

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

Study field: Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation

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

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The report includes the assessment of the study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" implemented by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA), and its two study programmes: professional bachelor's study programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" (42812) and academic master study programme "Tourism Competitiveness Management" (45812).

ViA is a small, but vibrant higher education institution, willing to develop and learn. One of the major strengths of the institution is the good and direct relationship with their stakeholders. The students are well cared for, communication between the staff and students is open and flexible. Students express that the cozy and supportive study environment motivates them to commit and learn. Although direct communication is appreciated and enabled in small institutions and communities, the formal processes also need attention to assure fair treatment and equal opportunities for all members (staff, students, partners etc.). Internal quality assurance system needs to be better structured and integrated with the core processes - studies, research and services for the society. As a common issue in small institutions, the responsibilities and job tasks of the staff are fragmented (one person has many roles and different job tasks), but the ViA should move toward clearer responsibilities and decision-making roles of management and management bodies.

There are definitely some challenges for the ViA in upcoming years. Study programmes and course syllabi should be seriously revised, particularly in the terms of learning outcomes, in line with the examining methods and student workload. In that process, feedback and suggestions from the employers in the region and Latvia need to be incorporated, along with analyses of graduate employability and the most important skills, knowledge and learning outcomes market need.

It is important to note that ViA understands and fulfills its social role and incorporates certain activities as a way of doing its business and developing and keeping its positive reputation within all stakeholders. As in relations with the students, also some of the social partners are chosen based on the personal interests and contacts, more formal and strategy based expectations and requirements for the collaboration with the social partners could assure the involvement of more external partners regionally and internationally.

International experience, participation in international projects and involvement of the students into the international networks and activities is worthy of recognition. ViA has many international projects and initiatives, good opportunities for the staff and students for internationalization. The bachelor students are willing to go abroad for the studies or internship and ViA has created a support system for them to find appropriate places to go and support their studies with the new experiences and gain new competences.

The ViA's lecturers are motivated, eager to contribute in different activities and teach. They use a variety of contemporary study methods and support the practical approach in their teaching - many useful methods and tools to bring the labor market closer for the students and graduates (field trips, guest lecturers, hackathons, practical assignments etc.). It is impressive that the teachers do not only teach, but involve the students in the research activities, communicate with the social partners and organize events and applied research in the partner organizations. The teachers collaborate with each other and social partners to enable rich and practical learning experiences for the students. ViA needs to support teachers more in implementation of learning outcome based studies

and student assessment, as well in systematic and comprehensive development of the study programme and course syllabi.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1.

The vision, mission and the strategic priorities of ViA is clearly defined and publicly announced both on the documents as well as on the website. However, with the new law introduced recently, it is observed that there are some overlaps in the practices.

There are two study programmes in the study field “Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Leisure Organization” (VRSTAO). The objectives of the VRSTAO study field are also aligned with the achievement of other ViA strategic goals, such as providing high-quality lifelong learning opportunities accessible to all, promoting the personal and professional development of each individual. In the Development Strategy 2016-2020 of ViA, three priorities have been set for the development of the VRSTAO study field, and there is a strategic goal and directions of action specified for each priority. This is also in line with the development trends of the industry and the overall economy.

Academic structure and roles are described in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR). According to the newly formed structure, the administration units are also clearly defined and the roles and responsibilities of the Departments are described in the SAR (pp. 5-7). Although as a common issue in small institutions, the responsibilities and job tasks of the staff are fragmented, this structure allows the institution to follow its procedures, connection between the study programmes and allows it to fulfill the requirements. Tourism is well established and there is a significant increase in the number of transitions with an increasing trend. There is a demand for trained and skilled workforce by the industry. So, the study field matches with the strategic development of the institution and also meets the needs of the society and the industry. As being a popular study fields in the country, it is justified and logical to have such a programme. As stated in the SAR, the development of the study field fits in the overall ViA strategy regarding the development of the study process. Also, justification for the programme is given at the SAR with reference to the industry requirement, national level and European context (p. 14, priority 3). Based on the site visit and interviews with all the stakeholders, it is clear that the study field meets the needs of the industry and as the employment rate of graduates is high, it is highly respected among the employers.

1.1.2.

The SWOT analysis is provided by the institution with more strengths than the weaknesses as well as more threats than opportunities. Management was not directly involved in the preparation stage, so more weaknesses are also spotted during the interviews like lack of internal communication, high workload, decreasing number of students, low capacity to initiate new things (high workload), low level of process formalization and lack of internal quality assurance (IQA) system.

This is due to the national and regional dynamics and fragile nature of the industry. It is possible that more threats of the study field could be highlighted such as due to the location, competition at national and regional level as well as the current industry challenges, pandemic, war. Based on the interviews with management as well as the documents, the institution is aware of its weaknesses

and treats and tries to integrate them with the upcoming strategic plan.

Strategic focus on international level versus national level remains equally important because of the trends in the tourism field and in society in general. For example, Covid-19 impacted the industry severely as well as the war in the region. This is also due to the pandemic and war time realities as stated by the management during interviews. At the same time the new English programme is an indication towards more internationalization of the study field as being one of the leading institutions in Latvia in the field of tourism.

1.1.3.

During the on-site visit, the management stated that as per the new law on higher education management structure is in place and ViA is in a transition to adopt the new system.

So far, the management is able to carry out the policies, procedures and the operation according to the current structure. This is in line with the development of the study field. Based on the interviews with the leadership and administration, the decision-making could be more efficient - not all the responsibilities are clear. Whether the ViA is a small institution, then the communication is mostly informal, but also the formal channels are established. Based on the documents and the interviews reviewed, the support provided by the administrative and technical staff help and ensure that all the needs of the study programmes both academically and administratively related to the study field are accomplished.

The Senate is more responsible for the academic decisions and issues. New strategic directions concerning the post-pandemic like European University initiation, 9 partners, aim is to become a multi-campus University, will be focusing on future skills of the students and supporting the regions to develop. Also, opportunities for the large research and joint study projects, start-ups programmes, spin-offs etc. will be provided by the management.

1.1.4.

As stated in the "Admission Regulations for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Study Programmes at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in the Academic Year 2022/2023" the management structure of the study field and the corresponding study programmes are oriented towards the development of the study field. Upon applying for admission to the programmes, the applicant or his/her authorized representative should fill in the application and present a passport or ID card, a certificate of secondary education, certificates of centralized examinations specified in the admission regulations, documents permitting admission beyond competition if a specific criterion is laid down in the regulations.

There are tools and ways of managing the process as it is possible to apply for the undergraduate studies at ViA electronically in the Information System of Unified Admission to Undergraduate Programmes (VUPP IS) through the e-service on the portal www.latvija.lv. It is possible to apply for the postgraduate study programmes, using ViA's electronic questionnaire (va.dreamapply.com) in DreamApply platform.

Also, Cabinet Regulation No. 505 "Regulations for recognition of competences acquired outside of formal education or professional experience and study results achieved in previous education" as states for all institutions also apply ViA that, every person has the right to submit an application to ViA for recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in previous education or professional experience in the study programme implemented by the higher education institution or part thereof. Another important area for admission and recognition is the recognition of non-formal education or professional experience which is also available on the ViA website.

Finally, the information of ViA study fields and study programmes is published on ViA website www.va.lv (only in Latvian, the English version of the website is available at the following address: <https://va.lv/en>).

1.1.5.

The student assessment requirements and procedure are given in the Study Regulations document, which describes the criteria, forms and terms for the assessment of student knowledge and other requirements for achieving learning outcomes.

As was stated during the interviews, the student assessment is organized mostly at the end of the particular study course (summative assessment), but final grading sometimes is supported by the continuous formative assessment. The students appreciated the principle that they can have a final examination (or other type of assessment) right at the end of the course, not during the separate examination session after the semester. This approach allows students to share their time for studies better.

The course syllabi states among the other programme components also the organization and tasks of student independent work and defines criteria for assessing learning outcomes. Unfortunately the given assessment methodology is not in line with the general principles of learning outcome based studies (course level assessment is described in this report in paragraphs 2.2.3 and 3.2.3).

In student assessment the ViA follows the Latvian 10-point grading scheme and the grading system is introduced in regulations and introduced for the students as well as for potential international students. General assessment principles are also given in ViA's study guide (available in: <https://va.lv/en/study-here/study-guide>). Unfortunately this guide also gives some misleading information about the assessment in mixing ECTS and national credit point systems. Document states: "1 ECTS is defined as a study workload of 40 working hours. An average workload of a full time study year in most study programmes is 60 ECTS, and 30 ECTS per semester. Latvian credit system is compatible with ECTS. The number of ECTS credits is found by multiplying the number of Latvian credits by a factor of 1.5. The university does not have any requirements for minimum or maximum number of ECTS chosen by exchange students. However, it is recommended to have 30 ECTS per semester to provide a reasonable amount of study load.", but 1 ECTS is equal to between 25 to 30 hours by EU regulation and in Latvian credit point system 1 CP = 40 hours student work. So, the document is incorrect and provides misleading conclusions.

