018 - 2021, the project “Modernization of stem curricula of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences” was implemented within the framework of ESF SAM 8.1.1. Within the framework of the project, repairs were carried out in nine auditoriums, a modern interior was created in them and they were furnished with new ergonomic auditorium furniture. The auditoriums are equipped with modern interactive whiteboards and other technology equipment, ensuring the availability of the technologies necessary for study programmes.
During the on-site visit Director of the Bachelor’s and Master’s study programmes explained that within the framework of this project, access for people with reduced mobility has been improved, an elevator in building “A” has been installed, a diagonal lift has been installed, which allows people with reduced mobility to move between the “A” and “B” buildings. Maintenance of the VUAS material and technical support is carried out by the Infrastructure Department. In addition to the maintenance of computers, servers, computer networks, audio-visual equipment and other material engineering equipment, the Infrastructure Department also provides various services –“Moodle”, “VeA Forum”, “Wiki”, etc.
The Expert Group was impressed by VUAS Student lounge room D0: On the basement floor of building “D” there is a large, renovated lounge room where any student can relax, study or meet other students. Often, this is the space where events, meetings, or simply unarranged meetings are held. The room has a pool table, a football and tennis table, sofas, a small stage for presentations, and a large table where students can easily study, play games, or have tea. During the session time (both in June and January), it is open 24 hours a day. From September to December: 06:00-03:00 and from February to May: 06:00-03:00. But from 22:00 to 06:00 in the lounge room, students have agreed to observe silence so that during this period everyone can perform the necessary work for studies without interruption, as the choice has been made to do it during the dark hours of the day.
Another great example was lecturers' co-creation room D101: in the academic year 2023/2024, a co-creation space for lecturers was created on the first floor of the VUAS “D” building at the main entrance of the university with the aim of providing a comfortable, freely accessible space for any VUAS lecturer to stay in between breaks, free hours and other times outside classes. The room is equipped with computer equipment and office equipment for work, a small kitchen corner for basic needs (refrigerator, kettle, sink, dishes, etc.), a round table for meetings and basic work, sofas and a TV screen for recreation. The room is open every day from 7:00 to 20:00, but outside this time any lecturer can receive a key to the room for individual use from the VUAS person on duty at building “D” on the first floor.

The Expert Group believes that VUAS should use more the benefit of a very modern and nice study environment, promoting its benefits to potential students.
Information and statistical data provided in the SER regarding the purchase and improvement of infrastructure, as well as the interviews with different internal stakeholders prove that there is a unified and well-functioning system and procedure for updating the material resources if such are needed.

1.3.3. During the on-site visit at VUAS Expert Group verified that the VUAS Library is located on two floors with a wide department of teaching literature, periodicals and also fiction. The reading room offers both the latest dictionaries from different fields, as well as audio and audio-visual materials, an e-book reader, the latest books and periodicals.
The library of the University has a collection of books ~32,600 volumes and ~800 audio-visual materials (CDs, DVDs, CD-ROMs, audio and video cassettes) in mathematics, physics, computer science, electronics, management, economics, law, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, translatology, literary science, etc.). Five open-access computers with internet connection are available in the library for work and study purposes. From all the stationary computers in the library premises, all the databases subscribed to by the VUAS library are available free of charge. VUAS students and lecturers also have access to an extensive fund of fiction, humanities, technical and other scientific publications, which is located in the central building of the city library in Ventspils, Akmeņu street 2.
All publications in the library are recorded in a single electronic catalogue (https://ventspils.biblioteka.lv), and reader service is automated. The automation of all spheres of activity of the library is provided by the ALICE system, including the possibility of publishing library catalogues on the Internet, as well as accessing the catalogues of other libraries through the network. There is also an interlibrary subscription available – both locally between the structural units of the Ventspils library, as well as with other academic libraries of major universities and the National Library of Latvia.
The following databases are available free of charge to users of the VUAS computer network: LETA, Letonika, Web of Science, Scopus, LNB Digital Library and others.
The library also performs the functions of the archive of bachelor's and master's theses developed by VUAS students and lecture materials of lecturers. During the on-site visit it was also confirmed that students from all three study programmes consider the available library resources, including databases sufficient. Each year, in coordination with the library, the faculty purchases the necessary books, refreshing the library's offer. In 2023, 1000 EUR were allocated to supplement the textbooks necessary for the study field in the FoTS budget. Over the last three years, the range of industry books has been supplemented with an average of 10 books. According to the statistical data provided in SER the number of views of electronic databases has grown over the years, in 2020 they were 721 views (609 unique views), in 2021 - 763 (653 unique views), and in 2022 - 826 (690 unique views).

1.3.4. During the on-site visit at VUAS Expert Group verified that VUAS has implemented modern information and communication technology solutions, the full list of the solutions is mentioned at SER Table 2.3 (p 46.-48.).
During the interview the Head of the Study department explained to the Expert Group that all students are enrolled in the LAIS system, where they can see their studied subjects and final grades. In the infrastructure of VUAS servers, students are issued with a username and password that allows them to access the e-learning environment Moodle, Google services (with a Google account of username@venta.lv), as well as the VUAS Forum and other internal services. Moodle courses are divided into study programmes and years, so you can connect and find the appropriate courses. If a separate lecture of the course is conducted online, the Moodle course provides a BigBlueButton link

for lectures and consultations, which is used in accordance with the lesson plan posted on Moodle. The learning process uses Office365, GitLab, Google Workspace, Moodle, as well as a VUAS proxy and a virtual private server. Study course instructors can foresee the use of alternative tools, systems or databases freely available in classrooms and laboratories on 49 computers.

In 2023 more than 90% of the study materials were acquired with the help of technology to some extent, including the course of classes (online, remote lessons), the acquisition of theoretical content, the performance of practical work, the performance of tests, the performance and submission of homework or others.

Most VUAS information and communication technology solutions are administered and maintained by the Infrastructure Department, ensuring their safety, availability and renewal, but systems subscribed from third parties, such as LAIS and Namejs, are maintained by back-office providers and administered by VUAS trained staff. While some systems are subscribed from external service providers, there is limited interlinking and automation of processes in information, which in some cases means double operations in each system individually or manual data processing and transfer.

All technologies used in the study process are aligned, providing convenient, freely accessible access with the VUAS user to any personal representative. For each FoTS study course at the beginning of the semester, a course of its own is created on the VUAS Moodle website, where general information about the course requirements, course progress and content is available. The employees of the Study Department are assigned the role of “Site Manager”, so they have the opportunity to access each course, conduct an evaluation as necessary. For example, whether the Moodle page contains all the basic elements, lists the topics of the training, and inserts the materials. A similar role is played by the Dean and Study Methodologist of each faculty so that they can access and browse study courses within the faculty. Moodle roles are assigned by the Moodle administrator. Currently, most lecturers already use the Moodle site for placement of materials, placement of tests and input of ratings.

The quality management system of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences is included in the content of the e-learning environment Moodle, where any VUAS domain holder with its personal user has access to the most up-to-date regulatory enactments, the management structural chart and the list of regulatory enactments under the responsibility of the structural units, as well as 50 visualised internal process diagrams, where the procedures, deadlines and responsible persons for the implementation of the processes are indicated. The minutes, decisions and viewed materials of the main decision-making bodies of the VUAS are stored on the public disk of the VUAS server, which can be accessed by any person with a user of the VUAS domain. The content and publication of the minutes shall be the responsibility of the minutes of the meeting, the person without the right to vote, and the chairperson of the relevant institution or commission, ensuring the availability and transparency of information. For information and communication between faculty and students, an email system based on the University's Google Workspace ecosystem is used, as well as an internal VUAS Forum. Students can also ask a question to the lecturer within their course in the Moodle environment by using the correspondence option. Similarly, the lecturer can assign a task to the students. As needed, a WhatsApp/Telegram group, Discord server, or other solution that best suits the specifics of the course can be created for very fast messaging for a specific course of study. It is organised by the lecturer and the students themselves.

Under the development is information enquiry and notification management solution “VeApp”, solutions will be suitable for both the desktop version and the Android and iOS operating systems of smartphones. The desktop version will provide convenient and practically effective lesson planning, replacing the traditional, currently used method in Excel spreadsheets. Lecturers themselves choose the most suitable solutions for study materials, however, the faculty is trying not to saturate study programs with too many different technologies and solutions. The VUAS requires the material to be available in the relevant Moodle course as uploaded files or as a hyperlink.

1.3.5. During the on-site visit at VUAS Expert Group verified that election to academic positions in VUAS is governed according to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 129 of 25 February 2021 “Procedures for Evaluation of Scientific and Pedagogical Qualifications or Artistic Creation Work Results of a Candidate for the Position of a Professor or Associate Professor and the Position of a Professor or Associate Professor'' and the Procedure “Procedures for Selection of Academic Staff of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences” approved by the VUAS Senate on 31 August 2021 (available only in Latvian): Noteikumi_akademiska_person_atlases_kartiba.pdf.
During the interview with management of VUAS (Rector and Vice-rector) explained to the Expert Group that a new remuneration bonus system had been developed and approved by the VUAS Senate rules on a unified remuneration system and bonus system based on individual KPI’s. Usually KPI’s are realistic and achievable, for example, particular number of scientific publications, organisation of the conference, it was confirmed also by the Dean of the FoTS. During the interview and online meeting with the teaching staff of the study field, the Expert Group received rather contradictory answers about the bonus system and their own KPI’s, not all could mention and describe the system and how they can impact it.
According the data in the Appendix 2_8 “Academic staff involved in the implementation of the study direction "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes", academic year of 2013/2014 and 2024/2025” Expert Group see some serious risks - a big reliance on guest lecturers (67% or 22 from 33 study field lecturers are not elected at VUAS) that could lead to inconsistencies in teaching quality, also course delivery and imply higher staff turnover. 9 of 33 lecturers are from the Faculty of Economics and Management. The Expert Group suggests to revise and improve existing HR strategy on attracting academic talents to the faculty to increase elected teaching staff ratio. From the provided documentation to the Expert Group it is not clear how the academic and theoretical content quality of study subjects provided by the guest lecturers is monitored, students and employers feedback is not always objective, especially in the small universities like VUAS. There should be very strict academic and scientific research controlling mechanisms in place. Topics and Quality of Bachelor and Master theses provided to the Expert Group shows that students are researching philological topics rather than public relations matters.
All the available vacancies are indicated on the VUAS website, in the section University: Vacancies. In the study field programmes, cooperation has been established with 2 foreign lecturers from Turkey, with whom cooperation is continued as guest lecturers after the end of the European Social Fund support. All the lecturers were attracted to the project through open advertisements in the EURAXESS database, in the “Latvijas Vēstnesis” and on the websites of the VUAS and the Ministry of Education and Science.

1.3.6. During the on-site visit at VUAS Expert Group verified that the core of professional development of academic staff consists of the teaching/pedagogical part and the research/scientific part. Experience exchange and participation in conferences tap onto both, depending on the needs and goals of a staff member. The procedure for assessing and listing the professional development of the lecturers elected by the VUAS in accordance with the necessary professional qualification of a pedagogue of a higher education level is determined by the “Regulations on the Pedagogical Professional Development of the Lecturers of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and its Recording”, approved by the VUAS Senate on 20.09.2017, Resolution No. 17-125. (VUAS internal circulation document, available to venta domain users on the University's server), developed in accordance with the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 662 of 28 October 2014 “Provisions on the education required for educators and improvement of professional qualifications and professional qualifications of educators”. Each lecturer is responsible for his/her own professional development. The self-assessment report indicates that all VUAS lecturers must complete a professional development program of 160 hours (including at least 60 contact hours) by the end of the election period. The lecturer of the VUAS once a year submits a report on professional

development with the attached attestations.
As the development process is individual initiative-based, the Expert Group believes that the self development progress system of monitoring the progress and evaluation of achieved results is very important, but was not well presented. VUAS does provide various professional development courses, for example, Moodle course building guide, Moodle tests and surveys, Application of Web of Science in practice: from study design to evaluation of results, Digital assessment models in higher education and others. From February 2021, the ESF project “To strengthen the academic staff of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences in the areas of strategic specialisation” (Project No. 8.2.2.0/18/A/009), the lecturers were able to start an internship with merchants in Latvia. The aim of the project is the targeted development of VUAS academic staff in order to improve the quality of the study process, ensure the development and renewal of academic staff competencies, as well as strengthen cooperation with external partners. Study field lecturers used this opportunity and there were active internships in various companies, such as AS “Cits Medijs”, SIA “Ventas Balss”, which not only raised staff knowledge about professional processes in the industry, but also strengthened the company and faculty active communication about study processes.
The self-assessment report mentions (p. 54-55) that “The pedagogical, scientific, as well as organisational work of the academic staff is assessed by reviewing the self-assessment report of the study direction at the meeting of the Faculty Council and by reviewing the report on the implemented professional development”. This approach is feasible if it is strictly adhered to, especially when it comes to individual achievements of the PhD holding academic staff.
Based on the data provided by the VUAS and information gained during the interviews, there are constant opportunities for the teaching staff to participate in international mobility exchange programmes and participation in conferences and seminars relevant to the purpose of professional development. Usually the Study Program Director is informing teaching staff about international mobility opportunities, but because of the quite high pedagogical load of the lecturers, especially of the elected staff, responsiveness to take part in international mobility exchange programmes is also low.

1.3.7. In the self-assessment report, it is mentioned (p. 55) that implementation of the study field in the 2023/2024 academic year is provided by 33 lecturers, of which 9 have been elected to the FoTS. According the data in the Appendix 2_8 “Academic staff involved in the implementation of the study direction "Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes", academic year of 2013/2014 and 2024/2025” Expert Group see some serious risks: a big reliance on guest lecturers (67% or 22 from 33 study field lecturers are not elected at VUAS) that could lead to inconsistencies in teaching quality, also course delivery and imply higher staff turnover. 9 of 33 lecturers are from the Faculty of Economics and Management. The elected academic staff (in the professor, associate professor, docent and lecturer positions) perform research duties.
The Expert Group also verified that the pedagogical load on the lecturers is quite high and exceeds 1.2 ratio of the one pedagogical load (one pedagogical load is 1000 hours), especially for the elected staff, which also leads to a lower number of teaching staff mobility. A well pronounced approach to managing the workload of the academic staff is needed.

1.3.8. During the on-site visit at VUAS Expert Group verified that support for students in the study process is mainly provided by the faculty Administrative Assistant, who ensures the provision of information about the study process and related events and the arrangement of record keeping. On certain issues, students may turn to the specialists of the Study Department, the director of the study programme, the Dean of the faculty. Support for foreign students is provided by the specialists of the Study Department in external relations. Students can also turn to the heads of the relevant directions of the VUAS Student Council for support, for example, in academic matters, they can turn to the Head of the Academic Direction. Information and support for foreign students in visa

processing, as well as in various household issues is provided by the Study Department specialists in external relations, as well as representatives of the Student Council, which supports students in solving various household and emotional situations. During interviews students also stated that various social events in order to integrate foreign students, both full time and Erasmus+, are taking place. Also students affirmed that support regarding information about Erasmus+ mobility options and all necessary documents is given. Seminars regarding Erasmus+ options are organised and students can easily reach out to the specialist of the Study Department in external relations.
In career development, students are helped by the annual Career Days organised by the Student Council, where students have the opportunity to meet companies and institutions that offer workplaces for young professionals. Directors of study programmes, as well as specialists of companies and institutions – guest lecturers, who inform students about opportunities to work in their represented companies and institutions, also help to establish contacts with employers' representatives. Regulations “Regulations on Study Procedures at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences” provide all VUAS students with the opportunity to receive professional psychological or career support on study-related issues, as necessary, in cooperation with the Ventspils Education Administration.
During the interview students, teaching staff and management of VUAS confirmed that communication with the students is very personal, students can always rely on teaching staff help during studies, and ask questions on WhatsApp.
VUAS is proud of a very personal approach with students.

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

In general, material, informative, technological and financial provision comply with the needs required for successful implementation of the study field. VUAS has modern study premises and technologies, serving students educational and leisure needs. Information and communication technology solutions are adequate. However various factors regarding the teaching staff can be seen as weaknesses: VUAS has a high guest lecturers percentage, improving human resources management is advisable, in order to attract new academic staff and clearly communicate such things as remuneration bonus system.

Strengths:

1) Additional financial support from the Ventspils State City Municipality Council.
2) Very modern and decent study premises, library and IT equipment. The study field is supported by modern technical equipment and resources and has great potential to be developed in the coming years.
3) Very personal approach with students.