The following guidelines and procedures have been prepared and approved by the management to support student assessment and follow the progress during the study; annual projects and graduation papers, Methodological Guide for the Preparation and Defence of Annual Projects, Bachelor Papers, Master Papers and Qualification Papers. For example, Internships within the study programmes are regulated by the Internship Regulations which lay down the process of internship, conditions for preparation and defense of reports. Also, it is stated that Students may get acquainted with the criteria, conditions and binding procedures for assessing academic progress on moodle.va.lv (only in Latvian) Refer to the annex for ViA Study Regulations.

1.1.6.

The management is aware and concerned about the integrity and to ensure the safeguarding of it. It is stated in the ViA Regulations of Ethics, approved on 26 April 2017 at the ViA Senate meeting. The Regulations of Ethics define the basic principles and norms that ViA personnel (students, academic and general staff) must observe in their attitude towards ViA, in their work, in their relations with other ViA representatives and society.

The institution follows the basic principles for academic ethics and listed the types of violations like plagiarism, falsification and use of unauthorized and ways of obtaining information.

The regulations also clearly define the sanctions for ethical violations, as well as the procedure for identifying violations and imposing sanctions. In 2017, ViA entered into an agreement with the University of Latvia on the use of the Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System, one of the most essential anti-plagiarism tools at ViA. Refer to the annex for ViA Regulations of Ethics and the Ethics Violation Scheme. It is highlighted by the management and faculty members that this tool is effectively used and well respected. There is no clear indication for the involvement or the informing of the external stakeholders.

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

Based on the evaluations, it can be concluded that the aims and the management structure of the study field is clearly defined and accessible. The SWOT analysis is provided by the institution with more strengths than the weaknesses as well as more threats than opportunities. With the establishment of the new law, the management is able to carry out the policies, procedures and the operation according to the current structure. There are some overlaps observed in the implementation. The student assessment requirements and procedure are given in the Study Regulations document, which describes the criteria, forms and terms for the assessment of student knowledge and other requirements for achieving learning outcomes. The management is aware and concerned about the integrity and to ensure the safeguarding of it.

Strengths:

1. The study field is highly ranked by the national authorities and industry and respected in the industry.
2. The employment opportunity for graduates is a major advantage.
3. ViA is small size institution with easy access to management and lecturers and open communication channels
4. Strong link between the leadership and Municipality and NGOs
5. Being flexible as per the situation of war and pandemic ViA is also agile in decision making.

Weaknesses:

1. Although the institution has close connections with the industry as an external stakeholder, the participation of the external experts and professionals is limited in the decision making process for ViA.
2. Student assessment is not fully in line with the learning outcome based study approach and ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) calculations are incorrect.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1.

ViA's development strategy emphasizes their dedication to achieve excellence in education, in science and research. At the same time ViA does not have a documented/described general quality management system. IQA is mainly understood as study quality assurance. Therefore, the study quality assurance policy (Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences) is the main regulating document in this field. There is no one person responsible for the quality assurance, responsibilities and tasks are shared between several persons. According to the interviewees' feedback, the Vice-rector for academic affairs should be responsible, but she is on

maternity leave right now and the deputy has many other duties. Although the ViA has different initiatives and implementations to support the study quality, those initiatives are not linked into one mutual quality system.

ViA follows the higher education legislation and implements the necessary and mandatory external assessments (eg. study field evaluation). According to the organization of present study field assessment, the external assessments have neither been part of ViA's quality management system (QMS) or integrated properly to the roles and tasks system/structure of the organization (responsibilities during the assessment, confirmation and involvement processes etc.). As ViA is a small HEI, all the assessments (either external or internal) could better be connected to each other and support the common quality assurance goals (eg. regular/annual study programmes self-assessments and feedback results are integral parts of study field SAR etc. - collected data and provided analysis contribute to the achievement of several aims in QMS).

The ViA's study process is covered with the internal regulations and procedures, Faculties are responsible for the administrative and accounting control over the study programmes implementation. Monthly meetings of the Assembly of the Faculty are used to analyze and decide the current issues raised in the study field - necessary changes in the study programmes, decisions concerning the academic staff etc. Still it remains unclear how often the study programme or academic staff issues really need any decisions - to consider changes in the study programmes or in academic staff monthly seems to be too often (study programmes could be changed once or twice per year - after the semester, if the changes are necessary to implement for the next semester, study programme or syllabi cannot change during the teaching process. If there are no major disciplinary problems, probably the teachers also do not change more often than once a year. It is important to keep on track, which are the latest versions of the study programme and syllabi, if those are changing constantly, then it is confusing for all the parties and does not ensure sustainable improvements and development).

Students and alumni are involved in the study field decision making bodies and processes. Students participate in the work of the Assembly of the Faculty and the ViA's Senate. The student self-government of ViA is formed and participates also in the Constitutional Assembly, and organizes a meeting with the Rector and/or directors of the study fields. The Head of the study field meets students of all programmes twice an academic year to discuss the study issues to get direct feedback from the students. The alumni involvement is mainly informal and they contribute more directly to the study process (eg. guest lectures, internship supervisors etc.), but some alumni are asked to participate in the work of the Advisory board, where they also can contribute to the development process of the specific study field/programmes.

1.2.2.

Aforementioned document Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences describes the principles of the development of the study programmes - as well as guidelines for the development, approval, monitoring and updating of the study programmes. The study programmes development process follows the ViA's strategy and other institution level documents as well the external directions (ESG, qualification framework etc.) and law. At the same time the described study programme development process is not whole (e.g. use of the collected feedback and impact analysis are missing) and focuses more on study programme initiation and confirmation procedure, not so much on annual /periodical updating and development. From the study programme development point of view the quality loop is not closed.

Based on the same procedure, the course syllabi are updated and improved annually. The

development of the study programmes and the assessment of its implementation quality are based on the self-assessment reports, regular student surveys on the study course and lecturer performance, feedback from internship supervisors within the industry, alumni surveys, suggestions of the advisory board, and opinions and recommendations from industry experts. Procedure also states that once per year the Specialists of the State Examination Commission provide opinions, recommendations on the quality of the Bachelor's and Master's theses, assessment of international cooperation enables input, recommendations of the Convention of Counselors is collected and used for study programmes improvement. Nevertheless, during the interviews no one mentioned such inputs to the study programme development.

As stated in the SAR (p. 28) ViA conducts annual student survey to find out their opinion on the compliance of the study programmes implemented by ViA with student expectations, the quality of the study programmes, informative and material technical provision, the quality of academic staff, the quality of international cooperation, as well as on other issues. The interviewed students did not mention this particular survey (not mentioned in Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences appendix 2 either), but remembered and valued the possibility to give feedback for the particular course and its lecturer via the survey conducted at the end of every semester. ViA organizes regular meetings with the students to collect their feedback, but how the results of the students feedback (which actions were applied, changes according to the feedback on the study programme, staff etc.) are announced for the students remains unclear and no formal process or procedure is described. During the interview students were not able to bring any examples how the study programme or study organization have been improved based on their feedback.

Beside the students also the feedback from the graduates/alumni and employers is asked and used in study programme development. The main goal of the graduates survey is to assess the satisfaction of graduates with the education they have received and to collect data on their employment. Still, many of the alumni do not have even the possibility to be involved into the school's quality assurance processes after the graduation (except graduate survey year after the graduation). Only some are involved in the activity of the Advisory Board. Involvement of the alumni is mainly informal and based on personal relations and preferences.

1.2.3.

As stated in SAR (p. 30), ViA students can communicate their opinions, recommendations and admonitions about the content of the programme, course, quality and teaching staff to all levels of ViA management. The openness and good social relations among ViA and students were confirmed during the assessment interviews. The school encourages the students to communicate directly with the staff and teachers to express their concerns or recommendations - monthly meetings with the head of study programmes, open and direct communication possibilities with the teachers and supportive small community feeling are created.