Weaknesses:

1) Small number of the students in groups, not reaching the financial break-even point of the study programmes.
2) The number of permanent teaching staff elected at VUAS is very low, it should be increased to reduce reliance on guest lecturers on such a high level.
3) Because of high guest lecturers percentage (67%) high risks of inconsistencies in teaching quality and course delivery, no clear system of how guest lecturers work is monitored.
4) The existing system of teaching staff’s professional and didactical development and monitoring of self development progress and evaluation should be improved.
5) Low teaching staff mobility.

6) A well pronounced approach to managing the workload of the academic staff is needed.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1. The Joint Doctoral study programme (hereinafter JDSP) implemented at VUAS, Daugavpils University (hereinafter DU) and Riga Technical University Liepaja Academy (hereinafter RTU Liepaja Academy) (programme taken over from ex. Liepaja University) is of significant relevance for the regional and national development of scientific and research excellence in the given field. Provided data well substantiates the diverse nature of the research themes, thoroughly developed theoretical and empirical curricula and the obtained results. The implementation of the Joint Doctoral study programme stimulates the advancement of the national language in monolingual and multilingual perspective, has a positive impact on the advancement in translation studies, linguistics and literary studies, and contributes to the preservation of national identity.
However it is strongly recommended to shift the terminological focus, avoiding describing the given study programme as interdisciplinary, which is misleading. It is suggested to highlight the intrafield multidisciplinarity of the given study programme, which is a great achievement. The given Doctoral study programme plays a significant role in the staff renewal policy at the given HEI, as many young and talented researchers are attracted to study, exploring their scientific research potential, and to work, shifting their academic skills.
Both Bachelor and Master Study programmes implemented at the HEI are of importance for regional development, however they fit the scientific field marginally. No evident data on research activities being performed in the fields of Public Relations, Communication Science, etc. is present.
Section 2.4.1 in SER basically lists the projects the HEI has participated in within the reporting period, rather than providing information on how the directions of scientific research correspond to the development goals of the higher education institution and how they are relevant for the study field and industry.
It is stated in SER, that “Most of the lecturers, in parallel with the study process, are also engaged in scientific research – there are elected researchers in the FoTS, thus linking the research work with the study work”. Whereas, when comparing employment data provided in other sections of SER, it appears that most of the teaching staff are employed as guest lecturers, rather than elected. This proportion certainly puts the sustainability of the education and research processes at risk.

1.4.2. The SER basically lists research fields the members of the academic personnel specialize in, rather than provides information on how the outcomes of their research are integrated into the study process. No clear evidence on methodology can be traced. For example, in the SER it is stated that: “...research on language learning. This was particularly relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic, when many courses were taught remotely, and this experience of remote teaching is still widely used today. Assistant Professor S.Sviķe works in this field.”, however no detailed information on methods, efficient solutions proposed and/or offered and elaborated, challenges overcome, aims achieved, etc. is mentioned.

1.4.3. The Section on international cooperation provided in SER is not representative. The HEI alludes to the implemented projects, stating that some of the projects were comprising international partners; mentions that for the JDSP there is an especially designated study course “External Mobility”, which should ensure that “doctoral students are actively involved in the academic process in academic institutions abroad”; and states that “Future plans for international cooperation are mainly related to the inclusion of VUAS in the international consortium COLOURS...”. However, during the meetings with both administrative and academic staff none of them could clearly reply to the question what benefits COLOURS would bring to VUAS, as well as what are the responsibilities

VUAS has undertaken to be the member of the consortium.
The vaguely described international cooperation strategy for the field certainly has a negative impact on unclearly defined internationalisation principles for the study programmes' development. Although as stated in the Occupational Standard PS131 Paragraph 3.7.10. knowledge of two foreign languages is a prerequisite for performing professional duties, no study courses on second and third foreign language acquisition are included into the Master study programme. This fact was also negatively emphasised by the alumni of the study programme.

1.4.4. SER provides data on the available mechanisms for the support of the academic staff conducting scientific research. However, no particular examples are mentioned, as well as no other mechanisms, except for financial, aimed at motivating the members of academic staff to conduct research are provided. Information on the lump sums for having acquired the status of a Latvian Council of Science expert is provided, as well as it is stated that “VUAS instructors are paid to participate in international scientific conferences – transport and accommodation expenses are covered and the participation fee for the conference is paid”.
Mechanisms of VIP (vertically integrated project) implementation are stipulated, which undoubtedly is a great tool of promoting research activities for the MSP (Master Study Programme) and JDSP (Joint Doctoral Study Programme) students, motivating them to participate and grow professionally.

1.4.5. SER states that: “All study programmes include coursework in which students gradually develop their research knowledge and skills.” However, no examples are provided, as well as no information on the status of the given study course(s) is stated.
SER indicates, that: “The best research papers are put forward for local or republican or foreign student scientific conferences, which in turn promote contacts with students involved in the research of other universities and thus help to broaden the horizons of the topical issues of the industry as well as other sectors”. No examples are provided.
SER states that: “Participation in student scientific conferences can raise the grade in the process of defending a bachelor's or master's thesis.” No statistical data is provided on how the involvement of the students in the scientific conferences contributes to achieving higher results during the Viva Voce Examination.
SER: “Bachelor's and master's study programs carry out professional internship for at least one semester…” Again, no data on how internships help in boosting interest of the students to get involved into scientific research is given.
SER includes only one example of involvement of the JDSP student into a number of research projects, which is justified by the fact that VUAS started enrolling new PhD students in the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" only in summer of 2023.

1.4.6. SER provides quite a voluminous description of the newly developed VeApp, which is “information system, developed as a unique tool for daily learning and activity planning, information exchange and communication for the convenience of VUAS students and employees.”, however no data is available on whether students and employees use it, how many of them employ it, or how convenient it is to employ it.
The idea of employing Google Doc for “a slightly modernised way of aggregating curriculum and workload information across the faculty” seems to lack substantiation, as this functionality should be developed within the internal information flow system, present at every HEI. The argument that databases cannot be used as they “are difficult to learn for administrative staff without additional preparation” cannot be sustained, as application of Google Doc for sensitive data accumulation, storage and retrieval can compromise the security of the data.
The introduction of a new video studio is a great addition to the study and research process - it is a wonderful tool to motivate students and employees to get involved in various activities.

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

It is strongly recommended to shift the terminological focus, avoiding describing the Joint Doctoral study programme as interdisciplinary, which is misleading. It is suggested to highlight the intrafield multidisciplinarity of the given study programme, which is a great achievement.
Both Bachelor and Master Study programmes implemented at the HEI are of importance for regional development, however they fit the scientific field marginally. No evident data on research activities being performed in the fields of Public Relations, Communication Science, etc. is present.
The SER basically lists research fields the members of the academic personnel specialise in, rather than provides information on how the outcomes of their research are integrated into the study process. No clear evidence on methodology can be traced.
The vaguely described international cooperation strategy for the field certainly has a negative impact on unclearly defined internationalisation principles for the study programmes' development.
SER contains a lot of general statements with almost no particular examples being provided.

Strengths:

1) The Joint Doctoral study programme implemented at HEI is of significant relevance for the regional and national development of scientific and research excellence in the given field. Provided data well substantiates the diverse nature of the research themes, thoroughly developed theoretical and empirical curricula and the obtained results.
2) The implementation of the Joint Doctoral Study programme stimulates the advancement of the national language in monolingual and multilingual perspective, has a positive impact on the advancement in literary studies, and contributes to the preservation of national identity.
3) The given Joint Doctoral study programme plays a significant role in the staff renewal policy at the given HEI, as many young and talented researchers are attracted to study, exploring their scientific research potential, and to work, shifting their academic skills.
4) Mechanisms of VIP (vertically integrated project) implementation are stipulated, which undoubtedly is a great tool of promoting research activities for the MSP and JDSP students, motivating them to participate and grow professionally.
5) The introduction of a new video studio is a great addition to the study process and research - it is a wonderful tool to motivate students and employees to get involved in various activities.

Weaknesses:

1) Lack of clearly developed international cooperation strategy. No information flow organised concerning the undertaken commitments (e.g. participation in the consortium COLOURS - none was actually informed what benefits will it bring, what VUAS should do being the partner, what challenges will it help to resolve, etc.).
2) Both Bachelor and Master Study programmes implemented at the HEI fit the scientific field marginally. No evident data on research activities being performed in the fields of Public Relations, Communication Science, etc. is present.
3) Underdeveloped study field development policy. Scientific and academic research activities should be in line with education activities. More information on scientific achievements should be disseminated among students and young researchers.
4) Clear methodology on integration of scientific and academic research results into the study process should be developed.
5) Mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research and/or applied research should be formulated in a clear cut manner, motivation tools should not be limited to financial ones and information about them should be accessible to all members of academic

personnel.
6) Most of the teaching staff are employed as guest lecturers, rather than elected, which means that they do not contribute to the development of the scientific field. This proportion puts the sustainability of the education and research processes at risk.
7) The argument that databases cannot be used as they “are difficult to learn for administrative staff without additional preparation” cannot be sustained, as application of Google Doc for sensitive data accumulation, storage and retrieval can compromise the security of the data.

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

A lack of clearly designed scientific field development strategy (no scientific and academic research activities in the fields of Public Relations, Communication Science, etc.) and international cooperation strategy (no information flow concerning the existing commitments, e.g. COLOURS, no clear planning).

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1. During the on-site visit at VUAS Expert Group verified that VUAS serves the regional needs and has close relationships with local regional businesses and state institutions (Ventspils City Municipality Council, Bucher Municipal Ltd., Freeport of Ventspils Authority and others).
The self-assessment report also mentions that employers' representatives, if they are interested, can supervise and review bachelor's and master's theses, take part in final defence, teach study courses, provide opportunities to visit companies/institutions and get acquainted with their activities, offer internships to students (SER p. 65). However, from the meeting with the group of employers and students the Expert Group concluded that it is not fully clear to what extent each of these activities take place.
During the interview Director of study programmes informed that the lecturers involved in the study programmes cooperate with Latvian and international professional organisations in the field of linguistics, translation, terminology, publishing, for example, Latvian Society of Translators and Interpreters, the Latvian Germanists' Association, the Latvian Association of Applied Linguistics, the Latvian Academy of Sciences Terminology Commission and sub-commissions. As these associations are focusing more on linguistics and can be very helpful for PhD students, the Expert Group suggests thinking about cooperation with Latvian Association of Public Relations Professionals and other organisations more related to the professional qualification of students on bachelor and masters study level.
The Expert Group concluded that most doctoral students are already in employment and have chosen their research direction/topic at the start of their studies, which in most cases is related to current issues or needs in the local and/or international scientific ecosystem as well as in the labour market.
Management of VUAS, also Dean of FoTS during the interviews confirmed that cooperation with the Ventspils City Municipality Council is very important for VUAS. The municipality financially supports the University by signing a cooperation agreement each year, which sets out the University's achievable performance results, and provides support for teaching staff. The same time during the interview employers and representatives of the Ventspils City Municipality Council informed Expert Group that regional businesses and Municipality are very interested in innovative achievements in

informational technology and business administration fields. Last scholarships were granted to students from these study fields, because the region needs their own “unicorns”.
Erasmus+ mobility brings together international partners through the participation of VUAS staff in conferences, training and visits abroad. No additional mechanisms are used to attract new partners, as there are currently cooperation agreements with 150 active partners. VUAS has cooperation agreements with the University of Latvia and Riga Technical University. The agreements allow students from one university to study courses at the other university, in accordance with their individual study plans. This cooperation allows for an increased range of free elective study courses.
In 2020, cooperation with Liepāja University (now RTU Liepāja) and Daugavpils University was launched to develop a joint doctoral programme. The joint doctoral programme is implemented from September 2022. The three partner universities' teaching staff (professors and associate professors, senior researchers, assistant professors, mainly those involved in doctoral programmes) collaborated in the development of the programme, with the active involvement of students from existing doctoral programmes at the time. The currently licensed doctoral programme is implemented in cooperation with the teaching staff of the partner universities. In the future, the programme foresees even more interaction between the faculty and students of the partner universities in the implementation of the different courses foreseen in the study plan, thus ensuring knowledge transfer between several academic institutions. After the discussions with PhD students and teaching staff the Expert Group believes in the future potential of this study programme and finds it well organised with highly motivated students.

1.5.2. According the Annex 2-14 List of Cooperation Agreements, VUAS has 63 cooperation partners, most of which are higher education institutions within Erasmus+ programme from about 20 countries which provide for mobility of FoTS staff and/or students for teaching (lecturers) or learning (students) courses, as well as for internships. The list of Erasmus+ partner universities can be found in the “International Cooperation” section of the VUAS website: https://en.venta.lv/studijas/starptautiska-mobilitate/starptautiska-sadarbiba, but data doesn't match with the list of cooperation agreements in Annex 2.14. On the website stakeholders can find information about cooperation with many universities from Kazakhstan, but these universities are not mentioned in the Annex 2.14.
Despite the great mobility opportunities for the students, statistical data in Annex 2.16 shows that there is a noticeable decline in student mobility for both studies and internships under the Erasmus+ program over the years from 2013/2014 to 2022/2023. There is also a noticeable decline in the number of inbound students participating in the Erasmus+ program over the years from 2013/2014 to 2022/2023. The total number of mobile students, as well as those specifically in the Faculty of Translation Studies, has decreased significantly in recent years. The self-assessment report mentions that the joint doctoral study programme “Language and Literature Studies” provides for the validation of students' research findings abroad in both scientific and academic environments. By participating in international conferences abroad, students develop and improve their ability to summarise the results of their research in the form of a report, develop their skills in presenting a report and improve their ability to participate in a scientific discussion in a foreign language. In the preparation of publications, doctoral students develop the ability to produce a scientific publication of international standard in accordance with the requirements of the relevant scientific journal. The study course “External Mobility” under the heading “Internationalisation and Research Validation” ensures that doctoral students are actively involved in the academic process in academic institutions abroad. For example, VUAS doctoral student is developing a methodological model of post-editing in her research, and gave guest lectures on her research topic (post-editing) to students of the study programme “Translation and Business Assistance” at the Polytechnic Institute of Porto in Portugal from 17 to 21 April 2023.
In order to address the reduced numbers of student mobility, the expert panel suggests creating a

clear system and procedures for attracting international students and staff, building fruitful partnerships with foreign universities within and beyond Erasmus+, including joint study programme creation, because VUAS infrastructure is compatible with the world's modern universities. And for strengthening the interdisciplinary profile of the study field, for supporting development of job related practical and entrepreneurship skills of the graduates it might be important to ensure that the goals of the study field are indeed achieved by establishing more entrepreneurship-related metrics (since it is one of the key priorities set up in the goal).

1.5.3. In the self-assessment report, it is mentioned that there are various activities aimed at attracting international students such as education fairs, information posting on educational platforms, reaching out to potential students through social networks, agents and webinar organisation. The key mechanisms highlighted are ‘personal contact of VUAS academic staff, participation in conferences, cooperation within projects, research, events and job postings’ (SER p. 68).
At least 5% of the academic staff of the VUAS are foreign visiting professors, associate visiting professors, visiting assistant professors and guest lecturers who have been employed in an academic position in an accredited higher education institution of a European Union country other than Latvia in the previous five years. Statistical data on student mobility by study programme (Annex 2.16.) shows that outgoing and incoming mobility of students in VUAS as a whole and in FoTS in the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 has decreased significantly and Expert Group could not identity clear system and procedures in place that would help increase student mobility and internationalisation.

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

The desk analysis and interviews organised during the site visit revealed that the VUAS intensively cooperates with the local and regional businesses, governmental organisations, potential employers and other social partners from Latvia and several Latvian HEIs. It has been observed that cooperation is more intensive with the professional organisations of more philological profile (linguistics, literary studies, translation, etc.), while the study field aims at educating professionals in intercultural communication which is related not only to intercultural competences of language acquisition and cultural diversity, but to public relations as well.
Based on the above analysis, the Expert Group concludes that VUAS and the study field generally meet the criteria related to cooperation and internationalisation. However, there is room for improvements in strengthening collaboration with the Latvian organisations working on public relations more related to the professional qualification of the graduates, in creating a clear system and procedures for attracting international students and staff, building fruitful partnerships with foreign universities within and beyond Erasmus+, including joint study programme creation, because VUAS infrastructure is compatible with the world's modern universities. In addition, it might be important to ensure that the goals of the study field are indeed achieved by establishing more entrepreneurship-related metrics (since it is one of the key priorities set up in the goal).

Strengths:

1) Strong local embeddedness (municipality, employers).
2) Wide Erasmus+ network.
3) A well organised doctoral study programme with highly motivated students, has a good future potential.
4) Great doctoral students’ practical and scientific achievements, in the field of machine translation post-editing, latest research is very valuable for the translation industry development.

Weaknesses:

1) There is no cooperation with Latvian Association of Public Relations Professionals or other organisations more related to the professional qualification of bachelor and masters study level students.
2) The list of cooperation partners on the website does not match the list provided in the annex.
3) A noticeable decline in student mobility for both studies and internships under the Erasmus+ program over the years from 2013/2014 to 2022/2023.
4) Absence of a clear system that would support internationalisation.

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

Generally compliant since the institution cooperates with both local and foreign institutions, but procedures for attracting foreign teaching staff and students still needs considerable attention and consecutive actions.
Cooperation of the VUAS is more intensive with the professional organisations of more philological profile (linguistics, literary studies, translation, etc.), while the study field aims at educating professionals in intercultural communication which is related not only to intercultural competences of language acquisition and cultural diversity, but to public relations as well.

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

Analysis

1.6.1. According to the SER and its supporting documents (especially see the Annex 2.18) and as it was verified during the interviews, the previous accreditation of the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes” took place in 2013, but in 2021 major changes to the Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes “Intercultural Communication” and “Strategic Intercultural Communication” have been made and a new joint doctoral study programme “Language and Literature Studies” has been established.
The accreditation experts provided the study field with six recommendations, four of which were successfully implemented. Namely, the following recommendations have been addressed: to diminish the amount of absolutely compulsory courses to no more than one third of the entire amount; to ensure that the general intellectual background of the students is supported by introductions to various disciplines that can be chosen from a list, not mandatory for everyone; to change the system so that all courses rotate except for mandatory introductions; to change the extremely specific course names to more generic ones in order to allow for more variation in course content.
After thorough analysis of the recommendations provided during the previous accreditation, VUAS team decided not to address the following two recommendations: to change completely specified modules of part B into lists from which students can chooses and to increase the completely free elective section from the current 2-4 credits to at least 20, which would make credit transfer from other Latvian or foreign universities possible for those who have studied there and would empower the students with better prospects of taking advantage of the breadth the university has to offer. The experts panel fully agrees with the University’s justification for not implementing the above recommendations.

Namely, as it is stated in the SER, “when reviewing the distribution of study courses of bachelor's and master's study programmes in accordance with the compulsory minimum course content and distribution set out in the Cabinet of Ministers Provision No. 305 “Regulations on the State Standard for Professional Higher Education” (13.06.2023), as well as the compliance of both bachelor's and master's study programmes with one professional specialisation in accordance with the professional standard, the need to set elective study courses in the professional specialisation has been excluded. The above-mentioned Cabinet Provisions do not provide for the amount of free elective study courses recommended by experts in the relevant part of study programmes, therefore the recommendation was not implemented” (SER, p. 70).

After assessing the major changes in the Bachelor and Master programmes, the evaluation experts gave four and three recommendations respectively (there is contradicting information on the number of recommendations in the SER and the Annex 2.18, but the experts panel followed the version provided in the SER). In the case of the BA programme “Intercultural Communication”, the following two recommendations have been implemented: to meet the specific objectives defined by the field of study and to ensure the implementation of a second foreign language as a working language in the study programme, in those study courses where French or German terminology is offered, to supplement the course learning outcomes with the acquisition of terminology in these languages – to be completed by the meeting of the Study Quality Committee and to eliminate the fragmentation of study courses whose thematic plan identifies the risk of overlapping study content by integrating them into study courses with a larger number of units.

In the case of the MA programme “Strategic Intercultural Communication”, the programme team addressed the two following recommendations: to clarify the understanding (for both students and lecturers) of the forms of examinations proposed in the course descriptions and the differences in their content and assessment principles (examinations, tests, laboratory work, practical work) and to conclude additional cooperation agreements with employers to provide internships.

The VUAS did not take into consideration three interrelated recommendations regarding organisation of the University’s internal processes and regulatory framework for the implementation of distance learning, also development of knowledge on an institutional level on the distance learning format and implementation opportunities and to organise the regulatory framework for the implementation of distance learning and to postpone the implementation of distance learning for a year or two by presenting distance learning materials prepared separately (from the full-time study plan) in the SP change documents. In case of these recommendations, the experts panel also fully agrees with the University’s justification for not implementing them. Namely, Although the regulatory base necessary for the implementation of distance learning has been arranged at the VUAS (two separate regulations have been established, methodological recommendations have been developed, a system of motivation of teaching staff has been introduced, as well as internship regulations and a model internship agreement have been developed), there are currently no plans to implement distance learning studies in the BA and MA programmes “Intercultural Communication” and “Strategic Intercultural Communication”. Therefore, the recommended measures have not been taken.

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

The previous accreditation of the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies, and Language Programmes” took place in 2013, but in 2021 major changes to the Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes “Intercultural Communication” and “Strategic Intercultural Communication” have been made and a new joint doctoral study programme “Language and Literature Studies” has been established.

The accreditation experts provided the study field with six recommendations, four of which were successfully implemented. After assessing the major changes in the Bachelor and Master

programmes, the evaluation experts gave four and three recommendations respectively, from which four have been also fully addressed. The experts panel fully agrees with the University's justification for not implementing two recommendations regarding the structure and number of the credits as the programmes changed their profile from academic to professional and the recommendations became irrelevant. And the experts completely concur with the University's rationale for not implementing three recommendations related to distance learning, as there are currently no plans for the implementation of distance learning within the scope of the BA and MA Programmes "Intercultural Communication" and "Strategic Intercultural Communication".

Strengths:

1) None.

Weaknesses:

1) None.

Assessment of the requirement [4]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

All relevant recommendations have been implemented. Some recommendations have not been addressed with proper rationale and justification.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

1) FoTS should update the current study field development strategy by undertaking a detailed risk analysis involving all stakeholders at different levels and translating the risk analysis into specific, measurable individual KPIs to track progress and proactively address potential challenges.
2) VUAS should further develop or update the international cooperation strategy, prioritising and detailing participation in the European Universities Alliance COLOURS, as this is a strategic cooperation instrument for strengthening institutional capacity and the study field as a whole.
3) VUAS should invest into the elaboration of the study field development policy, making sure that scientific and academic research activities are in line with education activities as well as more information on scientific achievements is disseminated among students and young researchers.
4) VUAS should update or elaborate the internal data storage and management system, investing into education and training of the academic staff to avoid or considerably decrease any risks of compromising the security of the sensitive data accumulation, storage and retrieval.
5) It is strongly recommended that VUAS elaborates on building the internal communication flow, which would not just provide access to the documents written by the agency, but would also explain to all parties involved 1) how they can contribute to achieving the excellence in science, studies, cooperation with industry; 2) what is considered to be efficient performance of the study field, study programme, study course; 3) what markers would indicate the fact that the quality was compromised; 4) what actions should/could they take to improve situation, etc.

Long-term recommendations

1) FoTS should significantly expand its research activities in the areas of Public Relations and Communication Science to ensure that research is in line with the Bachelor's and Master's study programmes.
2) Cooperation with the Latvian Association of Public Relations Professionals or other organisations related to Communication and PR needs to be established. VUAS should intensify cooperation with the professional organisations working on public relations, as the study field aims at educating professionals in intercultural communication which is related not only to intercultural competences of language acquisition and cultural diversity, but to public relations as well. Public relations are also closely connected with the professional profile of the educational programmes.
3) FoTS should take measures to attract more elected staff to contribute to the development of the relevant academic field. This issue should be addressed together with a well-developed approach to managing the workload of academic staff. In addition, a better developed and more distinctive academic staff support system should be put in place.
4) Internal information circulation and data sharing channels should be better targeted to ensure the sustainability of the development of the study field. A better correlation between the documented algorithm and the implemented processes should be empirically established.
5) The mechanisms for the participation of teaching staff in scientific research and/or applied research should be clearly formulated, the motivational tools should not be limited to financial resources and the information about them should be accessible to all members of the academic staff.
6) Concrete measures should be taken to improve the cost-effectiveness of Bachelor's and Master's programmes so that they do not become unsustainable in the long term.
7) Graduates and employers should be more actively involved in the quality assurance processes, e.g. in the self-assessment process.
8) FoTS should develop a flexible and user-friendly mechanism for recognising informal and non-formal learning in the study field.
9) VUAS should develop regulations for the use of artificial intelligence in academic work.
10) The regulatory framework of the quality management system should be implemented in a more precise and consistent way to ensure full achievement of planned aims and learning outcomes, continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes.
11) To ensure efficient functioning of the existing quality management system, VUAS should secure more consistent implementation of the internal regulations on development and review of study programmes by further strengthening involvement of various internal and external stakeholders.
12) VUAS should support the development of quality culture, in which everybody in the organisation, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality, which contributes to the development of effective and efficient care for constant improvement.

13) VUAS should create a clear system and procedures for attracting international students and staff, building fruitful partnerships with foreign universities within and beyond Erasmus+, including joint study programme creation, because VUAS infrastructure is compatible with the world's modern universities.
14) VUAS should ensure that the goals of the study field are indeed achieved by establishing more entrepreneurship-related metrics (since it is one of the key priorities set up in the goal).

II - "Intercultural Communication" ASSESSMENT

II - "Intercultural Communication" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. In the self-assessment report, it is mentioned that the bachelor's study programme "Intercultural Communication" (code 42314) was created following the major changes in the previous academic bachelor's study programme "Languages and Intercultural Communication". The changes were made in 2021, taking into account employers' needs and suggestions, students' recommendations, the recommendations of the previous programme evaluation committee and developments in the field.

The structure of the study programme has been changed also and it has been transformed from an academic bachelor's study programme into a professional bachelor's study programme; the title of the study programme has been changed to "Intercultural Communication" (previously: "Languages and Intercultural Communication"); the education classification code has been changed to 42314 (previously: 43222); the duration of the study programme has been changed to 4 years (previously: 3 years); the study programme volume has been changed to 160 ECTS (previously: 120 ECTS); the degree and qualification to be obtained: Professional Bachelor's Degree in Intercultural Communication and Qualification of Public Relations Manager (previously: Bachelor's Degree in Humanities); an additional language of the study programme to English and Latvian has been added (previously: English); introduction of a compulsory internship of 20 ECTS. The data presented to the Expert Group, for example, Study Programme "Intercultural Communication" (42314) Annex 3.4., 3.5 and 3.6, in fact, don't show “Culture” as the prevailing component in the curricula of the study programme, neither academic staff, nor students have emphasised it, always prioritising language and business as the main components of the study programme. The former title of the study programme "Languages and Intercultural Communication" was more corresponding to the curriculum addressed. The same idea was also emphasised by the former Head of the BSP (Bachelor Study Programme) during a short phone call with experts during the on-site visit because of her work trip, who stated that initially the study programme was intended to combine languages and business.

Although VUAS has emphasised during the meetings that language is needed to bridge the cultures and studying languages implies studying cultures, the Expert Group believes that the study programme does not belong to the given study field and considers that the study programme can be ascribed to it just marginally. The sociological and cultural component of the study programme is expressed in a quite vicarious manner.

The Expert Group believes that the study programme "Intercultural Communication" better applies to information and communication sciences and a degree must be obtained: Bachelor's Degree in Information and Communication Sciences and Qualification of Public Relations Manager. This issue is further discussed below (see the Report, 2.2.2).

2.1.2. The title, as well as the aim and objectives of the bachelor study programme "Intercultural Communication" of the study field "Languages and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes" comply with the Regulations "On the Classification of Latvian Education" (Cabinet Regulations No. 322, adopted 13.06.2017). Having analysed the curriculum and structure of the study programme, it can be stated that the degree to be obtained marginally fits the study field "Languages and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes", as the study programme mainly applies to information and communication sciences and a degree must be obtained: Bachelor's Degree in Information and Communication Sciences and Qualification of Public Relations Manager.
As stated in SER: “The content and delivery of the study programme complies with code 42314. The first part of the code (42) indicates that the study programme provides first cycle professional higher education. The second part of the code (314) indicates that the content and delivery of the study programme correspond to the group of educational programmes - language studies and programmes.” This information is misleading, as the code for the group of educational programmes “Language studies and programmes” following the Regulations "On the Classification of Latvian Education" (Cabinet Regulations No. 322, adopted 13.06.2017) is 227.
The Expert Group considers that the study programme fits the current study field only marginally and strongly recommends to consider shifting the study programme to other study field, i.e. Information and Communication Sciences as the degree obtained and professional qualification granted would mostly fit the scope of this field, although amendments as to the content of the study programme are needed. The Expert Group suggests obligatory reassessing the study programme structure critically and introducing necessary changes to cover the scope of the field completely.
The occupational standard mainly prescribes that the alumni being granted the qualification should possess competence and skills in such areas as: analysis, monitoring and evaluation of the internal and external environment within the structural unit; communication planning and management within the structural unit; cooperation in implementation of the corporate communication; designing and implementing daily communication processes at the structural unit; human resources and finance management; analysis and assessment of the public relations.
In SER: “The tasks, knowledge, skills and competences required of public relations managers are defined in the Occupational Standard for Public Relations Managers, approved by the Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council for Vocational Education and Employment at its meeting on February 28, 2020, protocol No. 2. The full text of the document is available at the following electronic link: https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-130.pdf. The occupational standard specifies that the occupational qualification of public relations manager corresponds to the seventh level of professional qualification (PKL 7) and the seventh level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF 6).”
Whereas, in the occupational standard it is stated that the occupational qualification of public relations manager corresponds to the 5th level of professional qualification (PKL 5) and the 6th level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF 6).
In SER: “to achieve the study outcomes set out in the study programme in accordance with the description of knowledge, skills and competences at LQF level 6 and PKL level 6”, which is misleading again, as the levels of the Occupational Standard are used quite voluntarily.
The Strategic objectives specified in SER are not representative at all and can be well assigned to any study programme irrespective the field. The division into “specific objectives of the study programme”, comprising 5 objectives and into “study programme objectives” amounting to 9 objectives is not well substantiated and creates an impression of overloaded content.
Learning outcomes divided into knowledge, skills and competences are formulated in a heavy if not stodgy manner. The initial idea to reflect them as close to the Occupational Standard as possible empirically is delivered in a rather vague way and requires serious reconsideration.
The admission requirements are expressed in a clear cut manner. The duration and scope of the

study programme implementation, as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.

2.1.3. As it was emphasised in SER, the BSP "Intercultural Communication" was created following the major changes in the academic bachelor's study programme "Languages and Intercultural Communication" made in 2021. The changes introduced to the BSP included:
- shifting from academic to the professional study programme;
- changing the title;
- changing the education classification code;
- changing the duration of the study programme;
- changing the volume of the study programme;
- changing the degree and qualification to be obtained;
- adding more languages of instruction;
- introducing compulsory internship.

In order to substantiate the changes, the new study courses were added to the curriculum, which however, mostly belong to the realm of Business Sciences and Communication studies, such as, e.g. Communication Theories, Crisis Communication and Management, Image Building and Branding, Marketing Management, Marketing Communication, International Public Relations, Media Technology, Social Media Communication, Leadership, Foundations of the Enneagram in Professional Communication, Business Process Simulation in Entrepreneurship and Digital Tools for Business Management, as well as Internship. New course on Language Technology was also introduced.
During the meetings with the management of VUAS, Director of the BSP, Dean (acting) of the Faculty and representatives of the Study Department, it was emphasised that the changes into the study programme have been introduced following the feedback received from students, alumni and employers. It was stated that the introduction of the changes gave a new impulse and more clear focus for the development of the study programme.
Having discussed this issue with students, graduates and employers the following reflections were received: employers emphasised that the current study programme lacks a clear focus, which is well reflected in the graduation papers; the students of the study programme did not actually comment on the necessity to introduce changes, whereas the alumni of the study programme were satisfied with the opportunity to study more business and language courses. It is interesting that none of them mentioned any of the culture-related aspects covered within the scope of the study programme.
The Expert Group believes that the changes as to the duration of the study programme, number of credit points, introduction of internship and complementing the number of languages of instruction are quite justified. The change of the title of the study programme can be substantiated partially as the title does not fully reflect the real content of the study programme and is mostly formulated pursuing marketing needs (as admitted by the representatives of VUAS during the meetings). The change of the education classification code, degree being obtained can be substantiated only marginally and require reconsideration.