As was stated in the interview with the administrative staff, ViA also has a formal student appeals process and database, but the majority of complaints are done without it - informally, through direct communication with the study administrators or teachers. Unfortunately the other members and stakeholders (questioned during the assessment interviews) of the ViA did not know anything about the students appeal process or procedure and the procedure is not documented, neither available publicly or mentioned in the ViA's website or in The List of the Main Internal Normative Documents and Regulations for Vidzeme UAS (SAR, appendix 4). ViA should pay attention to the formalization of the processes - formalized processes allows ViA to better ensure equal treatment of every student (despite of who and from whom asks, the response is always the same for the same

problem/question) and collect content-rich information/feedback about the procedures/activities where the problems occur (eg. now the complaints about the same issue reach different people and no mutual database or understanding about the hot points, which need immediate interruption/improvement).

1.2.4.

Statistical data are data that are collected and/or generated in the process of statistical observations or statistical data processing. ViA collects statistical data through stakeholders' surveys (see 1.2.2. and 1.2.3), observations (e.g. participation), and uses the generalized data from state systems (e.g. State Education Information System (VIIS)). The collected statistical data are divided into the two groups - mandatory (external requirements, law) and optional (internal use). Concerning the study programmes analysis, ViA collects statistical data based on the stakeholder group - applicants, students, graduates. About the applicants, the following data are gathered: number of applicants; place of residence; graduated educational institution; number of applications; admission competition; funding. Those data are used to analyze and plan the admission, marketing campaigns and for the preparation of different obligatory reports (e.g. study field assessment in SAR).

Statistical data concerning the students and their studies are mainly collected through the student surveys and used as the input into the study programme and study organization improvements. At the same time the other data about the students are collected like number of students, funding, average and weighted grades, number of drop-out etc. Those data are used for planning the budget, study organization and to make scholarship decisions. Although the table 1 "Types of reviews of statistical data collected by ViA" in SAR (p. 32) expresses only the main connections between data and their implementation possibilities, then the interviewees did not mention any use possibilities of statistical data (except results of student surveys) in their work and said that they have "data vizard" in the study administration, who knows everything about the statistical data.

During the assessment interviews the participants confirmed that the ViA analyzes and visualizes the data to understand the necessary trends and changes, but neither the SAR or its appendices contain any statistically meaningful charts or other visualization of the trends or changes (except financial data) to explain further improvements or enabling to measure the achievement of set goals or indicators. Proper (statistical) data analysis and the use of its results could give valuable information for the ViA in the study programme development (eg. changes in drop-out rates and reasons and admission numbers together with the changes in the pricing policy could give valuable feedback about the chosen policy etc.).

1.2.5.

The main information about ViA and its study programmes is published on the ViA website www.va.lv in Latvian and English. The ViA Administrative Department is responsible for publishing information (on the website - Marketing group; on other websites - Study administration group).

Every study programme has its own subpage with the general structure providing information about the programme in general (main aim, formal characteristics (e.g.. duration, study language, degree etc.), its benefits and career opportunities, tuition fees and admission requirements and deadlines. Information about bachelor level programme: Tourism Organisation and management (only in Latvian) is available in <https://va.lv/lv/studijas/bakalauris/turisma-organizacija-un-vadiba/par-programmu> and master level programme Tourism Competitiveness Management (in English) is available in <https://va.lv/en/study-here/masters-degree/tourism-competitiveness-management/about-programme> and <https://va.lv/lv/studijas/magistrs/turisma-strategiska-vadiba-konkuretspejai/par-programmu> (in

Latvian).

Although the names of the heads of the programmes are mentioned in the particular study programme website, then there is no contact information (e-mail, contact hours, phone number etc) and remains unclear with whom e.g. applicant should contact if she/he has any questions about the admission procedure or content of the study programme. The full study programmes (list of the courses, main learning outcomes etc.) are not provided on the website.

In general, the website (especially the English version) needs updating and stakeholder based analysis. Under the section "About us" → "Our people" even the name of the Rector is still an old one (22.12.22). The selection of the uploaded documents ("About us" → "Documents") is random (four documents including regulation of ethics, gender equality plan and election procedure of the rector), despite of the mandatory management documents e.g. Statue, Strategy, Quality Management System or documents necessary for the applicants (admission requirements and procedure, Study Rules, Scholarship regulation etc.) or other stakeholders. Although, the annex "List of the governing regulatory enactments and regulations of the higher education institution/ college" shows that most of the documents are available in the Moodle system, then those documents are still not available for the external stakeholders (e.g. potential students, authorities, social partners etc.).

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

ViA has done several efforts in describing the internal quality assurance system with its components, procedures and processes. Due to the small size of the institution, IQA system relies on informal agreements and relations. One of the main challenges for the ViA is to find the right balance between personal, relations oriented and formal, provable, equal treatment oriented processes. ViA's intentions in involvement of the stakeholders into the internal processes (especially study process) is valuable practice, but more attention also on the procedure how, when, where, why and who to involve should be paid. One of the further developments of ViA must focus on implementation of the learning outcome based study principles and requirements into the practice.

Strengths:

1. Study quality assurance system bases on necessary external requirements such as ESG, qualification frameworks etc.
2. Main stakeholders (academic staff, administrative staff, students, graduates and employers) are involved in the study quality assurance system.
3. Open and direct communication between students and staff.
4. The general information about the study programmes is available in the ViA's website and the information supports the student admission and is in line with the official information.

Weaknesses:

1. IQA system is too general, superficial and does not support the understanding and implementation of the quality study processes.
2. Most of the alumni are not enabled (they do not know or/and have possibility) to contribute to ViA's development.
3. Based on The Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences appendix 2 should describe the development, approval and supervision of the study programmes, but the procedure focuses on study programme initiation and formal confirmation not on the development of the existing programme.
4. The many processes are informal and therefore the understanding how and what to do are

different among parties (e.g. internship, appealing etc.).

5. There is no formal student appeal system, all the problems are solved in informal ways, which may cause legal problems and do not enable the institution to monitor and collect adequate information for improvements.

6. Some necessary statistical data are collected, but the use and analysis of those data is inconsistent and not fully meaningful.

7. The ViA's English website does not provide enough necessary information for the external stakeholders and some available information is not updated.

8. Main documents are not accessible for the external stakeholders either in Latvian or English.

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 quality assurance process works at a minimum level as collecting the feedback of the main stakeholders and using the received information for improvements. At the same time the the procedure and processes are not connected as one whole and efficient and effective (eg. employers feedback is mainly oral and is not structured, collected, saved to make comprehensive analysis).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The procedure has been established, but it needs updating and alignment with the general requirements of the QMS.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The mechanism works, although some responsibilities should be overlooked and agreed with the process owners.

- 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: Partially compliant

The student evaluation procedure is established at the institution level; some issues occur in the study course level, where the assessment systems are not in line with all requirements of the learning outcome based assessment.

- 5 1.4 - Internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the work quality have been developed.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The procedures are established and implemented.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

ViA asks feedback from the stakeholders and uses the collected information in improvement processes, although the evidence is informal. The quality loop is not fully closed as far as the feedback givers do not have any clue what happens with their feedback and what improvements are done based on that.

- 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

ViA is improving and developing. Most of the procedures to support the development are informal, which is characteristic for the small institution. Quality assurance system needs further development.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1.

According to information provided by ViA in 2021, the provision of financial support for the VRSTAO study field programmes of the ViA study direction reached 150 thousand EUR, which included state budget financing and ViA's own revenues. Funding for research activity at ViA is not divided by fields of study, but is directed to scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned works, in which academic, scientific staff and students from various fields of study work, and in 2021 it reached 1.9 million EUR. Funding for the collection of ViA library collections is not divided by study areas, because often the library resources in the study process are used by students of several study areas. More important literature is renewed cyclically within each course, but the most relevant additional literature units are updated regularly.

During the meeting with ViA representatives and on the spot inspection was concluded that ViA has in recent years attracted a large amount of financing from EU structural funds to modernize the laboratories; several study rooms have been repaired. Within the framework of various projects, ViA has also obtained financing for replenishing the library collection. The ViA VRSTAO study field students are offered study places financed by the state budget, and fee-paying students are also attracted. For the professional development of teachers, funding is attracted from the Erasmus+ programme, and since 2018, the European Social Fund project "Development of academic staff and human resources development of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences" (SAM 8.2.2.) has been implemented, within the framework of which English language, digital technology, academic leadership training, as well as provided internship opportunities with merchants, which contribute to the formation of closer cooperation with the industry.

A system for funding scientific and/or applied research and/or artistic creation is defined and implemented and it is effective. Due to closer cooperation between students, teachers and researchers and other participants in the tourism and hospitality industry also active participation in international cooperation.

The remuneration of the academic staff complies with the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers for teachers' remuneration No. 445 "Teachers' remuneration regulations" (07.05.2016) and additionally includes a motivational remuneration system developed by ViA and approved by the Senate of ViA according to the workload of lecturers.

In general the system of funding scientific activities and financial management are well organized and transparent.

1.3.2.

The infrastructural and material-technical support necessary for ensuring the study process, science, research and administrative activities of ViA is not divided between study areas, because ViA is a small university with the small amount of resources, which are planned and used in a coordinated manner for the implementation of all study areas. The way how the infrastructure and material - technical support is optimally used for ViA study process organization is appropriate and good.

ViA uses two buildings - in Valmiera, Cēsu Street 4 and Tērbatas Street 10, with a total space of 7312 m² at ViA's disposal for ensuring the study process, science, research and administrative activities. Of these, 2387 m² are used directly in the study and research process. The current study base consists of 38 auditoriums (total area 1445 m²), incl. 3 computer auditoriums with 90 workplaces and Internet connection (195 m²) and 12 laboratories: Data security laboratory (Cyber security laboratory); Computer network laboratory; Virtual Reality Lab; Multimedia laboratory (material values intended for study management and technology research direction); Multimedia laboratory (material values intended for the research direction of communication ecosystems and technologies); Simulation modeling and RFID technology laboratory; Mobile Technology Laboratory; Energy efficiency laboratory; Mechatronics laboratory; Electrical engineering laboratory; Construction laboratory; Spatial research laboratory (total area 324 m²).

The Spatial Research Laboratory, as well as the multimedia laboratory, which includes technologies necessary for the study and research direction of the VRSTAO study field, are the most important for the VRSTAO study field. All computers are connected in a common network, which ensures a uniform flow of information, as well as access to the Internet and the use of databases. A conference hall (257 m²) is also used during the study process. The study buildings also have rooms for group work and rooms where students can do independent study work (350 m²). Taking into account that master's studies are held on Fridays and Saturdays, master's students are provided with the opportunity to reserve a place in ViA service hotels by applying in advance in the electronic system.

All auditoriums are equipped with a stationary computer and a stationary projector, as well as speakers and a presentation remote control, timer and laser pointer in one. All computers at the university have access to the Internet, as well as subscribed full-text databases. Students can use the subscribed full-text databases also in dormitories, as well as by logging in from any place where the Internet is available. Wireless internet is available to students in all auditoriums.

Number of available computers: for students - 160 pcs., for academic staff - 45 pcs., for administrative staff - 60 pcs., number of stationary computers in auditoriums - 30 pcs. (excluding computer auditoriums), portable computers - 60 pcs., multimedia projectors - 45 pcs.

Resources are available for students and teaching staff in the working hours or after working hours with administration acceptance.

1.3.3.

The methodological base of ViA ensures that the resources available to students for knowledge acquisition are relevant and suitable for each offered study programme. ViA e-study environment is available to students and is an interactive student support environment where study materials are placed, electronic exchange of documents and communication with the lecturer takes place, and tests are performed and evaluated. From the fall of 2017, the Moodle environment is used in the ViA study process, and a license has been purchased for the use of the MS Teams study platform, which opens up much wider opportunities for the implementation of remote study forms and the development of the so-called "blended learning" approach. In the Moodle environment, methodological and other materials related to the study process (e.g. regulations on the development of study papers, practice regulations, methodological instructions for the development of study papers, etc.) are also available in English, taking into account that the both study programmes are also planned to be implemented in English.

In order for ViA lecturers to make full use of the new technological opportunities, since 2018, the European Social Fund project "Development of academic staff and human resources development of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (SAM 8.2.2.) has been implemented at ViA, within the framework of which trainings on the use of various technological tools in the study process. In addition, equipment has been purchased, for example, for filming classes, support for recording and processing video lectures is available for lecturers. This is a direction that should be further developed within the university, taking into account how rapidly technologies are developing. Students also have access to the room occupancy and reservation system for booking auditoriums and service hotels, which provides the opportunity to follow the schedule of lessons remotely and promptly announce changes.

An electronic reservation system for computer equipment and multimedia equipment has been created, which provides students with the opportunity to use the equipment available at ViA (video cameras, cameras, voice recorders, etc.) to create multimedia content. Students can also reserve time to work in the multimedia laboratory. In 2020, ViA has completed the creation of a mobile application, which together offers access to the most important electronic resources: moodle environment, lesson schedule, e-mail, etc.

The library is open to readers 51 hours a week: during study hours, every working day and on Saturdays. ViA students and teaching staff have 24/7 remote access to the subscribed databases and the electronic catalog. The library is also accessible to persons with mobility impairments. The library provides all traditional library services. Information about the library's working hours and the resources and services available in the library can be found on the ViA website, in the library section <http://va.lv/lv/studentiem-un-darbiniek/biblioteka/par-biblioteku>. As for undergraduate students, the library's working hours are fully adequate, but relatively less access to library resources is created for master's students who stay at ViA on Friday afternoons and Saturdays. Advance reservation of books is possible for Master's students, it is possible to pre-order copies of necessary book chapters, etc. Lecturers also tend to prepare a set of course literature in digital form as part of study courses.

In the reading room on the 1st floor (455.10 m²), students have access to 130 press publications in paper format in Latvian, Russian, English and German. Of these, the ViA library subscribes to 35. Fiction and an archive of individual periodicals are also available. On the 2nd floor, there is a computer lab (67.80 m²) with 18 workplaces, and another 4 workplaces in the common room. The PSPP data processing programme is also available on them. On the second floor there are also 2 reading rooms (each 14.50 m²) for group work, 4 individual reading rooms (each 5.20 m²) and a quiet reading room (79.20 m²). The library space on the 2nd floor is 776.00 m². Industry literature is located here, a collection of regional history materials of the city of Valmiera and the surrounding

counties is available, and the European Commission information point Europe Direct, which provides information about the European Union (EU), as well as an archive of the best works of ViA students.

In the ViA library, all library processes are automated using the library information system ALISE. Since January 2006, the i-library has been available, which allows you to order books from the electronic catalog of the Valmiera integrated library, apply to the queue for already issued books, request an extension of book deadlines, view data on issued/not delivered on time/reserved books. From the spring of 2015, the mobile version of the library information system Alice is available. Therefore, the electronic catalog is also easily accessible from mobile devices.

In order to provide quality support to the educational and scientific process of ViA, the library offers students, academic staff and other interested parties individual consultations, excursions and group training. Classes are conducted by experts from both ViA Library and Valmiera Library. The purpose of the training is to introduce the new students to the integrated library of Valmiera, offered by the total number of documents (physical units) of ViA Library in August 2021 was 28,830.

Full-text databases: EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science. Travelnews.lv Lursoft, i-finance and i-rights are also available. In cooperation with Valmiera libraries, the following databases are available to readers: Britannica Online Library Edition, EBSCO eBook Public Library Collection, LETA Archive, nozare.lv, Letonika, "Lursoft" newspaper archive, as well as DVD collection. Databases are mostly available from all computers working in the data transmission network of ViA (with authorization, students can also access academic databases remotely). Certain databases can only be accessed by working in the library on site and receiving a special permit (Lursoft, i-finances, i-rights) The library actively participates in the testing of electronic resources or full-text databases offered by the state agency "Cultural Information Systems Center". 2020/2021 in the academic year there were 5 databases.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, during the spring semester, some academic publishers gave access to their electronic resources - SAGE, Proquest, Cambridge Core, ACM Digital library, etc. Current list <https://www.myloft.xyz/free-resources-for-covid-19/> Open access resources of these databases are available after the pandemic period. Since March 2020, remote access has also been opened to some digital collections of the National Library of Latvia.

The collection of the library corresponds to the study programmes and directions of the Academy of Sciences; books published in Latvia, in cooperation with the Valmiera library, are purchased in a small number of copies every month. The library also accepts donations from individuals and legal entities to supplement the library collection with printed works and other documents that are missing or in insufficient number of copies.

Books published outside of Latvia are collected at the request of teaching staff in accordance with the procedure for ordering and using books in the library of ViA. If the resource is available in open access on the web or in databases subscribed to by the library, the library rarely buys a hard copy. In cases where the required books are not available in the library, the lecturer fills out the form Book order for the collection of the ViA library fund and coordinates with the director of the study direction. Upon receiving a request, the library checks whether the book has not already been ordered, conducts a price study (survey). The decision on subscribing to a database or unsubscribing is made at the meeting of Development, academic and scientific issues, with the agreement of the directors of study programmes and scientific institutes.

Funding for collection of ViA library collections is not divided by study areas, because often the

library resources in the study process are used by students of several study areas. More important literature is renewed cyclically within each course, but the most relevant additional literature units are updated regularly. The library staff collects the "rejected" requests for information from students, analyzes them, and indicates a possible solution to the lecturer (you need to buy a book of a newer edition, another book, etc.).