2.1.4. SER provides statistical data on the growth for public relations specialists in Latvia and overseas. It is stated in the SER that: “In the context of the European Union, there is a wide range of job opportunities in public relations, e.g. a LinkedIn search for "public relations in European Union" yields 153 927 results with potential job opportunities in European Union countries with competitive salaries (source accessed 10.09.2023)”. Currently it is not possible to objectively analyse the proposed statement as the first cohort of alumni is going to appear only in 2024.
SER neither provides full analysis if the number of enrolled students has changed significantly after the introduction of the major changes into the study programme, nor gives the statistical data on the employability before the changes have been performed. It is difficult to judge if the study

programme alumni are employed immediately upon completion of the study programme. No particular examples of the employment of the previous cohorts of the graduates were provided in SER.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

The Expert Group believes that the changes as to the duration of the study programme, number of credit points, which should be assigned following the internal and external regulations, introduction of internship and complementing the number of languages of instruction are quite justified. The change of the title of the study programme can be substantiated partially as the title does not fully reflect the real content of the study programme and is mostly formulated pursuing marketing needs (as admitted by the representatives of VUAS during the meetings).
The Expert Group considers that the study programme fits the current study field only marginally and strongly recommends to consider shifting the study programme to other study field, i.e. Information and Communication Sciences as the degree obtained and professional qualification granted would mostly fit the scope of this field, even though the Expert Group realises that some amendments as to the content of the study programme would be needed. The Expert Group suggests obligatory reassessing the study programme structure critically and introducing necessary changes to cover the scope of the assigned study field completely.

Strengths:

1) The admission requirements are expressed in a clear cut manner. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation, as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.

Weaknesses:

1) Serious consideration is required for assessing the compatibility of the study field "Languages and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes" expectations, strategic development, research priorities; of the bachelor study programme's (..314) aims, tasks, learning outcomes, content of the graduation papers; and the competences, skills identified in the occupational standard.
2) The Expert Group considers that the study programme fits the current study field only marginally and strongly recommends to consider shifting the study programme to other study field, i.e. Information and Communication Sciences as the degree obtained and professional qualification granted would mostly fit the scope of this field.
3) Culture as the prevailing component is not pronounced in the curricula of the study programme, neither academic staff, nor students have emphasised it, always prioritising language and business as the main components of the study programme.
4) Learning outcomes divided into knowledge, skills and competences are formulated in a heavy if not stodgy manner.
5) The Strategic objectives specified in SER are not representative at all and can be well assigned to any study programme irrespective the field. The division into “specific objectives of the study programme”, comprising 5 objectives and into “study programme objectives” amounting to 9 objectives is not well substantiated and creates an impression of overloaded content.
6) SER neither provides full analysis if the number of enrolled students has changed significantly after the introduction of the major changes into the study programme, nor gives the statistical data

on the employability before the changes have been performed. It is difficult to judge if the study programme alumni are employed immediately upon completion of the study programme. No particular examples of the employment of the previous cohorts of the graduates are provided in SER.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The study programme is designed to award students the Professional bachelor's degree in Intercultural Communication and a qualification of Public Relations Manager. The structure of the programme (240 ECTS) includes all obligatory parts: general study courses (31 ECTS), basic theoretical courses and courses of information technologies (54 ECTS), courses of professional specialisation (98 ECTS), free elective study courses (9 ECTS), internship (30 ECTS), state examination (18 ECTS) and complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 305 "Regulations on the State Standard for Professional Higher Education" (13.06.2023) of the Republic of Latvia. The interrelation of the obligatory parts is logical and complementary. It should be noted that the number of ECTS is 61 in the first academic year of a full-time programme and 59 in the third year, although a full-time programme should correspond to 60 credits per academic year according to the Law on Higher Education Institutions. VUAS should correct the study plan accordingly to fulfil the requirements of the Law on HEIs.
According to SER p. 19, the content of the study programme provides a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and competences in the field of intercultural communication, including linguistic, intercultural and business aspects. During the on-site discussions, the expert team found that the academic staff and students place language and business as the main components of the study programme in the foreground. The cultural component should be emphasised more clearly as it is the essence of this programme.
The mapping of the study courses for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme is appropriate (Annex 3.5 Mapping of the study programme “Intercultural Communication”). The learning outcomes correspond to the 6th level of the professional qualification and the 6th level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework). Analysis of the study programme description and interviews with the programme director revealed that the content formally, in general terms is defined and implemented in accordance with the Professional Standard for Public Relations Manager, however a better pronounced correlation between the competences, skills and knowledge stipulated in the document and content, structure and organisation of the Bachelor Papers is required.
Having analysed the Bachelor Papers during the on-site visit, it should be noted that the subjects they cover fit the occupational standard quite marginally, as they are devoted to, e.g., comparison of state employment laws in Latvia and abroad, giving full attention to the analysis of holidays and leaves, working times, etc., but do not relate this to the public relations realm. According to the occupation standard - https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-130.pdf (available only in Latvian), the public relations manager is a mid-level management role in the organization that requires excellent organizational, planning as well as leadership skills, ability to develop and implement publicity strategies for the organization’s services, including a crisis management strategy and requires deep understanding of different social and social anthropological phenomenon. Having read the annex 3-5_appendix_studiju programmas kartējums_ENG.pdf and the annex 3-7_appendix_Studiju kursu apraksti_ENG.pdf the Expert Group conducted that in the study programme, there is not enough deep social and communication science subjects, for example, mass communication strategies, political public communications, anthropology, international brand communications, practical content creation, and production subjects ect., which also explains the fact why students in their Bachelor Papers have not been researching existing public relations

campaigns or developing new public relation strategies. Experts want to draw the attention of study programmes developers to the fact that the current study course content covers too broad a range of topics in a very general way, lacking in-depth studies of social science practical competences, which are crucial for a Strategic Intercultural Communication Manager and PR Manager (as these are professional study programmes), for example statistical data analysis (at least Google, Meta Analytics if faculty has no statistical data analysis softwares), deeper brand communication, etc. Bachelor Papers should clearly and unambiguously set the framework for awarding the degree and obtaining professional qualification, which was not that evident having got acquainted with the papers provided by VUAS during the meeting. The same drawback was also highlighted by the employers, who have admitted that they actually were not invited by VUAS to get acquainted with the occupational standard. The content of the study programme reflects the needs of the labour market – students are taught current topics in the fields of computational linguistics, language technologies, artificial intelligence, machine learning, speech technologies, e-commerce and e-business, e-marketing, digital marketing, digital content creation, etc.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. The active and cooperative teaching/learning methods (e.g. interactive work, practical projects, discussions and exchange of opinions) correspond to the essential provisions of a student-oriented studies and enable students to achieve the intended study outcomes and reflect on their performance. There is no overarching study philosophy or prescribed guidelines for teaching methodology. Lecturers are free to design course content and choose teaching methods. The course content may be updated after the programme has been completed based on student evaluation. The study programme is delivered in both Latvian and English, but SER does not specify the methods used to deliver such a study programme. The study programme benefits from the participation of PhD students (A. Bādere) as they act as lecturers.
Students are regularly surveyed and the feedback collected from students is taken into account when updating the programme. From the information on the SER and the appendices, it can be concluded that students are involved in the study process and the role of the lecturers is to facilitate it. However, considering that the student-centred approach should focus on the needs of the individual student, little information is provided (the SER states on p. 132 “the students are provided with quality studies and the possibility of individual approach during the study process") 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). None of the students interviewed during the on-site visit managed to provide information about existing opportunities of individualised study plans.

2.2.4. In the 7th semester, students complete compulsory internships of 30 ECTS. The scope corresponds to the internal regulations and the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia No. 305 "Regulations on the State Standard for Professional Higher Education". According to SER p. 120, there is no difference in the realisation of internships for Latvian and English students. Students receive the same internship opportunities, the same help in finding an internship and the drafts to be submitted are offered in both Latvian and English.
The internships are carried out both in Latvia and abroad, including the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme. Students are advised by the Study Programme Director and the Erasmus+ coordinator on the selection of a suitable company/organisation. The information in the SER on p. 121 shows that some of the Erasmus+ internships hardly correspond to the content of the programme, as they involve tasks in hotel administration or customer service. The aim and objectives of the internship are in line with the professional standard "Public Relations Manager" and is clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the study programme as indicated in Annex 3.5.

There is an appropriate mechanism for assessing the internship. A tripartite contract is signed between the university, the student and the company at the start of the internship. The Faculty Council evaluates and approves internships chosen by students. In addition, the internships are assessed by the internship supervisor (at the company), the internship supervisor/reviewer at the VUAS and the internship report defence commission.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. There are 18 ECTS dedicated to the writing of the Bachelor's thesis which translates to a fair amount of 450 academic hours. The topics of the thesis reflect the most important research areas of the study field. Various cultural aspects are covered, e.g. cultural dimensions in Latvia, communication in multicultural companies and many others. Taking into account the structural composition and thematic framework of the theses provided during the on-site visit, it is strongly recommended that the theses be more focused, better structured and include a clearly pronounced empirical and analytical part (parts), which serves as a mandatory basis for the award of the professional qualification. There should also be more theses written in collaboration with companies. According to SER p. 122, the evaluation of students' theses varies from average (4) to excellent (10). The additional document provided during the on-site visit (Excel table) shows an average grade of 8.3. The proportion of good to excellent evaluations is relatively high, but does not indicate grade inflation. According to the study course description (Annex 3.7.), there is an interim pre-defence procedure to ensure the defence and assessment of the Bachelor's thesis (including compliance with the methodological guidelines and presentation requirements).

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

The study programme is in line with its intended aim. The aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the programme are aligned with the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study field. It includes all obligatory parts and formally fully complies with the state regulations. The content of the study programme is well structured, connected and up-to-date, but its cultural component is less elaborated and the Final Thesis component needs better alignment with the occupational standard. 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 and they contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme, although the opportunities for students to individualise their studies are not sufficient. Internships are properly organised and assessed, and students can rely on the support of the administrative staff. The topics of students' final theses are relevant to the study field and in line with the study programme, although major improvements are needed to ensure the thesis are more focused on intercultural communication and public relations and are better structured in relation to the compulsory parts for the professional qualification.

Strengths:

1) Well structured and interconnected content of the study programme.
2) The programme considers the labour market needs in the design of the course content.
3) Student feedback is considered when updating the programme.

Weaknesses:

1) The cultural component of this programme is not emphasised clearly enough as the academic staff and students place language and business as the main components of the study programme in

the foreground.
2) The empirical part of theses is not emphasised clearly enough.
3) A comparatively small number of theses are written in cooperation with companies.
4) Insufficient opportunities for students to individualise their studies.
5) Insufficient alignment of the Final Thesis component with the occupational standard.

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

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Not applicable.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. The resources and provision of the BSP “Intercultural Communication” correspond to the ones required for the study field. Informative, technical and material provision of VUAS is described in second chapter, part 3 “Resources and Provision of the Study Field”, subsection 1.3.2. and 1.3.3. No specific resources are needed for this study programme. Lectures, practical classes and examinations are held at VUAS in Ventspils, Inženieru street 101.
Study provision includes modern lecture rooms, equipped with a multimedia projector or an interactive whiteboard and a computer in each study room, computer classrooms, a library with a large reading room. VUAS library has access to scientific literature on translation studies, language learning, intercultural communication, and various linguistic issues. Library grants access to various databases. Library staff organizes training courses on how to use these databases and regularly informs students and the teaching staff of any database additions. During interviews students affirmed resources provided by the library are sufficient. University resources also include necessary network services, such as the university's website.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The available funding for the study programme is clearly stated in SER (p. 124). Revenue of VUAS includes the funding from the local government, state subsidy for the provision of the study process (1630.11 EUR per student; for student scholarships and social needs 251.98 EUR per student) and revenue from tuition fees (for citizens of Latvia and the EU it is 2000 EUR, for citizens of third countries – 3500 EUR per year).
In SER (p. 124) different calculation methods for determining potential ‘break-even point’ for the study programme are given. VUAS has so far used the method of modelling the minimum number of students required. The other methods mentioned would be increasing public funding per student or increasing tuition fees, however due to the current economic situation and the financial situation of the local population VUAS is choosing to focus its resources on student recruitment measures. Currently, 44 students study in the BSP “Intercultural Communication”, which is 21.57% of the total number of students of the FoTS. It is calculated that 57 students would be required for the programme to reach break-even point. As of right now the losses of the study programme are covered by the positive cash flow of other programmes in this study area. During meetings with various staff members, including the director of BSP “Intercultural Communication” and MSP “Strategic intercultural communication” and management of VUAS, it was stated that 10 is the

minimum number of students in order to run the bachelors programme each year, while still evaluating each situation and the given programmes necessity.
However in meetings with students and graduates the Expert group observed that the number of students in all represented programme years by the informants was lower than 10, it being about 7 or 8. Although the calculation process of break-even point is precisely described in SER, the programme does not reach it and a clear policy on how to deal with this problem is not in action.

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

In general, study provision, informative provision, material and technical provision and also financial provision comply with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and indicate the possibility to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved.

Strengths:

1) Modern study premises, good resources provided by the library.

Weaknesses:

1) Small number of students, that don’t reach the break-even point; lack of a clear policy on how to deal with the low intake of students in the programme.

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

VUAS provides the study programme with all the necessary tools and resource material, technical as well as informative base for successful implementation of the study programme, but there is an issue of financial sustainability of the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. According to the SER (page 125.-128.) 23 teaching staff are involved in the implementation of the professional Bachelor’s study programme, including 14 guest lecturers, making up the majority of the teaching staff. This indicates a reliance on part-time or visiting professionals to bring specialised knowledge to the study programme; then there are 3 lecturers, 4 assistant professors, 2 associate professors, indicating a higher level of academic experience and involvement in curriculum development and 2 professors, who are likely to be the most senior and experienced members of the academic staff. 9 staff members hold doctoral degrees and one member of the teaching staff is currently studying, 14 staff members have master's degrees (all guest lecturers); several lecturers hold professional master's degrees, indicating a focus on practical applications in fields like business management, translation, and human resources. The State language skills of the lecturers of study programme "Intercultural Communication" comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 733 of 2009 "Regulations on the Scope of Knowledge of the State Language and the Procedure for Testing Proficiency in the State Language for Professional and Official Duties". Information on the English language skills of the lecturers is seen in the lecturers' curricula vitae

(CV) attached in the Annex 2-9_Valodas_un_kulturas_stidju_virziena_macibspeku_CV_ENG., also the level of knowledge of the English language of the teaching staff is confirmed by the certificate No./1-10.1/102 issued on December 12, 2023, regarding the English language proficiency level of all teaching staff involved in the implementation of the bachelor's study program "Intercultural Communication". After checking the documents, the Expert Group confirms its correctness. During the interview with the Study Programme director Expert Group was informed that the high number of guest lecturers is due to the fact that teaching staff from industry companies are involved in order to provide all the necessary practical competences to achieve the study programme results, guest lecturers ensure that students are exposed to current industry practices and specialised knowledge. Study programme "Intercultural Communication" also involves teaching staff whose degrees and professional qualifications are related to social sciences. However, the Expert Group believes that there is room for full-time faculty staff growth, which would help to expand the practical and academic research opportunities and would also strengthen the Study programme.

2.4.2. Based on the analysis of the SER, its annexes and the results of the interviews the Expert Group see, that significant changes have been implemented in the Study programme "Intercultural Communication" in 2021, which also affected the composition of the teaching staff, many professionals from the industry were attracted to the Study programme, so that students have the opportunity to learn from professionals working in a real work environment, as well as to learn the latest developments in the field, for example, two lecturers with practical experience in public speaking and event management have been appointed to teach the course "Public Speaking and Presentation Skills". No complaints have been received from students, so it can be concluded that the quality has not been compromised by the changes. The Expert Group could not find the proof that mentioned changes would negatively affect the Study programme development.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. The CVs and SER reveals that the academic staff has professional/practical experience related to the study programme profile and/or publishes in peer-reviewed journals indexed in peer-reviewed editions like ERIH PLUS, EBSCO, SCOPUS, Web of Science, etc. in the last six years as required.

2.4.5. The cooperation takes place both in formal and informal activities organised by the VUAS. The involvement and participation of the teaching staff takes place in the study programme assessment and possible improvement discussions in the study programme council meetings and in the framework of the Faculty discussions, where students, employers' and entrepreneurs' representatives participate. It was confirmed during the interviews that cooperation among teaching staff takes place. In order to ensure continuity of the implementation of the study programme, the VeAUS makes an effort to integrate new teaching staff, including VUAS Doctoral students, into the pedagogical and research work under the supervision of VUAS professors. During interviews, formal and informal meetings among teaching staff were mentioned as the main method to facilitate cooperation and mutual coordination of content and teaching. According to the SER (Page 131.), currently, 22 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the study programme with various workloads, while 44 students are currently enrolled in the study programme. The ratio of students to lecturers is 44/21=2.09.

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

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements and enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme. The teaching staff changes that were caused by changes made

in the structure of the study programme does not affect the quality of the study outcome. The information about the scientific publications of all teaching staff members is provided in Annex 2.13 List of publications, patents, artistic creations of teaching staff for the reporting period. No complaints have been received from students about the Study programme. However, the Expert Group believes that there is room for full-time faculty staff growth, which would help to expand the practical and academic research opportunities and would also strengthen the Study programme.