The library does not digitize its collections, student theses (master's, qualifications) already created in digital form are collected. Access to works - using the electronic joint catalog of the Library, in the section - "ViA student works", out of 2656 records, access to the full text of 431 student works is available. In the "ViA lecturers' publications" section of the library's electronic catalog, the creation of a database of lecturers' works has been started. The database includes analytical descriptions of 269 publications of teaching staff (monographs, edited and compiled books, studies, conference materials, etc.). If these works are available on the Internet, links to their full texts are placed in the descriptions.

ViA library resources and databases meet the need of the study field.

1.3.4.

The VRSTAO study field is included in the provision of the study process of the overall set of information and communication technology solution tools used by ViA.

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the corresponding transition to online studies fully confirmed that ViA is ready to adapt to the changing situation and the infrastructural base is fully suitable for it. From the first day of online studies in March 2020, classes were held on the MS Teams platform, the Moodle system and the e-mail system fully support the exchange of information, notification of news, announcement of changes between lecturers and students.

Currently, information and communication technology solutions have been updated and improved. During the study process, the following are actively used: the possibilities provided by moodle.va.lv (study management system) - the study's electronic environment, in which the materials necessary for studies, presentations from lectures are held and information exchange takes place. Students post their presentations and homework are stored within the framework of each study course. On the other hand, online lectures, e-mail system, calendar, etc. are provided using MS365, which includes such communication tools as MS Teams, Outlook, OneDrive, Sharepoint, etc. For information exchange ViA also uses the ViAapp mobile app, as well as the lecture/audience schedule system (the ViAapp app can be downloaded via GooglePlay: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=lv.via.vidzemes_augstskola&hl=en&gl=US). For the needs of students, ViA has also created a tuition fee discount calculator. YouTube.com can be mentioned as another important tool (e.g. introductory lectures, various live broadcasts, conferences, etc.).

An important tool that is used especially for providing the study process of the VRSTAO study field for students is the geospatial information system app ArcGis, which is provided to students in cooperation with ViA Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research (HESPI).

The information and communication technology solutions used for the study process are appropriate and effective.

1.3.5.

ViA has developed a regulation "On elections in academic and scientific positions at Vidzeme

University of Applied Sciences", which determines the procedure for announcing vacancies, evaluating candidates and making a decision on approval for an academic or scientific position. Vacancies are announced by announcing the competition on the official website "Latvijas Vēstnesis", as well as by publishing information on the ViA website. The principles of openness and availability of information are observed throughout the recruitment process. Persons in academic positions are elected as a result of an open competition. The scientific, pedagogical and organizational qualification of the applicant for the position of professor or associate professor is evaluated by the council of professors in accordance with the procedures established by the Cabinet of Ministers. The scientific and pedagogical qualification of the applicant for the position of docent, lecturer or assistant is evaluated by the study direction council and forwarded to the relevant faculty council for consideration.

There are several regulations "On elections for academic and scientific positions at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences", "ViA's Remuneration Regulations" also there is "The description of work content and duties of ViA lecturers", which enable lecturers to better understand and fulfill their job requirements and opportunities.

1.3.6.

ViA has created a unified procedure for ensuring the qualification and quality of work of academic staff. To ensure the qualification and quality of work of ViA academic staff, the Study Quality Assurance Policy has been approved, which contributes to ViA's internal quality culture and its continuous improvement. ViA has certain measures to make sure and check that lecturers working with students have the necessary qualifications and competence, that is, the requirements are defined in ViA's Regulation on elections in academic positions; The ViA Salary Regulations contain the division of academic work, conditions for research work. The Senate of ViA has approved the work content and responsibilities of lecturers, which determine the requirements in academic work, in raising research, academic and scientific qualifications, and also in administrative work.

In order to ensure the qualifications, work quality improvement and professional development of ViA academic staff, lecturers are given the opportunity to supplement and expand their knowledge and professionalism by acquiring foreign experience or internships in foreign universities/organizations, as well as by participating in relevant seminars and conferences - Erasmus+, etc. within the framework of mobility programmes.

The needs for raising the qualifications of lecturers are discussed at the level of study areas, appropriate funding is sought within the faculty, within the framework of various projects, including lecturers are offered the opportunity to participate in Erasmus+ mobility to raise their qualifications, as well as to use funds from other financial sources, both for staff development visits and for participation in academic and professional conferences. For the professional development of lecturers, since 2018, the European Social Fund project "Development of academic staff and development of human resources of Vidzeme University" (SAM 8.2.2.) has been implemented, within the framework of which English language, digital technology, academic leadership training is provided, as well as internship opportunities are provided to merchants, which contributes to the formation of closer cooperation with the industry. For the long-term development of the university, it is planned to elect at least one foreign lecturer involved in the project in each field of study and all participating doctoral students to academic positions.

All lecturers of the VRSTAO study field have participated in SAM 8.2.2 activities, both in academic leadership training and, if necessary, in the improvement of language or technological skills. Eight lecturers have carried out internships with merchants as part of the project. During the internship,

the lecturers gained professional experience, got acquainted with the current affairs of the industry, thus creating a connection with the industry.

The added value of the used opportunities for the implementation of the study process and the quality of studies can be assessed through the fact that the composition of the lecturers in the VRSTAO study field meets the requirements for the implementation of study programmes, as well as actively engages in the implementation of international projects and the preparation of new projects with international partners with whom cooperation is formed as a result of Erasmus+ mobility and exchange of lecturers.

The effectiveness of the system implemented by ViA ensuring the qualification and quality work of academic staff is according regulation of the Law on Higher Education Institutions <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/37967-augstskolu-likums>.

1.3.7.

According to the information provided by ViA in general 35 lecturers are involved in the course of study, of which 23 are elected and the rest are engaged as visiting lecturers. 13 of them have a PhD degree. The large number of lecturers is due to the fact that some teaching staff have part-time academic workloads, while guest lecturers teach only one study course. It is guest lecturers who are industry professionals or outstanding specialists in their field who ensure the linking of programmes with practice, which is objectively necessary for the acquisition of professional competences. Due to the above-mentioned circumstances, 9 lecturers combine the academic load with research at the HESPI. Individual discussions with lecturers are also carried out every academic year in order to understand and analyze both the teaching and research load, as well as their motivation to take on a larger or smaller load. The research and administrative workload is regulated by individual hours accounting tables, as well as by workload cards. Lecturers whose knowledge of the English language is lower than B2 level will teach the courses in Latvian. It should be noted that this is a self-assessment of the language level, so most often lecturers at the B2 level read scientific literature, write articles, but do not feel safe enough to communicate with a large audience.

In 2021, a license was obtained for the implementation of the Academic Master's study programme Strategic Management of Competitive Tourism.

In general, the involvement of lecturers in research varies from year to year, as it depends on the amount of project funding, taking into account that research work in Latvia is carried out only on a project basis. Work is underway on the re-planning of lecturers' workload and the targeted recruitment of new teaching staff, in order to avoid overloading and burnout of preferred lecturers, which can generally be assessed as a very big problem in Latvian higher education. ViA's remuneration system ensures that the work of lecturers is generally well-remunerated, the remuneration system is transparent and has previously been assessed as one of the best in Latvia in World Bank studies. As involvement in projects increases, in order to compensate lecturers for the time spent preparing new project applications, from 2018, payment is made from the base funding of the HESPI. In this way, we can avoid the situation where lecturers prepare project applications without compensation.

It is important to emphasize that the research work carried out by the lecturers is integrated into the study process, as well as the students of both bachelor's and master's programmes are involved in the research work both for conducting practical field studies and in projects in general.

2021 The VRSTAO study field has prepared and published the most (17) scientific publications

compared to other study directions of the university.

After meeting with teaching staff it appeared that the workload of individual teachers is high and there are overlapping duties, which can cause dissatisfaction, fatigue and depression.

1.3.8.

Funding for student self-government is provided annually in the amount of at least one two-hundredth of the state funding for the study process and tuition fee revenues and fluctuates around seven thousand EUR per year, but in 2021 it reaches almost eight thousand. According to information provided by ViA the amount of the state budget and study fees is presented in order to show that ViA complies with the regulations set by the legislation and that no less than one two-hundredth of the state funding for studies and study fee revenues has been allocated to student self-government.

The students are supported in the study process by teachers, the directors of the study fields, study methodologists, as well as the employees of the Administrative Department. Regarding career support, in the autumn semester of 2019 ViA has renewed a service - career counseling and career planning support. This service is offered to students in all study programmes, without separating foreign students, taking into account their very small number at ViA. Support for students with special needs is planned depending on the specific health situation and needs of each student.

If necessary, the opportunity to study according to an individual plan is offered. Those interested who want to learn ViA study courses, but cannot participate in full-time face-to-face studies, can use the Open University opportunities.

Psychological support is especially important for first-year students who have difficulty fitting into the university study process, as well as starting an independent life away from home and family. ViA students also have access to psychological support consultations on various problems and issues related to studies and personal life. Psychological counseling is a collaborative process that helps an individual to more successfully deal with current life difficulties, to get support in solving various issues, to help see different alternatives to a certain problem. ViA does not maintain statistical data on students who received career or psychologist counseling, but in the 2021/2022 academic year, 14 students asked for career specialist or psychologist help.

In 2022, the "Student's journey" or a short and simple information scheme was created as support for first-year students, so that new students know what to do and who to turn to during their studies. Info available: <https://moodle.va.lv/course/view.php?id=775>

According to an analysis of results of students, graduates and employers of the professional ViA bachelor's programme "Tourism organization and management" (2017-2021) - 80% of graduates are employed and 49% are taking part in future cooperation in different forms with ViA.

The financial base is sufficient for the implementation of study programmes, taking into account that the costs of implementing study programmes are covered from various financial sources: project financing, state budget funds, ViA's own revenues.

In general the infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study field have been identified in the higher education institution. Resources are available to students and teaching staff. All auditoriums are equipped with modern equipment and technologies. Teaching staff is well trained and actively participates in the study process.

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

ViA is well prepared to offer quality studies in this study field - continuously developing infrastructure, library resources and technological capability give good bases for provision of studies. Via has the challenge to set a balance among the academic, adm,n and research works with the current staffing structure. Different support measures and collaboration enable supportive learning environment.

Strengths:

1. ViA infrastructure is well organized and equipped with modern technologies.
2. ViA has an experience to attract EU and state financial funds.
3. Academic personnel are experienced and regularly participate in qualification improving activities.
4. HESPI in combination with ViA gives flexibility for organization of research work and optimization of financial support for middle and long term development.
5. Library is well equipped with access to the literary sources and online access to the information sources as well.
6. Participation of students and teachers in Erasmus exchange programme is at great level and is deeply embedded into overall study experience.

Weaknesses:

1. Difficult to maintain balance between academic work, administrative work and research for a limited number of staff (burnout syndrom).

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1.

The status of a scientific institution ViA acquired in 2015. Since then, the number of personnel elected to scientific positions has increased from 7 to 25, but the funding raised in scientific projects has increased five times during this time period. The scientific activity of ViA is planned according to the "missions" principle, defining problems important to society, which cannot be solved within the framework of one scientific discipline. In this way, interdisciplinarity is promoted in scientific activity at ViA. ViA strategically focuses on attracting new talents as part of the post-doctoral programme and those who are interested participate in the VRSTAO study field programmes as teachers and cooperate with the VRSTAO study field students in research work.

Since 2018, ViA has also been implementing the project "Support for the effective involvement of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in the international scientific environment (ViA-Int)", the aim of it is to promote the involvement of ViA's research staff in international research projects, thus strengthening the capacity of researchers in the development of international projects, promoting researchers' international circle of contacts formation and networking opportunities and developing research placements in ViA research sub-directions. As a result of the ViA project, it is expected that ViA lecturers (including the VRSTAO study field) will participate in the preparation of applications for at least seven projects of the "Horizon 2020" programme and the 9th Framework Programme of the EU, supported by the ERDF and evaluated above the quality threshold.

Research activities within the VRSTAO study field are mostly organized through the ViA HESPI. Most of the teaching staff involved in the VRSTAO study field programmes have joined the research sub-direction "Sustainable economy and knowledge society". The development of this sub-direction of research is closely related to the activity of the ViA VRSTAO study field, in accordance with ViA's

strategic goals defined in ViA's "Strategy 2016-2020". Research activity is most consistent with the goal of the priority "Education": to provide a modern and high-quality educational offer based on research results, which meets the demand and forecasts of the labor market, as well as good international practice.

Scientific research in the study field in the current accreditation period has taken place thanks to the very active work of teaching staff in attracting research grants and various other project financings. The strategic research direction of the study field is sustainable tourism development. The academic staff studies the following topics have researches on: strategic development of tourism, tourism monitoring, tourism in specially protected natural areas, interaction between tourism and the environment, history of Latvian tourism, museum communication, spatial and regional planning of tourism, documentary heritage, dark tourism, place marketing and branding, tourism strategic processes, tourism mobility, impact and marketing of events, application of ICT in tourism research and public events, management of intellectual organizations in tourism and leisure organization, human resource development and self-sustainability, business games, research related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Spatial Research Laboratory is a very important support of the tourism industry of Latvia. The main applications are the monitoring of the flow of visitors in specially protected natural areas, the time, space and behavior measurements of tourist mobility and the flow of visitors to public events, using geographic information systems (GIS) and various devices for measuring the flow of tourists and visitors.

Six lecturers of the VRSTAO study field are experts of the Latvian Science Council (<https://lzp.gov.lv/>).

The involvement of the VRSTAO study field lecturers in the grant projects of Valmiera municipality is significant, solving economic and business problems relevant to the region. In the past, they were participating in such projects like "Possibilities and prerequisites for attracting human resources (including talent) for the city of Valmiera. Development of population attraction strategy for the city of Valmiera" and "Development of the project of the administrative structure of the municipality of the newly created Valmiera region".

The involvement of the VRSTAO study field lecturers in scientific research is subordinated to the priorities set in the ViA development strategy for 2016-2020: developing study programmes and study directions in education; to develop research in the field of science, which would be a proactive response to society's challenges in accordance with study directions and external demand; in the field of knowledge transfer and idea leadership, to implement the transfer of knowledge to cooperation partners, fulfilling the role of the intellectual leader of the Vidzeme region in promoting the growth of the country and the region. The scientific research work carried out by the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field also corresponds to the specific strategic goals of the studies set by the VRSTAO study field - it provides the content of internationally competitive higher education in the field of tourism and recreation, through research, it promotes the VRSTAO study field as a center for learning, popularizing and supporting entrepreneurship in the Vidzeme region. The scientific and research activity of the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field corresponds to the research goals - to create the direction as a scientific research center in the field of sustainable development of regional tourism and recreation, to promote the involvement of master's and doctoral students in research.

1.4.2.

Scientific activity and preparation of publications, both for academic editions and in popular scientific form, takes place in connection with the content of study programmes and implementation goals and tasks. In this, joint research projects of lecturers and students are being created within the framework of bachelor's and master's theses in such areas as tourism monitoring, youth motivation, cultural history, research of different segments of travelers, dark tourism, availability of tourism infrastructure for different groups of travelers, etc., since 2020 - also with research related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of the projects are integrated into the content of lectures of the study courses at both the bachelor's and master's level, the publications created within the framework of the lecturers' projects are included in the list of mandatory or additional literature of the study courses. By regularly attending and presenting at local and international scientific conferences, lecturers follow industry trends and current research directions. In this way, the content of the study courses is improved, it is ensured that the study courses are based on the latest scientific knowledge and research results.

In some cases, field studies are carried out as part of the study process, for example for the project "Enter Gauja" or example demonstrated by asoc.prof. A. Klepers - when during the studies students have possibilities to participate in scientific projects using ICT and GIS mapping systems and data.

During the accreditation period, a qualitative and quantitative leap in scientific research has taken place in the VRSTAO study field, which has ensured the integration of the latest theoretical knowledge and business practice examples into the study content, thus updating and improving the study content according to the current affairs of the national economy and tourism and hospitality industry. The connection of scientific research and applied research of the study field with the study process is logical and justified.

1.4.3.

The limited funding of science in higher education forces to focus on project-based research, which is also observed in the VRSTAO study field. Lecturers have been involved in national and international science projects. Since 2019, together with cooperation partners from Finland and Lithuania, the Nordplus Newelra intensive course programme is prepared and implemented every year, where both students and 2 accompanying lecturers participate. 2022 the intensive course was prepared and cooperation partners were received in Latvia.

The Erasmus+ project "Skills Development in Coastal Tourism" (Skills 4CMT) is being implemented during the period 2020-2023 (I. Grínfelde, L. Veliverronen), which expands the offer of optional courses for students and the internationalization of studies.

With the involvement of the VRSTAO study field lecturers, an important cross-border cooperation promotion project of small and medium-sized enterprises "EDU-SMEs: Curriculum alignment and cross-border cooperation with SMEs" was implemented (Interreg, Central Baltic (2015-2017)), where the leading partner from Latvia was ViA.