Strengths:

1) Experienced practitioners are involved in Study programme realisation as a guest lectures;
2) Low student-lecturer ratio allowing for an individual approach in teaching and learning.

Weaknesses:

1) Reliance on visiting professionals as guest lecturers is high risk for Study programme further successful development;
2) High proportion of non-elected 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 formal qualification requirements of the academic staff members are fulfilled.

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

The Annex 3_-3appendix_SK_Atbilstiba izglitibas standartam_ENG.docx.pdf confirms that the study programme complies with Cabinet of Ministers Provisions of June 13, 2023 No. 305 “Provisions on the State Standard for Vocational Higher Education” - https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342818-noteikumi-par-valsts-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitibas-standartu (Available only in Latvian).

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: Partially compliant

The study programme content marginally complies with occupational standard for the public relation manager - https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-130.pdf (Available only in Latvian), however a better pronounced correlation between the competences, skills and knowledge stipulated in the document and content, structure and organisation of the Bachelor Papers is required. Bachelor Papers should clearly and unambiguously set the

framework for awarding the degree and obtaining professional qualification, which was not that evident having got acquainted with the papers provided by VUAS during the meeting. The same drawback was also highlighted by the employers, who have admitted that they actually were not invited by VUAS to get acquainted with the occupational standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in both 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.

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: Non-compliant

The provided Diploma samples (3-1_appendix_D_DP_ENG.pdf) does not comply with Cabinet Regulation No. 202 “Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus”: 1) wording in diploma in Latvian should be "ieguvis/-usi Profesionālo bakalaura grādu.." instead of "ieguvis/-usi Profesionālā bakalaura grāds..."; 2) in the diploma supplement point 8 there is an outdated information on education system in Latvia (from 2012) in both Latvian and English versions; 3) an error in diploma supplement in Latvian in the table on page 6 "1. Īsā profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms", it should be "Īsā cikla profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms"; 4) an error in diploma supplement point 2.5. - the language of examination should be English not Latvian, as the study programme is implemented in English. It is suggested to revise Diploma samples and to make necessary corrections.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

This is identified in the annex (2-9_Valodas_un_kulturas_stidju_virziena_macibspeku_CV_ENG). It can be concluded that the state language proficiency is compliant with Cabinet Regulation. Nr. 733 " Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language".

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

English language proficiency B2 or higher is required for all teaching staff. The level of knowledge of the English language of the teaching staff is confirmed by the certificate No./1-10.1/102 issued on December 12, 2023 and identified in the annex (2-9_Valodas_un_kulturas_stidju_virziena_macibspeku_CV_ENG).

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 (Annex 2-5_appendix_stud_liguma_paraugs_ENG.pdf) complies with Cabinet Regulation. Nr. 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

VUAS has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another higher education institution if the implementation of the study programme is terminated. The agreement is specified in the annex 2-3_appendix_agreement_ENG.pdf. It is specified that in case of discontinuation of this study programme, students are to be able to continue their studies at Turība University.

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

VUAS 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. It is ensured based on the Annex 2-4_appendix_Declaration_on_loss_compensation_for_students_ENG.pdf pursuant to paragraph 13.4 of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 795 “Regulations Regarding Licensing of Study Programmes”.

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

The study programme is generally compliant (marginally in terms of occupational standard) with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, however the question of study programme attribution to the given study field should be considered. It is strongly recommended to shift it to another study field as the new courses added to the programme, mostly belong to the realm of Information and Communication Sciences. The research quality of provided Bachelor's Papers does not prove graduate’s readiness to work as Public Relation Managers as it is required from the occupational standard.

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

The bachelor study programme is generally compliant with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, however the question of study programme attribution to the given study field should be considered seriously. It is strongly recommended to shift it to the study field “Information and Communication Sciences”, as the new study courses with their learning outcomes added to the programme mostly belong to the realm of Information and Communication Sciences.
The study programme marginally complies with the occupational standard for the public relation manager - https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-130.pdf (Available only in Latvian). A better pronounced correlation between the competences, skills and knowledge stipulated in the document and content, structure and organisation of the Bachelor Papers is required.
Bachelor Papers should clearly and unambiguously set the framework for awarding the degree and obtaining professional qualification, which was not that evident having got acquainted with the papers provided by VUAS during the meeting. The same drawback was also highlighted by the employers, who have admitted that they actually were not invited by VUAS to get acquainted with the occupational standard.
Having eliminated the identified weaknesses and having resolved the issue with the attribution of the study programme to the study field “Information and Communication Sciences”, the bachelor study programme can be further implemented in the desired form (full time), in all applied implementation languages (i.e. Latvian and English) and in the applied implementation place, i.e. Ventspils.

Evaluation of the study programme "Intercultural Communication"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Intercultural Communication"

Short-term recommendations

1) It is strongly recommended that consideration be given to changing the Bachelor's study programme to the study field of Information and Communication Sciences, as the degree and professional qualification acquired would largely fit the scope of this field.
2) Measures should be taken to adjust the structure of the study programme and place the cultural component of this programme in the foreground including a comparison of the study programme with at least three study programmes with a similar focus that are run in Latvia, nearby and in the top 500 universities.
3) It is highly advisable to address the strategic objectives of the study programme so that they are specifically tailored to the unique aspects of the programme.
4) It is strongly recommended to establish a better pronounced correlation between the competences, skills and knowledge stipulated in the Occupational Standard and content, structure and organisation of the Bachelor Papers.
5) VUAS should correct the study plan to fulfil the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions regarding 60 ECTS per academic year.
6) Change wording in diploma Diploma samples (3-1_appendix_D_DP_ENG.pdf) in Latvian to "Profesionālo bakalaura grādu" instead of "Profesionālā bakalaura grāds".
7) In the diploma’s supplement point 8 correct outdated information on the education system in Latvia (from 2012).
8) Correct an error in the diploma supplement in Latvian in the table on page 6 "1. Īsā profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms", it should be "Īsā cikla profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms".
9) Correct an error in the diploma supplement in English and Latvian in the point 2.5. - the language of examination and instruction of the study programme should be mentioned as English, not Latvian.

Long-term recommendations

1) Data on the employment of graduates should be regularly collected and analysed to ensure a successful transition of graduates into the labour market.
2) Bachelor theses should be more focussed, better structured and contain a clearly defined empirical and analytical part (parts). There should also be more theses written in cooperation with companies.
3) Students should be given more opportunities to individualise their studies, e.g. through individualised study plans in which the study results achieved through formal, non-formal and informal learning are credited.
4) FoTS should take measures to attract more elected staff to contribute to the development of the respective academic field.

5) Concrete measures should be taken to improve the cost-effectiveness of the Bachelor programme so that it does not become unsustainable in the long term.

II - "Strategic intercultural communication" ASSESSMENT

II - "Strategic intercultural communication" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. The SER mentions that the Master Study Programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication" was restructured into the professional study programme. The changes were made in 2021, taking into account employers' needs and suggestions, students' recommendations, the recommendations of the previous programme evaluation committee and developments in the field. The study programme has acquired a new education classification code, which has been changed to 47314 (previously: 47222); the duration of the study programme has been changed to 1 or 2 years.
It is recommended to reconsider employing the term “interdisciplinarity”, when highlighting the nature, content and structure of the given study programme. The Expert Group marginally agrees that certain elements of interdisciplinary studies are present in the curriculum and can be traced in the documents, however, they are not well pronounced. It is stated in SER: “The interdisciplinarity of the study programme and its compliance with the knowledge, skills and competences of level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework as defined in the Latvian Classification of Education justifies the appropriateness of the programme code 47314”.
The Expert Group is not confident that the study programme with code 47314 fits the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes” and strongly recommends adjusting the curriculum of the study programme and shifting it to the study field “Information and Communication Science”.
Although language is undoubtedly the key component for efficient communication, the main focus of the study programme awarding Master Degree in Intercultural communication and a qualification of Strategic Communications Manager is not put on the language and linguistic competence, but is supposed to be put on strategic organisation of communication, creative and innovative planning, development and management of public relations and communication strategy in accordance with corporate aims, conducting research, performing analysis and boosting advancement of public relations and communication activities, forecasting risks and crisis situations, managing efficient application of modern technologies and performing other tasks in close cooperation with the administration of the organisational unit.
The intentions of the administration of the study programme to combine language, culture and communication through the prism of management are understandable, but not well grounded. The lack of consistency is reflected in the graduation papers, curriculum and lack of unified understanding of the study programme demonstrated by graduates, students and employers.

2.1.2. The title of the study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication” is concise and appealing to potential students. The degree and professional qualification of the study programme to be awarded following one of the implementation scenarios are defined in accordance with legal documents. The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are defined following the requirements stipulated in the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 322 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education", the requirements of the Occupational standard "Strategic Communication Manager", which corresponds to LQF 7 and to the seventh level of professional qualification, and the requirements listed in the Regulation No 305 "Regulations on

the State Standard for Vocational Higher Education" of the Cabinet of Ministers.
SER states that, “in order to provide interested students with the opportunity to obtain a second cycle higher education qualification and a level 7 professional qualification, the study programme is offered as a two-level programme, determined by the content of the programme, the amount of credit points and the duration of the programme”. It means that the holders of the first cycle higher education and professional qualification can continue their studies with a programme of 60 ECTS, whereas, students with first cycle higher education obtained in other thematic groups of education can obtain second cycle higher education, i.e. a master's degree and a seventh level professional qualification, by completing a programme of 120 ECTS. Any of the options would amount to five years of consecutive studies, which is in line with the recommendations made by the European Commission and national higher education regulations.
SER: “The main aim of the professional master’s study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication" is to train highly qualified, creative and competitive specialists in the field of strategic intercultural communication in a multicultural society”. The aim is formulated in line with mainstream tendency to focus on efficient communication within multicultural society. Although it is stated in SER that “The master’s programme can be considered as an interdisciplinary programme, where the structure of the programme is based on three basic pillars: language, culture and communication. Thus, the title of the study programme does not contradict and corresponds to the chosen field of study "Language and Cultural Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes", the objectives set for the study programme reflect the importance of management, strategic communication, digital and critical thinking skills and cooperation abilities, but not the significance of linguistic competences whatsoever.
The master study programme fits the occupational standard quite marginally as there is certain disproportion and disbalance in the number of study courses devoted to culture, management, communication, and other aspects. The occupational standard mainly prescribes that the alumni being granted the qualification should possess competence and skills in such areas as: analysis, monitoring and evaluation of the internal and external environment within the structural unit; communication planning and management within the structural unit; implementation of the corporate communication; designing and implementing daily communication processes at the structural unit; human resources and finance management; analysis and assessment of the public relations. The curriculum and structure of the study programme give attention to achieving managerial aims, and the students have positively evaluated the content of the management, business and marketing related study materials. However, despite the evident number of the study courses, which contain the term “culture” or “intercultural” in their titles, during the onsite visit, students, alumni and employers, have highlighted the prevailing managerial aspect and the cultural aspects lagging behind. This, however, was commented during the on-site visit, that the titles do not obligatory reflect the content of the study material.
The occupational standard prescribes that it is required to possess competence in at least two foreign languages, however, there are no foreign language study courses in the curriculum of the MSP, which makes it unclear how students can gain this valuable and extremely significant competence for intercultural communication specialists.
The Expert Group strongly recommends to reconsider the attribution of the given study programme to the study field "Language and Cultural Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes". See Criterion 2.1.1.
The admission requirements are clearly formulated. The admission results have a stable tendency and although the numbers are not big, it can be generally substantiated that the proposed delivery model is justified.

2.1.3. In the Self-evaluation report it is stated that the changes to the study programme “will be made based on changes to the Higher Education Act and recommendations made in the

accreditation report, as well as feedback from graduates and employers", which makes the Expert Group believe that more changes to the study programme shall be introduced. The SER also contains information on the changes in progress, i.e. "Significant changes in the Master's study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication" are being made, firstly, in the design of the content of the study programme to provide students with the opportunity to study an individual free-choice part of their studies, as stipulated by Article 6(2)(4) of the Law on Higher Education; secondly, by making changes to the education and professional qualifications to be acquired, specifying the appropriate cycle of education and the appropriate qualification level, as stipulated by Article 57 of the Law on Higher Education; and thirdly, by making changes to the education and professional qualification to be acquired, specifying the appropriate cycle of education and the appropriate qualification level, as stipulated by Article 57(2)(4) of the Law on Higher Education. Article 57(1)(2) and in accordance with the requirements of Article 37 of Part 6 of Cabinet Regulation No. 305 "Regulations on the State Standard for Vocational Higher Education"; thirdly, by making a transition to credit point accounting in accordance with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, as provided for in Article 57(1)(4) of the Higher Education Act."
The unclearly described procedure and status of the changes introduced to the study programme, the choice of general phrases for description, e.g. "The content of the study programme has been further specified, which is mainly due to changes in the sector in line with labour market requirements" and the lack of detailed analysis of the changes in curriculum, lack of particular examples mentioned, garble information provided and hinder the performance of analysis.

2.1.4. It is stated in SER that "Graduates of the programme obtain a second cycle higher education and a seventh level professional qualification, i.e. a master's degree in Intercultural Communication and a qualification as a Strategic Communication Manager." In order to perform a well-substantiated analysis of the socio-economic impact of the study programme, it was compared with other similar study programmes implemented in the region. The detailed analysis of the VUAS study programme and the study programme implemented at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland is provided. Having compared both study programmes it has been concluded that: "After the comparison of the study programmes, it can be stated that the master's study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication'' at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences is designed as a competitive higher education programme". The Expert Group believes that for obtaining objective, trustworthy and valid data it is recommended to compare the study programme with at least three study programmes with similar focus implemented in Latvia, near-by and at the top 500 universities.
It is emphasised in the SER that: "Taking into account the 2022 report by the Ministry of Economy "Informative report on medium- and long-term labour market projections" it can be concluded that the demand for highly qualified specialists (managers, senior specialists, professionals) will only increase in the future. The report indicates that highly qualified professionals with knowledge, skills and competences in intercultural and communication management will be needed in all sectors". The importance of intercultural communication can hardly be overestimated, however it would be required to list the key points mentioned in the report and correlate them with the learning outcomes of the study programme for a more representative reflection.
It is also mentioned in SER that: "highly motivated people study the programme because they have already completed higher education and most of them have work experience. Master's students indicate that they are employed and hold leading specialist and middle management positions". It would be more representative if some examples of alumni employment would be listed. SER: "Graduates are employed in both international and Latvian companies and institutions." - no information on the companies where graduates are employed.
It is emphasised in SER, that "the master's programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication" is considered as a sequential continuation of the bachelor's programme "Intercultural Communication"." The programme was launched in 2022 and enrolled 12 students in the first year

of implementation. In 2023, 14 students were enrolled. It is significant that almost half of the students matriculated into the study programme were international.
SER: “Comparing the number of students in equivalent study programmes at other universities in the country, it can be concluded that the significant changes made to the content of the study programme have been successful. ” This is a general observation again, which requires substantiation and statistical data to prove the statement. It is strongly recommended to avoid including general observations and generalised statements into the reports as they do not reflect the real situation objectively.
It is also unclear how the numbers of drop-out students are calculated if VUAS analyses data only for the period since 2022. SER: “When evaluating the data on drop-out from the master’s programme, on average 7% (3 students) do not continue their studies.” The appendix 3.2. contains no information on the graduates and exmatriculated students for the period of 2019 - 2022, while this period is illustrated by the number of active students.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

The Expert Group considers that the study programme with code 47314 does not fit the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes” and strongly recommends adjusting the structure and curriculum of the study programme and shifting it to the study field “Information and Communication Science”.
The objectives set for the study programme reflect the importance of management, strategic communication, digital and critical thinking skills and cooperation abilities, but not the significance of linguistic competences whatsoever.
It is recommended to reconsider employing the term “interdisciplinarity”, when highlighting the nature, content and structure of the given study programme. The Expert Group marginally agrees that certain elements of interdisciplinary studies are present in the curriculum and can be traced in the documents, however, they are not well pronounced.
It is strongly recommended to avoid including general observations and generalised statements into the reports as they do not reflect the real situation objectively.

Strengths:

1) The admission requirements are clearly formulated. The admission results have a stable tendency and although the numbers are not big, it can be generally substantiated that the proposed delivery model is justified.