Important was involvement in such projects as: Interreg BOOSTED (2016-2019), INTERREG CENTRAL BALTIC programme project "Boosting Tourism Business Growth through Higher Professional Education" (I.Grínfelde, L.Weliverronena, A.Andersons) (The BOOSTED project implemented an international tourism work research of market needs and on its basis - actual study courses introduced in the study programme). L.Veliverronen participated as a researcher in the project CHRISTA, INTERREG (2017-2018) and in the project Cult-RingG, INTERREG (2018), in which she conducted research on the development of the tourism industry in the context of strategic planning. A. Līviņa participated in the networks of the Nordplus programme "Network Circular Economy Future" (2017-2018) and "Baltic -Nordic Network for Creating New Earning logics in Rural Areas".

Each of these projects directly or indirectly has a positive impact on the offer of tourism studies - study courses, new current topics are included, cooperation with the tourism industry and partner universities is strengthened.

Various types of projects are being prepared and applied for within the Erasmus+ programme initiative "European University" project Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions (E³UDRES²), including several ideas currently related to tourism projects.

The VRSTAO study field is also a member of various international networks, for example ITEM (International Tourism Master Network) - gives the opportunity for tourism master's degrees to cooperate, including promoting student publication opportunities, conference visits, etc., as well as the ATLAS - The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research with the aim of developing international educational and research initiatives in the field of tourism and leisure. ATLAS is a forum that promotes staff and student exchange, international research, and promotes curriculum and professional development. Currently, ATLAS has members in about 50 countries.

International cooperation in the field of practical scientific research and applied research within the study field and study programmes could be developed more effectively with industry and professional Tourism and Hospitality associations, not only with academic NGO.

1.4.4.

In the last years lecturers have been involved in more than 30 different projects, of which more than 10 have been international projects.

Research activities within the VRSTAO study field are mainly organized through the ViA HESPI (including the VIA HESPI UNESCO Chair "Man and the Biosphere"), where several teaching staff are elected: prof. J. Kalnačs, associate prof. A. Klepers, prof. M. Rosenthale, prof. M. Leščevica, prof. A. Līviņa, docent L. Veliverronen, lecturer Aigars Anderson, lecturer I. Greenfeld, lecturer J. Smalinskis, lecturer L. Ločmele, assistant professor V. Silkāne, lecturer A. Anderson. The lecturers involved in the direction are included in HESPI's research direction "Sustainable economy and knowledge society", engaging in research in one of the four sub-directions. The scientific topics of the lecturers cover aspects of national and regional economy, environment and governance. A. Andersons has obtained a master's degree in social systems modeling, and therefore also represents another direction in research - Sociotechnical systems modeling technologies, which is one of the research directions at the Institute of Socio-Technical Systems Engineering. Involvement in research is also stimulated by the activities of the HESPI, attracting financing and commissioned research.

Since 2018, HESPI's scientific base funding has been gradually increasing, which is an additional opportunity to pay for the scientific activity of lecturers. Funds are also allocated from the basic budget of ViA to pay for publication, if the preparation of publications is not already financed within the framework of a project.

In general, lecturers involved in the VRSTAO study field studies have published more than 200 scientific publications during the past accreditation period.

Participation in conferences in the direction of studies takes place using the budget of scientific projects, and then participation is related to the execution of the tasks planned in the project. If the conference attendance takes place outside of scientific projects, then these expenses can be covered from the funds of the Erasmus+ programme. Since ViA is implementing the project "Support

for the effective involvement of Vidzeme University in the international scientific environment (ViA-Int)" (2018-2022), the costs of attending conferences can also be covered from the funds of this project. But it should be emphasized that the central priority of ViA is the preparation of high-level publications for academic journals, so no specific goals are set for visiting conferences for ViA lecturers outside of scientific projects.

A significant number of the lecturers involved in the VRSTAO study field obtained a doctorate degree in the fields corresponding to the study direction during the previous accreditation period. The topic of the doctoral theses reflects the lecturers' extensive expertise in the tourism and recreation industry and in field research.

It should be emphasized that lecturers are also involved in various activities (conducting courses, seminars, consultations, developing strategic planning documents for both the private and public sector, etc., practical involvement and support for the tourism and recreation industry), which are not scientific activities, but their very important support for the private and public sector, raising the level of public knowledge and understanding.

During the entire previous accreditation period, the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field have actively participated in advising the Vidzeme region students' scientific research activities - in the development process, organizing the conference, reviewing and evaluating the works.

Also within ViA, the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field contribute to the circulation of information and ensuring the quality of scientific activity, for example by informing colleagues about the experience gained at conferences, seminars or experience exchange trips about the current affairs of the tourism and recreation industry.

Analyzing the scientific research situation in the VRSTAO study field studies, it can be concluded that the research topic has a wide spectrum, but basically the research is related to the tourism business sector, the topic of regional development of tourism, and tourism monitoring. ViA has developed closer cooperation with international partners preferably in the ViA traditional directions of research or combined with topics of interest of other partners.

1.4.5.

Students are involved in the activities of various research projects. In the past study works including bachelors and master thesis were connected with Gauja National park, Slitere National park, Cesis district and other municipalities, LIAA as well as the private sector. Thanks to the research directions of lecturers students are involved in concrete research topics. For example ICT GIS mapping conducted by assoc.prof.A.Klepers. Close cooperations between students and lecturers resulted in scientific articles. The students of the study programmes of all levels are involved in scientific research and applied research.

1.4.6.

In the VRSTAO study field studies in the period under review, the main focus was on the creation of a product - a competitive study offer - innovations. Several national and international projects and initiatives related to the tourism industry have been implemented, as a result of which the presentation of current and innovative study course content has been promoted, attracting international professionals.

In cooperation with the ViA knowledge and technology center and the Valmiera business incubator, a pre-incubation platform has been created to support new tourism entrepreneurs. There is an

opportunity to prepare and start a business already during studies, the platform includes the possibilities of working in three laboratories. The Business Trial Laboratory (B-LAB) was created to support and evaluate ViA students' business ideas before starting a business, providing the necessary advisory and infrastructure support. Innovation Laboratory (I_LAB) is a place for solving cooperation challenges of students - entrepreneurs - organizations, applying a creative and innovative approach. Here is an opportunity to work on real and innovative products/services for the needs of a specific company. The Student Internship Laboratory (S-LAB) offers the opportunity for students to undergo study practice or gain practical experience working in one of ViA's laboratories and developing products and services for various institutions and organizations, the opportunity to practically develop a project within the academic year or in a shorter period of time, students are provided with mentors (lecturers, entrepreneurs) and the necessary training.

Currently, the Project "Vidzeme Innovation Program for Students - VIPS" No. 1.1.1.3/21/A/009, within the programme, teams of the most capable and ambitious young people solve the challenges of companies and institutions in the Vidzeme region and Latvia. Good business ideas of young people are supported. By participating in the programme, young people can receive scholarships, grants for idea development, and the best teams or individual participants also receive cash prizes. This programme is open to any student, senior high school or technical school student, as the work is mostly done in interdisciplinary teams.

A study approach focused on problem-solution (problem-based learning) plays an important role in the VRSTAO study field studies. For example, the intensive course "Problem solutions project" is held every year, where solutions are sought for real problem situations or process improvement of entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. Within the academic year 2022-2023, it is planned to integrate this course together with the Erasmus+ programme initiative "European University" project E³UDRES² - promoting internationality and interdisciplinarity. Innovations of this type ensure improvement of study content, improvement of training quality, as well as encourage changes in students' thinking and setting future goals in the organization and management of tourism and recreation.

Process innovations also played an important role. Improvement of processes and information circulation was carried out, new ICT solutions were introduced both for internal information circulation and mobilization. A very important innovation block is technological innovation, investments in the expansion of ICT opportunities. Since the fall of 2020, lecturers have also had access to a modernly equipped multimedia studio, where it is possible to record lectures as well as conduct online studies using a light board. There is also one lecture hall equipped, where it is possible to organize small group work, project-based study processes. These improvements were made in the project "Next Generation Micro Cities of Europe" in cooperation with Valmiera Municipality, Ventspils University and other partners.

Pedagogical innovations are one of the cross-cutting themes in the European Social Fund project "Development of academic staff and human resources development of Vidzeme University" (SAM 8.2.2.), implemented since 2018, within which lecturers host colleagues' classes, discuss what has been observed, and opportunities for professional development. Within the framework of this project, a new form of cooperation with the companies of the industry is also being tested - internship opportunities for lecturers are organized with merchants, which contributes to the formation of closer cooperation with the industry.