Weaknesses:

1) The intentions of the administration of the study programme to combine language, culture and communication through the prism of management are understandable, but not well grounded. The lack of consistency is reflected in the graduation papers, curriculum and lack of unified understanding of the study programme demonstrated by graduates, students and employers.
2) The Expert Group considers that the study programme with code 47314 does not fit the study field “Language and Culture Studies, Mother Tongue Studies and Language Programmes” and strongly recommends adjusting the curriculum of the study programme and shifting it to the study field “Information and Communication Science”.
3) The unclearly described procedure and status of the changes introduced to the study programme, the choice of general phrases for description, the lack of detailed analysis of the changes in

curriculum, and the lack of particular examples mentioned, garble information provided and hinder the performance of analysis.
4) For obtaining objective, trustworthy and valid data it is recommended to compare the study programme with at least three study programmes with similar focus implemented in Latvia, near-by and at the top 500 universities.
5) It would be more representative if some examples of alumni employment would be listed. No information on the companies where graduates are employed.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The study programme is designed to award students the Professional master's degree in Intercultural Communication. According to SER p. 84, the programme is designed as a two-level study programme: 1. Full version of the programme with the implementation scope of 120 ECTS – for graduates with first cycle higher education in other fields; 2. Short version of the programme with the implementation scope of 60 ECTS – for graduates with a first cycle higher education qualification and a sixth level professional qualification in related fields. This setup is logical and serves to facilitate access to the Master's programme. The structure of the programme for both 60 and 120 ECTS includes all compulsory parts according to Section 55, Paragraph 2, Subparagraph c of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 June 2023 No. 305 "Regulations on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education": study courses that provide coverage of the latest developments in the theory and practice of the field (9 ECTS), research work, creative work, design work and management study courses (9 or 39 ECTS), optional study courses (3 ECTS), internship (9 or 39 ECTS), national examination including defence of a master’s thesis (30 ECTS). The interrelation of the obligatory parts is logical and complementary.
According to SER p. 89, is designed to provide students with the necessary knowledge of intercultural communication, helping them to acquire the skills and achieve the competence required in the profession of strategic communication manager, contributing to the competitiveness of students in the labour market. The course descriptions provided in Appendix 3.7 justify the fact, the programme meets the needs of the industry, labour market and scientific trends. The content of the study programme includes important topics on Media Language, Crisis Communication, Social Media, Translation, Intercultural Communication and Business Language and encompasses innovative courses like Digital Culture Management. The mapping of the study courses for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme is appropriate (Annex 3.5 Mapping of the study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication”).
During the on-site discussions, the expert team found that the academic staff and students place language and business as the main components of the study programme in the foreground. The cultural component should be emphasised more clearly as it is the essence of this programme. The experts panel also suggests shifting the programme to the study field “Information and Communication Science” (for the details see the analysis provided above, Report, 2.1.1).
The curriculum and structure of the study programme give considerable attention to achieving managerial aims stated in the occupational standard, and the students have positively evaluated the content of the management, business and marketing related study materials. However, despite the evident number of the study courses, which contain the term “culture” or “intercultural” in their titles, during the onsite visit, students, alumni and employers, have highlighted the prevailing managerial aspect and the cultural aspects lagging behind. This, however, was commented during the onsite visit, that the titles do not obligatory reflect the content of the study material.
The occupational standard prescribes that it is required to possess competence in at least two foreign languages, however, there are no foreign language study courses in the curriculum of the MSP, which makes it unclear how students can gain this valuable and extremely significant

competence for intercultural communication specialists.
The programme follows, but marginally complies with the professional standard "Strategic Communication Manager", as a better pronounced correlation between the competences, skills and knowledge stipulated in the document and content, structure and organisation of the Master Papers is required. For instance, some of the Master Papers provided for the Expert Group during the on-site visit are focused on translation and/or linguistic issues that would seemingly fit the field requirements, but they have nothing to do with the occupational standard. Some master theses are devoted to digitalization of the Latvian Culture and, e.g., building the virtual museum experience, which has technological and digitalization aspects greatly pronounced as well as certainly raises the issue of preservation of the Latvian Culture, but only partially complies with the occupational standard and the main aims of the study programme. Master Papers should clearly and unambiguously set the framework for awarding the degree and obtaining professional qualification, which was not that evident having got acquainted with the papers provided by VUAS during the meeting. (for the details see the analysis provided above, Report, 2.1.2. as well as below, Report, 2.2.6)

2.2.2. According to SER p. 90, the programme follows an interdisciplinary approach with the main objective to train creative and competitive professionals who are able to navigate linguistic, cultural and intercultural communication issues and who have a thorough knowledge of the chosen language and current global trends in linguistics, literary studies, folklore studies and theatre studies in Europe and the world. There is no doubt that access to the Clarivate Analytics and Scopus databases ensures that students are exposed to the latest cutting-edge research in culture and language. The reading lists included in the course descriptions include essential monographs and other literature in different languages and research traditions. However, the VUAS key research areas do not include Intercultural Communication or Public Relations. The analysis in SER p. 90 focuses on the topics of Master’s theses and student involvement in research projects, although no specific examples are given to substantiate the latter claim. From this it can be concluded that the Master's programme is partly linked to the latest developments in communication research.

2.2.3. The active and cooperative teaching/learning methods (e.g. applied games, individual and group consultations, study visits, case studies, students' independent individual work, presentations, conferences) correspond to the essential provisions of a student-oriented studies and enable students to achieve the intended study outcomes and reflect on their performance. There is no overarching study philosophy or prescribed guidelines for teaching methodology. Lecturers are free to design course content and choose teaching methods. Great emphasis is placed on the synergy between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The course content can be updated after completion of the programme based on student evaluation.
The study programme is delivered in both Latvian and English, but SER does not specify the methods used to deliver such a study programme. The SER merely specifies the implementation of the two-level programme by stating that the short and long programmes do not differ and that all students have the same opportunities to take courses and final examinations.
Students are regularly surveyed and the feedback collected from students is taken into account when updating the programme. According to SER p. 91, students can participate in the improvement of the study process directly (personally) by expressing their wishes to the course lecturer, the study programme director, the dean, specialists of the study department, or through the Student Council, which is represented in the Study Programme Council, the Faculty Council and the Senate. From the information on the SER and the appendices, it can be concluded that students are involved in the study process and the role of the lecturers is to facilitate it. 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). None of the students interviewed during the on-site visit managed to provide information about existing opportunities of individualised study plans.

2.2.4. Students of the full-version of the programme complete compulsory internships of 39 ECTS (Internship of 9 ECTS and Professional internship of 30 ECTS) in the 2nd and 3rd semester while students of the short-version programme undertake their 9 ECTS placements in their 1st semester. The scope corresponds to the Section 55, Paragraph 2, Subparagraph c of the Law on Higher Education and the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 June 2023 No. 305 "Regulations on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education" and internal regulations approved by the meeting of the Faculty Council. The aim and objectives of the internship are in line with the professional standard "Strategic Communication Manager" and is clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the study programme as indicated in Annex 3.5.
The provision of internship as well as the organisation of work are sufficient. The internships are carried out both in Latvian companies, state and municipal institutions and abroad including the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme, although master's students prefer companies that are related to their professional activity and use and implement modern innovative solutions and technologies, as well as provide an appropriate working environment and are located closer to their place of residence (SER pp. 93-94). This is due to full-time employment and family circumstances, which is completely understandable.
Students are advised by the Study Programme Director and the Erasmus+ coordinator on the selection of a suitable company/organisation. According to SER p. 94, there is no difference in the realisation of internships for Latvian and English students. Students receive the same internship opportunities, the same help in finding an internship and the drafts to be submitted are offered in both Latvian and English.
There is an appropriate mechanism for assessing the internship. A tripartite contract is signed between the university, the student and the company at the start of the internship. The Faculty Council evaluates and approves internships chosen by students. In addition, the internships are assessed by the internship supervisor (at the company), the internship supervisor/reviewer at the VUAS) and the internship report defence commission.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. A sufficient amount of 30 ECTS (750 academic hours) are available for writing the Master's thesis. According to the SER, a Master's thesis may be written on topics closely related to the students' professional activity and should include three main parts: theoretical, analytical and practical. Most of the topics cover areas in the Humanities including the study of cultural issues and intercultural communication e. g. "Integration of the Ukrainians in Latvia (2022)", "The role of female gender managers in entrepreneurship", "Perception of Latvian literature and culture in Japan: translations from Latvian into Japanese". It was not possible to fully assess the thematic distribution of the Master's theses, as the first graduates of the two-year programme were not available during the on-site visit. The information on the six defended Master's theses shows that the topics of the students' theses cover a variety of linguistic, cultural and public-related phenomena covered by the programme's courses.
The typical volume of a Master's thesis is 70-80 pages. It is evident that students are dedicated to their research interests and are adequately supervised by the lecturers. However, considering the structure of the theses, it is strongly recommended that the theses should be more focussed, better structured and include a clearly distinct empirical and analytical part (parts), which serves as a mandatory basis for the award of the professional qualification. There should also be more theses written in collaboration with companies as the majority of the theses deal with fundamental topics.

According to SER p. 122, the evaluation of students' theses varies from average (5) to with distinction (10) with an average grade of 7.5. The distribution of grades is proportional. According to the study course description (Appendix 3.7.), there is a preliminary pre-defence procedure to ensure the defence and assessment of the Master's thesis, including compliance with the methodological guidelines and presentation requirements. The intentions of the administration of the study programme to link language, culture and communication through the prism of management are understandable but not well founded. The lack of consistency is reflected in the final papers, the curriculum and the lack of uniform understanding of the programme displayed by graduates, students and employers. Improvements are needed to ensure the thesis are more focused on intercultural communication and public relations and are better structured in relation to the compulsory parts for the professional qualification.

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

The aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the programme are partially aligned with the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study field. It includes all obligatory parts and fully complies with the national regulations. The content of the study programme is well structured, connected and up-to-date, but the cultural component of the study programme needs further elaboration. 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 and they contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme, although the opportunities for students to individualise their studies are not sufficient. Internships are properly organised and assessed, and Master’s students can rely on the support of the administrative staff. The topics of Master’s theses are relevant to the study field and in line with the study programme, although major improvements are needed to ensure the thesis are more focused on intercultural communication and public relations and are better structured in relation to the compulsory parts for the professional qualification. Access to world-class databases and course content ensures that students have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the latest research developments in the field of culture and language.

Strengths:

1) Well structured and interconnected content of the study programme.
2) The programme considers the labour market needs in the design of the course content.
3) Student feedback is considered when updating the programme.
4) Students are provided with opportunities to get acquainted with the latest research developments in culture and language.

Weaknesses:

1) The cultural component of this programme is not emphasised clearly enough as the academic staff and students place language and business as the main components of the study programme in the foreground.
2) The Master's programme is partly linked to the latest developments in communication research.
3) The empirical part of Master’s theses is not emphasised clearly enough.
4) A comparatively small number of theses are written in cooperation with companies.
5) 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: Partially compliant

The Master's programme is partly linked to the latest developments in communication research as no evident data on research activities being performed in the fields of Public Relations, Communication Science, etc. is present.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. Resources and provision for the implementation of the study programme comply with the needs of the study field and are described in SER Part II, chapter 3, criteria 2.3.1 - 2.3.3.
Study provision includes modern lecture rooms, equipped with a multimedia projector or an interactive whiteboard and a computer in each study room, computer classrooms, a library with a large reading room. VUAS library has access to scientific literature on translation studies, language learning, intercultural communication, and various linguistic issues. Library grants access to various databases. Library staff organise training courses on how to use these databases and regularly inform students and the teaching staff of any database additions. During interviews students affirmed resources provided by the library are sufficient. University resources also include necessary network services, such as the university's website.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The revenue of the university, as stated in SER (p. 97), includes the state subsidy for the study process (1630.10 EUR per student) and tuition fees (for citizens of Latvia and the EU it is 3000 EUR, for citizens of third countries – 3500 EUR per year).
Different potential calculation methods for determining “break-even point” are mentioned in SER (p. 98): increasing the number of students, increasing public funding per student or increasing tuition fees. VUAS is choosing the first strategy and has calculated that a minimum of 23 students would be needed to reach “break-even” point. Currently, the programme is only in its second year, thus only data of year 2023 is available, when 19 students were enrolled in MSP “"Strategic Intercultural Communication." In order to assess the stability of the programme, more data from a longer time period would be needed.

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

In general, informative, material and technical base and financial provision comply with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and indicate the possibility to ensure qualitative study process.

Strengths:

1) Modern study facilities, good resources provided by the library.

Weaknesses:

1) Low number of students, for now the number of students does not reach financial breakeven point.
2) Not fully using the potential of modern facilities.

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

VUAS provides the study programme with all the necessary tools and resource material, technical as well as informative base for successful implementation of the study programme, but there is an issue of financial sustainability of the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. According to the SER (p.99) 14 teaching staff are involved in the implementation of the master's study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication". The qualifications of the teaching staff involved in the study programme meet the requirements of Section 39 (Academic Staff of Professional Study Programmes) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions - 53% of them are elected by the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, but 42% are specially invited industry specialists. Seven lecturers have doctoral degrees. VUAS is working on developing the new generation of academic staff by attracting more master's graduates and doctoral students. The lecturers involved in the study programme are engaged in research activities, preparing scientific publications and co-publications published in journals and conference proceedings indexed in SCOPUS, Web of Sciences and EBSCO databases. Some of the lecturers involved in the study programme are authors of textbooks and scientific monographs. The State language skills of the lecturers of study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication" comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 733 of 2009 "Regulations on the Scope of Knowledge of the State Language and the Procedure for Testing Proficiency in the State Language for Professional and Official Duties". Information on the English language skills of the lecturers is seen in the lecturers' curricula vitae (CV) attached in the Annex 2-9_Valodas_un_kulturas_stidju_virziena_macibspeku_CV_ENG., also the level of knowledge of the English language of the teaching staff is confirmed by the certificate No./1-10.1/102 issued on December 12, 2023, regarding the English language proficiency level of all teaching staff involved in the implementation of the Master's study program "Strategic intercultural communication". After checking the documents, the Expert Group confirms its correctness. Overall, the teaching staff of the professional Master's study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication" meet the requirements set out in the laws and regulations. The teaching staff members who do not have doctoral degree, have sufficient practical work experience. Thus, the requirements by the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Section 39, are fulfilled.

2.4.2. The Professional Master's study programme "Strategic Intercultural Communication" has been implemented at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences since 2022. Changes in the composition of the academic staff were influenced only by some long-term absences and retirements of several lecturers, termination of employment relations. Made changes in the academic staff does not affect the quality of teaching of the study courses and do not affect the quality of the study programme outcomes. Significant changes are being made to the content of the study programme in order to provide students with the opportunity to study an individual free-choice part of their studies, as stipulated in Section 6, Part 4 of Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The substantial changes in the division of the compulsory content of the programme will clarify the content of the study programme and the study plan. The composition of the academic staff will be adjusted in line with the changes in the study plan. The main criteria for the selection of lecturers in

VUAS are education and qualifications, academic and scientific degrees, work experience, analysis of the results of scientific research work, upgrading of qualifications and methodological developments.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. The CVs and SER reveals that the academic staff has professional/practical experience related to the study programme profile particularly in linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication and/or publishes in peer-reviewed journals indexed in ERIH PLUS, EBSCO, SCOPUS, Web of Science and fulfil the law requirements, but more publication in top-level international outlets would be desirable. Annex 2-13 appendix_SK_SSK_VLS_EN.pdf shows study programme's teaching staff's strong commitment to exploring and addressing complex issues related to language, culture, and translation, contributing to both academic discourse and practical applications in their respective fields.
The data from the appendix 2-12_appendix_kvantitatīvie dati_SK_SSK_VLS_ENG.pdf shows a generally positive trend in research output and engagement in academic activities over the reporting period. The notable peaks in publication and conference participation highlight periods of intensified research activity and academic interaction. However, the decline in recent years, particularly in scientific publications, conference participation, and project involvement, suggests potential challenges or shifts that may need addressing to sustain and enhance research productivity.
The qualifications of the dedicated staff involved in the programme meet the requirements of Article 39 (Academic Staff of Professional Study Programmes) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. In the academic year 2021/2022, 13 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the study programme, 53% of them are elected by the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, but 42% are specially invited highly qualified specialists. Seven lecturers have doctoral degrees.

2.4.5. Teaching staff from different faculties are involved in the implementation of the study Process. The cooperation takes place both in formal and informal activities organised by the VUAS. Key criteria for the selection of academic staff are scientific and professional competence, potentially ensuring successful collaboration between academics. The involvement and participation of the teaching staff takes place in the study programme assessment and possible improvement discussions in the study programme council meetings and in the framework of the Faculty discussions, where students, employers' and entrepreneurs' representatives participate. It was confirmed during the interviews that cooperation among teaching staff takes place. In order to ensure continuity of the implementation of the study programme, the VAUS makes an effort to integrate new teaching staff, including VUAS Doctoral students, into the pedagogical and research work under the supervision of VUAS professors. During interviews, formal and informal meetings among teaching staff were mentioned as the main method to facilitate cooperation and mutual coordination of content and teaching. According to the SER (p.104.), currently, 13 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the study programme with various workloads, while 19 students are currently enrolled in the study programme. The ratio of students to lecturers is 19/13=1.46.

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

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements and enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme. The teaching staff changes that were caused by changes made in the structure of the study programme does not affect the quality of the study outcome. The information about the scientific publications of all teaching staff members is provided in Annex 2.13

List of publications, patents, artistic creations of teaching staff for the reporting period. More publications in top-level international outlets would be desirable. No complaints have been received from students about the study programme.

Strengths:

1) Preparation of the next teaching staff generation by involving doctoral students in the programme implementation.
2) The teaching staff has a very personal and student centric approach.

Weaknesses:

1) The teaching staff must work more on publications in peer-reviewed editions, also VUAS should put more effort to support them.

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 formal qualification requirements of the academic staff members are fulfilled.

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

The study programme complies with the State Education Standard (Annex 3-3_appendix_Atbilstiba valsts izglitibas standartam_EN.docx.pdf) and confirms that the study programme complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 June 2023 No 305 “Regulations on the State Standard for Professional Higher Education” - https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342818 (Available only in Latvian).

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: Partially compliant

The study programme marginally (partially) complies with the professional standard for the strategic communication manager https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-131.pdf (Available only in Latvian). A better pronounced correlation between the competences, skills and knowledge stipulated in the document and content, structure and organisation of the Master Papers is required. Master Papers should clearly and unambiguously set the framework for awarding the degree and obtaining professional qualification, which was not that evident having got acquainted with the papers provided by VUAS during the meeting. The same drawback was also

highlighted by the employers, who have admitted that they actually were not invited by VUAS to get acquainted with the occupational standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in both languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in corresponding legal documents.

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: Partially compliant

The provided Diploma samples (3-1_appendix_D_DP_ENG.pdf) does not comply with Cabinet Regulation No. 202 “Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus”: 1) wording in diploma in Latvian should be "ieguvis/-usi Profesionālo maģistra grādu.." instead of "ieguvis/-usi Profesionālā maģistra grādu..."; 2) in the diploma supplement point 8 there is an outdated information on education system in Latvia (from 2012) in Latvian and English versions; 3) an error in diploma supimnet in Latvian in the table on page 6 "1. Īsā profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms", it should be "Īsā cikla profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms"; 4) an error in the language of examination mentioned in the diploma point 2.5. - it should be English, not Latvian. It is suggested to revise Diploma samples and to make necessary corrections.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

This is identified in the annex (2-9_Valodas_un_kulturas_stidju_virziena_macibspeku_CV_ENG). It can be concluded that the state language proficiency is compliant with Cabinet Regulation. Nr. 733 " Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language".

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

English language proficiency B2 or higher is required for all teaching staff. The level of knowledge of the English language of the teaching staff is confirmed by the certificate No./1-10.1/102 issued on December 12, 2023 and identified in the annex (2-9_Valodas_un_kulturas_stidju_virziena_macibspeku_CV_ENG).

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 (Annex 2-5_appendix_stud_liguma_paraugs_ENG.pdf) complies with Cabinet Regulation. Nr. 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

VUAS has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another higher education institution if the implementation of the study programme is terminated. The agreement is specified in the annex 2-3_appendix_agreement_ENG.pdf. It is specified that in case of discontinuation of this study programme, students are to be able to continue their studies at Turība University.

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

VUAS 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. It is ensured based on the Annex 2-4_appendix_Declaration_on_loss_compensation_for_students_ENG.pdf pursuant to paragraph 13.4 of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 795 “Regulations Regarding Licensing of Study Programmes”.

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

The study programme is generally compliant (marginally in terms of occupational standard) with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, however the question of study programme attribution to the given study field should be considered. It is strongly recommended to shift it to another study field. Some corrections should be done in the Diploma sample and its supplement.

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

The master study programme is generally compliant with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, however the question of study programme attribution to the given study field should be considered seriously. It is strongly recommended to shift it to the study field “Information and Communication Sciences”.
There is no established correlation among study field scientific and academic framework, study programme content and learning outcomes and the occupational standard. For instance, some of the Master Papers provided for the Expert Group during the on-site visit are focused on translation and/or linguistic issues that would seemingly fit the field requirements, but they have nothing to do with the occupational standard. The other example would concern the curriculum of the study programme, where many courses are devoted to business and communication, but they have nothing to do with linguistics and culture. The research is mostly performed in the field of Linguistics, as the JDSP belongs there, but neither MSP, nor BSP can benefit from it, as their research should lie at least at the crossroads of these disciplines.
Shifting BSP and MSP to the “Information and Communication Science” field would make the focus more pronounced. This would imply reconsidering the curriculum, removing unnecessary courses, which are included just to marginally fit the existing field, and motivating the students to develop their graduation papers mostly on the themes, which fit the occupational standard.
The study programme marginally complies with professional standard for the strategic communication manager https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-131.pdf (Available only in Latvian). A better pronounced correlation between the competences, skills and knowledge stipulated in the document and content, structure and organisation of the Master Papers is required.
Master Papers should clearly and unambiguously set the framework for awarding the degree and obtaining professional qualification, which was not that evident having got acquainted with the papers provided by VUAS during the meeting. The same drawback was also highlighted by the employers, who have admitted that they actually were not invited by VUAS to get acquainted with the occupational standard.
Having eliminated the identified weaknesses and having resolved the issue with the attribution of the study programme to the study field “Information and Communication Sciences”, the master study programme can be further implemented in the desired form (full time), in all applied implementation languages (i.e. Latvian and English) and in the applied implementation place, i.e.

Ventspils.

Evaluation of the study programme "Strategic intercultural communication"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Strategic intercultural communication"

Short-term recommendations

1) It is strongly recommended that consideration be given to changing the Master's study programme to the study field of Information and Communication Sciences, as the degree and professional qualification acquired would largely fit the scope of this field.
2) Measures should be taken to adjust the curriculum and structure of the study programme and place the cultural component of this programme in the foreground including a comparison of the study programme with at least three study programmes with a similar focus that are run in Latvia, nearby and in the top 500 universities.
3) Change wording in diploma Diploma samples (3-1_appendix_D_DP_ENG.pdf) in Latvian to "Profesionālo maģistra grādu" instead of "Profesionālā maģistra grādu".
4) In the diploma’s supplement point 8 correct outdated information on the education system in Latvia (from 2012) in both Latvian and English versions.
5) Correct an error in the diploma supplement in Latvian in the table on page 6 "1. Īsā profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms", it should be "Īsā cikla profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms".
6) Correct an error in the diploma supplement in English and Latvian in the point 2.5. - the language of examination and instruction of the study programme should be mentioned as English, not Latvian.

Long-term recommendations

1) FoTS should significantly expand its research activities in the areas of Public Relations and Communication Science to ensure that research is in line with the Master’s programme.
2) The current deficit of publications in cited journals should be addressed, including active support measures for teaching staff.
3) Master's theses should be more focussed and better structured, with a clearly defined empirical and analytical part(s). There should also be more Master’s theses written in collaboration with companies.
4) Students should be given more opportunities to individualise their studies, e.g. through individualised study plans in which the study results achieved through formal, non-formal and informal learning are credited.
5) Concrete measures should be taken to improve the cost-effectiveness of the Master’s programme so that it does not become unsustainable in the long term.

6) Data on the employment of Master’s graduates should be regularly collected and analysed to ensure a successful transition of graduates into the labour market.

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) implemented by Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VUAS), Daugavpils University (DU), and RTU Liepāja Academy corresponds to the field of study “Language and Culture Studies, Native Language Studies and Language Programmes” in terms of multidisciplinary thematic coverage of translation studies, language and literature and is in accordance with the current legislation of the Republic of Latvia. The study programme provides a consecutive way of receiving education in the study field of “Language and Culture Studies, Native Language Studies and Language Programmes”, upon the completion of the Bachelor and Master Degree study programmes.

It is emphasised in the SER that: The field in which the doctoral study programme “Languages and Literature Studies” belongs to is conceptually linked to the priority policy segment of the country, namely culture, according to Latvia's Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030. Although culture preservation, national identity formation, cultural artefact management, cultural data storage and retrieval are undoubtedly related to the development of the fields of linguistics, translation studies and literature, as well as cultural aspects can be traced in most of the human activities and should definitely be considered beyond the field of Arts and Humanities, it is recommended to avoid employing generalised statements and provide actual data on how learning outcomes of the study programme are formulated in close relation to the national development strategy, how national policy on prioritising culture-related issues is reflected in the content of the study programme, as well as if national policy makers are informed on the aims attained by the young researchers of the regional university (is there any opportunity not only to follow the stipulated guidelines and procedures, but also influence them).

The content of the programme is in full compliance with the study field and fits the requirements formulated for doctoral study programmes. The topicality of this joint study programme is deeply rooted in the mainstream research conducted in translation studies, Linguistics and Literary studies at national and international level.

The study programme is designed and implemented by the strong regional academic research leaders, who have accumulated valuable expertise in the field of Language, Literature and Translation.

The implementation of the Doctoral Study programme stimulates the advancement of the national language in monolingual and multilingual perspective, has a positive impact on the advancement in translation studies, linguistics and literary studies, and contributes to the preservation of national identity.

It is mentioned in the SER that: “It should be stressed that the humanities, and in particular the field of linguistics and literary studies, are responding flexibly to the latest trends, maintaining both classical priorities (philological fields) and engaging in modern contexts (interdisciplinary approach, Digital Humanities).” It is recommended to formulate in a more precise way what is considered under the approach “Digital Humanities”, how it is implemented within the framework of the JDSP, what benefits, challenges it brings, etc.

It is stated in the SER that: “The JDSP “Language and Literature Studies” is designed as an

interdisciplinary programme comprising three sub-programmes: 'Translation Studies', 'Linguistics', 'Literary and Cultural Studies'". However it is strongly recommended to shift the terminological focus, avoiding describing the given study programme as interdisciplinary, which is misleading. It is suggested to highlight the intrafield multidisciplinarity of the given study programme, which is a great achievement.
The given Doctoral study programme plays a significant role in the staff renewal policy at the given HEI, as many young and talented researchers are attracted to study, exploring their scientific research potential, and to work, shifting their academic skills.

2.1.2. The study programme is implemented in Latvian and English (for foreign students) in the form of full-time studies (3 years). The scope, duration, form and type of the study programme are justified. The proposed languages of instruction chosen for the given study programme are justified in terms of preserving national identity and pursuing scientific excellence on the global scale.
The joint doctoral study programme “Language and Literature Studies” complies with the degree being awarded. Upon successful completion of the study programme the alumni are awarded the - Doctoral degree (Ph.D.) in Humanities and Arts.
The contents of the study programme generally fits the requirements formulated for the Doctoral study programmes, based on information provided in the given SER and appendices. 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.
Taking into account that there are three partners involved in the implementation of the study programme, the curriculum contains study courses taught on the common basis and the ones ensured by each partner university in the desired specialisation.
One of the objectives of the doctoral programme is to train and educate students for research-oriented work, either in the university or in society at large, and to equip them to fulfil a wide range of professional responsibilities and roles. The aim of the sub-programme "Translation Science" is to “train professional scientists in the field of translation science with high research potential, who, by developing original and topical research, create new knowledge and productively use an interdisciplinary approach, are competent to raise and solve the most important problems of contemporary translation science, developing and strengthening the scientific potential of Latvia”.
The knowledge, skills and competences defined in this study programme correspond to level 8 of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF), as defined in the Regulation "Regulations on the Latvian Classification of Education". The objectives are in line with the "Ventspils University of Applied Sciences Development Strategy 2021-2027", "Daugavpils University Development Strategy 2015-2020" and "Liepaja University Strategy 2016-2020". However, it is recommended to avoid employing the terms skills and competences as the synonyms of the term learning outcomes, since there is still an ongoing discussion on what competencies are, how skills can really be attained, and if a particular learning outcome can be actually reduced to a certain skill or competence or does it range beyond it.
Generally, the title of the study programme, the degree to be obtained, the aim of the programme and the objectives are interrelated and ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme.
The assessment of matriculation documents of the applicants to the study programme is taken by the Entrance Examination Committee, which is approved by an order of the Rector, and examines the scientific research proposal - the paper submitted by the applicant. The decision on matriculation is taken by the Admissions Committee in a competitive procedure, based on the Committee's evaluation. Following information stated in SER: “The thesis may have an approved supervisor and advisor who are specialists in the relevant scientific fields. In certain cases, a suitably qualified specialist from another university may be invited to supervise the thesis”. It would be recommended to mention any particular examples of how many Doctoral Theses are supervised by

one scientific advisor, by a scientific supervisor and an advisor, as well as by scientific advisors from other universities. It is also relevant to learn what is the most efficient method of DS supervision, which leads to better results. Admission to the joint doctoral programme organised in VUAS is subject to the Admission Rules, which are formulated on the annual basis and published on the website of VUAS. The admission requirements are formulated in a clear manner. It is envisaged that candidates undergo an interview, which is recorded and stored by VUAS. During the interview a candidate is supposed to share ideas on the proposed theme, novelty of research, significance of the results, etc. It is recommended however, to complement admission requirements by the documented regulations on how students can appeal the results of interview assessment.

2.1.3. According to SER: “The JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" is a new doctoral programme licensed in September 2022, so no changes have been made to the parameters of the programme”. It is also stipulated in the SER that, new trilateral agreement among Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, Daugavpils University and RTU Liepāja Academy (previously signed with Liepāja University) on the implementation of the joint doctoral programme "Languages and Literature Studies" is under consideration.

2.1.4. The field of humanities plays a significant role in shaping the development of a society, ensuring the existence of critically thinking, well-educated, creativity-oriented individuals. Advanced information processing, creation and communication strategies and techniques acquired by young researchers in the respective field are of extreme importance for ensuring continuous knowledge transfer, preservation of national identity, perception and recognition of disseminated data, which ultimately lead to a healthy, friendly, stable society.
The given joint doctoral study programme has been compared to other similar study programmes at other universities to assess the validity and relevance of the study programme implementation, as well as to provide a socio-economic assessment. The list of the study programmes addressed is quite representative and substantiates the economic and / or social justification of the study programme.
It is mentioned in SER that: “In the evaluation of the period of the study programme implementation, it can be stated that the study programme is developing according to a defined plan and is economically justified, as the number of students interested in the doctoral programme at VUAS was positive.” It is recommended to specify what was the defined plan according to which the given JDSP was expected to develop and what was the minimum number of students expected to make the JDSP financially efficient.
It is emphasised in SER that: “The labour market for doctoral study programmes in the humanities is primarily oriented towards academia. Jobs are related to literary studies, linguistics, translation studies, cultural studies in Latvian HEIs: Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, University of Latvia, Daugavpils University, Liepaja University, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Latvian Academy of Culture and others; scientific institutes (LU Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, LU Institute of Latvian Language, Humanities Institute of Kurzeme in Liepaja University; HEIs abroad, museums and libraries.” However, since the programme has been running only for two years, no alumni of the JDSP with the specialisation in translation studies can be listed, while it is recommended to provide information on the employment of the current students.
There are currently 6 students studying at the JDSP "Language and Literature Studies" at VUAS.

2.1.5. The joint doctoral study programme "Languages and Literature Studies" was developed within the FEM project No.8.2.1.0/18/A/019 "Reduction of fragmentation of study programmes and strengthening of resource sharing at Daugavpils University". DU, LiepU and VUAS have signed a tripartite cooperation agreement on the basis of which a joint doctoral study programme "Philology" is being developed (updated title "Languages and Literature Studies"). During the development

process, both national and regional higher education and scientific policy planning documents have been taken into account. The joint doctoral programme "Languages and Literature Studies" is designed to pursue academic and scientific excellence and aims at training professional scientists in the fields of linguistics, literary studies and translation studies.
The partner universities have their own unique institutions, which productively complement each other (VUAS - applied linguistics and translation studies; DU - school of literary studies, contrastive approach in linguistics; LiepU - regional studies in linguistics and literary studies, comparative and contrastive linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics). The three partner universities have set up a joint programme council to ensure and evaluate the quality of the implementation of the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies". The Council is responsible for establishing a joint quality assurance system for the joint DSP "Languages and Literature Studies". It is emphasised in the SER that work on the development of QA system is still underway. Although the joint doctoral study programme is designed and implemented by the strong regional academic research leaders, a better organised flow of information within VUAS and among the partner institutions should be established to ensure an effective quality management system and smooth coordination of joint activities. Since the given study programme is the joint study programme, it should have a clearly developed system of competence recognition, including extra-curricula activities, however, during the meetings and having got acquainted with the documents provided no well-pronounced evidence of an existing curriculum-based and extra-curriculum competence recognition system is provided. During the meeting with the representatives of the study programmes, academic staff and students the Expert Group has noticed that the questions on study programme development strategies, on the activities planned within the framework of the study programme, on the nature of interdisciplinarity addressed, etc. have been addressed in a rather fragmented and miscoordinated manner.
The great scientific potential, national and regional recognition, and solid reputation of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" have contributed a lot to shaping the study programme in terms of content, structure and organisation. The scientific and creative activities undertaken by the members of academic staff range from active publishing of scientific papers to participation in conferences, forums and roundtable discussions, from implementing different projects to organising international conferences, etc. The synergy policy adopted leads to high research and education quality admitted by the students of the study programme during the meeting. The doctoral programme serves as a bridge between studies and independent research. The joint doctoral study programme enables its students to acquire knowledge and skills relevant for conducting solid research.

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

The content of the JDSP is in full compliance with the study field and fits the requirements formulated for doctoral study programmes. The topicality of this joint study programme is deeply rooted in the mainstream research conducted in translation studies, Linguistics and Literary studies at national and international level. The study programme is designed and implemented by the strong regional academic research leaders, who have accumulated valuable expertise in the field of Language, Literature and Translation.
The implementation of the Doctoral Study programme stimulates the advancement of the national language in monolingual and multilingual perspective, has a positive impact on the advancement in translation studies, linguistics and literary studies, and contributes to the preservation of national identity.
Although there is a clear tendency for combining traditional and modern methods and paradigms in curriculum design, it is recommended to formulate in a more precise way what is considered under the approach “Digital Humanities”, how it is implemented within the framework of the JDSP, what

benefits, challenges can it bring, etc.
It is also strongly recommended to shift the terminological focus, avoiding describing the given study programme as interdisciplinary, which is misleading. It is suggested to highlight the intrafield multidisciplinarity of the given study programme, which is a great achievement.

Strengths:

1) The joint doctoral study programme is designed and implemented by the strong regional academic research leaders who have gained valuable experience in the field of Language, Literature and Translation.
2) The joint doctoral study programme helps to preserve national identity and strive for academic excellence.
3) The available resources and premises provide all the conditions for running the programme and achieving the learning outcomes.
4) The great scientific potential, national and regional recognition, and solid reputation of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" have contributed a lot to shaping the study programme in terms of content, structure and organisation.

Weaknesses:

1) It is strongly recommended to shift the terminological focus, avoiding describing the given study programme as interdisciplinary, which is misleading. It is suggested to highlight the intrafield multidisciplinarity of the given study programme, which is a great achievement.
2) A better organised flow of information within the university and between the partner institutions should be established to ensure an effective quality management system and smooth coordination of joint activities.
3) Since the given study programme is the joint study programme, it should have a clearly developed system of competence recognition, including extra-curricula activities.
4) Observing the principles of academic integrity, and with the aim to avoid any conflicts of interests it is recommended to complement admission requirements by the documented regulations on how students can appeal the results of interview assessment.

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 SER and appendices. The distribution of ECTS credits is harmonious, so that a considerable number of hours are available for research work (~ 70% of full-time study time). 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 programme plan is designed in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 1001 of 27 December 2005 on the Procedure and Criteria for the Granting of the Scientific Doctorate Degree and includes promotion examinations according with Paragraph 12.2.
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. VUAS is responsible for the “Translation Studies” sub-programme, the RTU Liepaja Academy is responsible for the “Linguistics" sub-programme, while the Daugavpils University takes care of the “Literary and Cultural Studies” sub-programme. According to SER p. 138, the three sub-programmes work both by

focusing on the common specificity and the interdisciplinarity of the field, by developing specialised scientific competences and by giving students the opportunity to get acquainted with the basic elements of another specialisation. A Joint Doctoral Programme Board has been established to manage the programme in collaboration between the partner universities.
According to the SER 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). The joint study programme also takes into account national conceptual documents, e.g. positions of the report "On the Introduction of a New Model of Doctoral Studies in Latvia" (“Cabinet of Ministers' Order No. 345).
Based on the study programme SER 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 SER, 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 SER 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 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. VUAS FoTS runs several research projects relevant for doctoral study programme, e.g. “The Latvian Language of Science in the Intralingual Aspect, “Diversity of the Latvian Language in Time and Space”, “Smart complex of information systems of specialized biology lexis for the research and preservation of linguistic diversity”.
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 VUAS and partner universities. According to the study programme SER (p. 148), a new section “Internationalisation and research validation” was developed to raise the international research profile of the joint doctoral study programme. Nevertheless, the FoTS should consider participation in international scientific projects funded by the

European Research Council (ERC), Horizon Europe, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions etc.

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. VUAS FoTS utilises digital solutions and modern technological tools to enhance both theoretical and practical learning and support the training of skilled researchers. SER emphasises the development of students' ability to work independently, with extensive guidance and support from faculty. Future plans for VUAS FoTS include greater student involvement in inter-university projects and closer interaction with thesis supervisors.
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. From the information in the SER 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. If an internship is foreseen during the study programme, the opportunities and provision of internship offered to students, as well as the organization of work are effective. The tasks of the internship are related to the learning outcomes achievable. The internship complies with the requirements of regulatory enactments.
If the study programme is implemented in a foreign language, provide an assessment of the provision of internship in a foreign language, including for foreign students.

2.2.4. Not applicable.

2.2.5. According to SER, the implementation of the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" started in autumn 2022, when the programme licence was obtained, it is not yet possible to provide information on the evaluation of the dissertation process. Based on the information provided in SER and during the on-site discussions, the expert group was convinced that there will be a Joint Doctoral Programme Council to create promotion opportunities at VUAS in cooperation with Daugavpils University and RTU Liepāja Academy.

2.2.6. There are no defended doctoral theses at VUAS as the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" is a newly licenced programme. The brief information about the doctoral students and their theses in the SER on p. 155 shows that the topics are relevant to the field, appropriate to the study programme and fully in line with the aim, objectives, learning outcomes and content of the JDSP. The topics provided demonstrate the applied nature and labour market relevance of the research currently being undertaken, with a clear focus on translation science and practise as well as medical and financial terminology.

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 VUAS.
4) Serving regional needs 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. Resources and provision for the implementation of the study programme, including material,

technical and informational base, comply with the needs of the study field and are described in SER Part II, chapter 3, criteria 2.3.1 - 2.3.3. Lectures, practical classes and examinations are held at VUAS in Ventspils, Inženieru street 101.
Study provision includes modern lecture rooms, equipped with a multimedia projector or an interactive whiteboard and a computer in each study room, computer classrooms, a library with a large reading room. VUAS library has access to scientific literature on translation studies, language learning, intercultural communication, and various linguistic issues. Library also grants access to various databases, during interviews with students such databases as EBSCO, SCOPUS and ResearchGate were highlighted as useful. Library resources comply with both the needs of JDSP "Language and Literature Studies" programme and the sub-programme. Library staff also organise training courses on how to use these databases and regularly inform students and the teaching staff of any database additions.

2.3.2. The material and scientific base of all three partnering universities – VUAS, DU and RTU Liepāja Academy – is used for the implementation of the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" and their resources are available for all students of the JDSP. In SER (p. 156.-157.) are these cooperation partners and their provided resources described: the libraries of DU and RTU Liepāja Academy, offering their on-site resources and access to databases, collaborations with RTU Liepāja Academy structural units, such as Art Research Laboratory of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Media Library and Speech and Voice Research Laboratory of the Speech Therapy Centre of the Faculty of Education and Social Work and also branch libraries of the Kurzeme Humanities Institute. Although the doctoral programme positions itself as interdisciplinary, cooperation with other institutions or companies that would result in interdisciplinary results is not pronounced. During the meeting with management of JDSP "Language and Literature Studies" it was expressed that interdisciplinarity comes from students themselves, as they have different backgrounds in various fields. In meeting with doctoral programme students one mentioned her cooperation with SIA "Tilde," a language technology company, and having one of her thesis supervisors from "Tilde."

2.3.3. According to the SER (page 159) revenue for study programme implementation is gained through state subsidy (EUR 1630.11 per student, EUR 996.01 for student grants and social needs per student) and the tuition fees, for JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies" for Latvian and English language students it is currently 5601 EUR per year. Currently, 6 students are enrolled in the VUAS doctoral study programme "Languages and Literature Studies", which is 2.94% of the total number of students at the Faculty. Taking into account the costs directly affecting the implementation of the study programme, it is estimated that on average EUR 47 736 is spent on remuneration of lecturers and general staff involved in the study programme, EUR 8077 on scholarships and EUR 264 on goods and services. SER (p. 159) states that the break-even point of a study programme is calculated by modelling the minimum number of students required and in the case of JDSP "Language and Literature Studies" it is 10 students.

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

In general, study provision, informative provision, material and technical provision and also financial provision comply with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and indicate the possibility to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved.

Strengths:

1) Students have access to adequate library materials and other resources necessary for their research;

2) Study process is integrated with the research activities of the faculty staff and their long-term research projects.
3) Students are highly motivated and feel themselves to be valued members of the research community.

Weaknesses:

1) The level of financial support is insufficient for the students to dedicate themselves to their studies full time and they must work to earn money for living.

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

VUAS provides the study programme 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 VUAS notes in SER that the joint doctoral study programme "Languages and Literature Studies" was developed by recruiting academic and scientific staff in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, including the provision of Section 55.1 (https://likumi.lv/ta/id/37967-augstskolu-likums) and the Law on Scientific Activity (https://likumi.lv/ta/id/107337-zinatniskas-darbibas-likums). According to the concept of the three sub-programmes of the JDSP "Languages and Literature Studies", the faculty members of VUAS are specialized in translation studies, Daugavpils University in literary studies, but RTU Liepāja Academy - in linguistics research. According to the SER (page 160-161) 30 teaching staff and one leading researcher are involved in the implementation of the JDSP study programme "Languages and Literature Studies". The joint doctoral study programme of VUAS, DU and RTU Liepāja Academy involves nine professors (VUAS - 2, DU - 4; TRU Liepāja - 3), seven associated professors (VUAS - 3, DU - 2; RTU Liepāja Academy - 2), 14 lecturers (VUAS - 3, DU - 9; RTU Liepāja Academy - 2) and one leading researcher (RTU Liepāja). All lecturers involved in the programme have doctoral degrees (1 - Dr. habil. philol., 28 - Dr. philol., 1 - Dr. paed. and 1 - PhD). This confirms that, in view of the specific nature of the academic doctoral programme, teaching staff with the appropriate qualifications have been selected. The teachers involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2 level of English language skills, i.e. they are able to teach study courses in English. Scholars of the study programme in VUAS represent the high level of academic excellence available in translation studies in Latvia.

2.4.2. As the implementation of the JLSP "Languages and Literature Studies" started in autumn 2022, there have been no changes in the composition of the teaching staff. 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 features of the programme – leading scholars can be involved even if they work in other institutions.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. According to the provided documents to the Expert Group the study programme relies on scholars of the VUAS, DU and RTU Liepāja Academy who have the best publishing records and their bibliographies are formally in accordance with the requirements of the law and each member of the academic staff of VUAS in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions, and thus the requirement of the Law on Higher Education Institutions is fulfilled, however, more publication in top-level international outlets would be desirable, because many of scientific publications are conference proceedings.

2.4.5. According to the observations of the Expert Group, the study programme is implemented by the teaching staff in close and constant cooperation both among themselves and with colleagues from 2 other partner universities and scientific institutions. The study process flows smoothly and the students feel their coursework to be relevant for their research. The key criteria for selecting academic staff are scientific and professional competence, which potentially ensures successful collaboration between academics. As the joint doctoral study programme "Languages and Literature Studies" was licensed in autumn 2022, the cooperation model between the partner universities is currently being validated and embedded. The Expert Group observations, the student satisfaction with the responsiveness of teaching staff is very high. The teaching staff keeps the individual approach during the study process.

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

The teaching staff is dedicated and highly qualified, they work in close cooperation with each other and provide both adequate individual supervision and support in class.

Strengths:

1) High student’s satisfaction with the study programme, individual approach during the studies.
2) Close cooperation among teaching staff of VUAS with other two cooperating higher education institutions.

Weaknesses:

1) More publication in top-level international outlets would be desirable.

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

Legal requirements have been fulfilled (CVs, SER, Latvian legislation, University regulations).

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

In full compliance with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The provided Diploma samples comply with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued according to Cabinet Regulation No. 202 “Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus”, but it is recommended to update the coat of arms of the third partner institutions.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The provided Diploma samples comply with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued according to Cabinet Regulation No. 202 “Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus”, but it is recommended to update the coat of arms of the third partner institutions.

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

It can be concluded that the state language proficiency is compliant with Cabinet Regulation. Nr. 733 " Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language".

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

English language proficiency B2 or higher is required for all teaching staff. The level of knowledge of the English language of the teaching staff is confirmed by the certificate No./1-10.1/102 issued on December 12, 2023 and identified in the annex (2-9_Valodas_un_kulturas_stidju_virziena_macibspeku_CV_ENG).

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 complies with Cabinet Regulation. Nr. 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

VUAS has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another higher education institution if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

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

VUAS has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme’s licence is revoked.

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

The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Higher Education Institutions . The correspondence of the reported study programme is clearly identified by Annex 3-9_appendix_Latvijas Zinātnes padomes apstiprināti eksperti_ENG.pdf.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme is in full compliance with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments.

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

The Joint Doctoral Study Programme is in full compliance with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.
However, it is strongly recommended to shift the terminological focus, avoiding describing the given study programme as interdisciplinary, which is misleading. It is suggested to highlight the intrafield multidisciplinarity of the given study programme, which is a great achievement.
Since the given study programme is the joint study programme, a better organised flow of information within the university and between the partner institutions should be established to ensure an effective quality management system and smooth coordination of joint activities.
The same would concern establishing a clearly developed system of competence recognition, including extra-curricula activities.
No considerable deficiencies that cannot not be eliminated within the period of 2 years have been identified. Having resolved the identified weaknesses, the joint doctoral study programme can be further implemented in the desired form (full time), in all applied implementation languages (i.e. Latvian and English) and in the applied implementation place, i.e. Ventspils.
The students have access to well equipped library materials and other resources necessary for their scientific research, they are highly motivated and feel themselves to be valued members of the researchers community.
The teaching staff of the study programme consists of highly qualified academics.

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) It is strongly recommended that the intra-field multidisciplinarity of the Joint Doctoral Study Programme is emphasised rather than describing the programme as interdisciplinary, which is misleading.
2) Observing the principles of academic integrity, and with the aim to avoid any conflicts of interests it is recommended to complement admission requirements by the documented regulations on how students can appeal the results of interview assessment.
3) On the Diploma it is recommended to update the coat of arms of the third partner institution (RTU Liepājas akadēmija).

Long-term recommendations

1) A better organised flow of information within the VUAS and between the partner universities should be established to ensure an effective quality management system and smooth coordination of joint activities.
2) FoTS should introduce and support a postdoctoral initiative to promote the career prospects of graduates.
3) FoTS should consider various options to participate in high calibre international scientific projects for this study field.
4) Teaching staff of the JDSP should be encouraged 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) Concrete measures are needed to improve the financial support system so that doctoral students can devote more time to their academic pursuits.

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

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

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation			Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:		Partially compliant		The better pronounced correlation between the QA system documented and implemented should be introduced. It is recommended to eliminate all the shortcomings and weaknesses identified, as well as establish a better correlation between the documented processes and the actually implemented ones.
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)		Partially compliant		A lack of clearly designed scientific field development strategy (no scientific and academic research activities in the fields of Public Relations, Communication Science, etc.) and international cooperation strategy (no information flow concerning the existing commitments, e.g. COLOURS, no clear planning).

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation			Comment
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.		Partially compliant		Generally compliant since the institution cooperates with both local and foreign institutions, but procedures for attracting foreign teaching staff and students still needs considerable attention and consecutive actions. Cooperation of the VUAS is more intensive with the professional organisations of more philological profile (linguistics, literary studies, translation, etc.), while the study field aims at educating professionals in intercultural communication which is related not only to intercultural competences of language acquisition and cultural diversity, but to public relations as well.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.	Fully compliant			All relevant recommendations have been implemented. Some recommendations have not been addressed with proper rationale and justification.

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

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Intercultural Communication (42314)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Average

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
2	Strategic intercultural communication (47314)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Average
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.