The impact of innovations on the study process can be assessed as high - the lecturers have modernized their study methods, pedagogical improvement has taken place, as a result of which the

lecturers have expanded their range of pedagogical methods, the links established with industry companies within the internship programme have also expanded the opportunities to attract guest lecturers. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, several lecturers have also implemented online classes using the TV studio of the Multimedia Laboratory and the equipment available in it.

The directions of scientific research of the study field is successfully organized correspond to the development goals of the higher education institution.

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

ViA has been successful in attracting different research projects and fundings, academic staff is active in research activities and the institution has been supportive in assurance of sufficient material and technical base for that. There is an international cooperation efforts for the research . For the resilience and sustainability of the research areas, more long-term oriented decisions and plans for funding have to be made.

Strengths

1. The teaching staff is highly qualified and the material and technical base is appropriate.
2. The research work takes place both within the study process and that outsourcing service for third parts.
3. Students are involved in the research work and the results are reflected in scientific articles and bachelor's and master's thesis.
4. Research is mainly concentrated in specific research directions.
5. Several international projects, which also support the improvement of lecturer's research skills and opportunities

Weaknesses

1. International cooperation in scientific research is organized, but limited.
2. Unpredictable funding for future research projects, which do not support the sustainability of the research area and the continuation of already established research directions.

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: Fully compliant

As a small institution, ViA has established several strong research groups, applied research activities are integrated into the study programmes, study methods and other activities of the institution.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1.

The ViA VRSTAO study field is represented in the professional network through involvement in the operation of such organizations as: the Association of Latvian Travel Agents and Operators, the Association of Hotels and Restaurants of Latvia, Vidzeme Tourism Association, Latvian Convention 58 Bureau. There is also a regular and versatile cooperation with the Tourism Department of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA), the Nature Conservation Agency, the Tourism Association of Gauja National Park, the Latvian Country Tourism Association "Lauku ceļotājs", guide

associations, and the tourism advisory council of Valmiera and its surroundings.

The ViA VRSTAO study field actively participates in the improvement of sites and development of the destination management network. The initiation of the Gauja National Park Tourism Cluster initiative and the leading role in the strategy development, strategic counseling, and market research are especially noteworthy. Furthermore, there is cooperation between ViA HESPI's UNESCO Department "Biosphere and Human" and the Nature Conservation Agency in regard to the Northern Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve strategic development and research issues.

There is an advisory board for Bachelor's and Master's programmes established in the VRSTAO study field. Twelve professionals from the tourism and leisure industry actively participate in the advisory board. Also, four tourism and leisure industry professionals, including three graduates, participate in the working group which is responsible for the development of the SAR.

The main criteria for cooperation with employers (employers for our graduates) are the municipality, their departments (Tourism information centers), state institutions such as LIAA, industry non-governmental organizations (NGO). During the analysis, discussions and the interview, such cooperation seems to be contributing to the achievement of the aims and the learning outcomes of the study field and the study programmes at bachelor and master levels.

Industry representatives have the opportunity to submit proposals for bachelor's and master's theses topics. In addition, ViA meets with employer representatives at least once a year.

1.5.2.

The internationalization of the study field includes two directions of activity: within the EU and outside the EU. ViA has entered into approximately 80 agreements regarding cooperation with international higher education institutions. As stated in 1.4.3 the internationalization is also supporting the aims, visibility and status of the study field. More collaborations with the regional stakeholders are planned for the post pandemic.

The VRSTAO study field is also a member of various international networks, for example ITEM - the International Tourism Master's Network gives the opportunity for tourism master's degrees to cooperate, including promoting student publication opportunities, conference visits, etc., as well as ATLAS with the aim of developing international educational and research initiatives in the field of tourism and leisure. It also promotes staff and student exchange, and promotes curriculum and professional development.

Internationalization and cooperation with industry is an integral part of the VRSTAO study field, without which the existence and further development of the study field is impossible. There are intentions and willingness from the faculty members and management to boost international research as well as mobility for the expansion of the study field in the region.

1.5.3.

Although it is a challenge for ViA to attract international lecturers for some reasons, there are some sources to comply with this requirement as far as internationalization strategy is concerned. The Pandemic period is also highlighted as an obstacle to achieve this goal. Lecturer mobility is provided by using other sources of funding - Nordplus, funding from various international projects. Starting from 2018, SAM 8.2.1 funding is also available for lecturers who participate in the development of study programmes to be established within the project. Within the SAM 8.2.2 project, the courses were taught by a doctoral student from India, Mahender Reddy Galvinolla, and a lecturer from

Belarus, Ilona Beļitskaja.

International lecturers come for teaching and staff training visits, as well as to carry out research work. Visiting professors conduct courses for students of several study programmes and exchange programmes. During the reporting period, ViA had 144 incoming visits. Incoming mobility has increased in recent years, there is an interest from teaching staff working at higher education institutions in countries outside the EU (Moldova, Albania, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan). Refer to the annex for the information on the mobility of students and academic staff of the field of study (see Annex 21). ViA is eager to develop procedures and tools to attract international teaching staff as well. On the other hand, there is also an outgoing mobility by the faculty members through projects, study visits and bilateral agreements. Regarding mobility, teaching staff and students participate in both outgoing and incoming mobility, which provides added value to the implementation of the study process and the quality of studies.

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

The institution and management is actively seeking cooperation within Latvia with the industry stakeholders for various areas to support students and researchers and also effectively cooperating with the regional partner institutions for exchange programs and research projects. Internationalization is getting more priority, especially post pandemic term. There are plans to establish a ground to attract more visiting faculty, researchers and international students.

Strengths:

1. Good collaboration with the Latvian tourism industry, especially with the tourism umbrella organizations.
2. Good examples/initiations about the international collaborative networks enabling more practical and international studies for the students.
3. Many possibilities for the teachers to gain international experiences and bring the examples and new knowledge into the studies.

No weaknesses identified.

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: Fully compliant

ViA provides many good examples and initiations of the collaboration with the appropriate partners in Latvia and abroad.

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

Analysis

1.6.1

During the previous accreditation procedure 3 recommendations were prepared for the study field. 7 recommendations were provided for a professional bachelor study programme "Tourist Guide - Tour Organiser", which has been closed by 28.04.2021 ViA Senate Decision 3.1.1. There were 4 recommendations for a professional masters study programme "Strategic Management of Tourism" as well. However the study programme was also closed by 30.06.2022 in accordance with

22.05.2022 ViA Senate decision. For the professional bachelor study programme “Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship”, formerly known as “Tourism Organisation and Management”, there are 4 recommendations in place.

Recommendations for study field were following:

1. “Reduce the number of internal information platforms. 2-3 platforms would be sufficient to store students’ personal information and study materials.”

As indicated, during previous accreditation there were five platforms present. At this moment the number is reduced to just Moodle and LAIS. For distance communication - Cisco Webex or MS Teams. However there is still room for improvement regarding e-learning platform usage. As this recommendation deals with user experience, it must be highlighted that there are no common minimum requirements for maintenance of study course e-learning as it is left to the initiative of individual teaching staff. Material availability as well is left to personal preference of staff. However this recommendation from the previous evaluation procedure can be considered as completed.

2. “Improve cooperation between ViA and industry. Collaboration can also lead to a variety of industry-based projects, which may be related to the themes of bachelor or master theses.”

University is participating as a member in various associations. There is an Advisory board set up in the VRSTAO study field consisting of 12 members from industry. Industry representatives are participating in evaluation of the final thesis. It is hard to track cooperation between ViA and industry in a consistent manner, as the institution lacks trackable key performance indicators (KPI) following defined outcome metrics of industry cooperation. University notes that within the framework of SAM 8.2.2 staff members are participating in professional traineeships within companies, however statistics regarding this are not available in SAR. However, cooperation is at a good level and scope can be further deepened across the field. However, full analysis of this recommendation regarding cooperation between ViA and the industry can be found in Joint Report chapters 1.5 and 1.4.3. Therefore recommendation can be considered as completed as far as criteria regarding implementation of previous recommendation goes.

3. “There is strong informal cooperation with employers and the Panel recommends the establishment of a formal structure; a Study Area Advisory Board should be established. The criteria for participation should be clarified and the council should include representatives of the main employment sectors, pursuing the interests of graduates (including travel agencies, tour operators, municipalities, etc.) and meeting regularly at least twice a year.”

As mentioned previously, the University has set up the Advisory board for study field as required by recommendation. However, main essence regarding this recommendation is the need for deeper involvement of industry stakeholders into processes of study programmes - to ensure employability and interests of graduates, relevance of curriculum, advancement of scientific knowledge etc. Nevertheless, the fact that there is the Advisory board is commendable and cooperation should be extended further and ViA should seek out other ways how this aim can be achieved. There must be highlighted the fact that management of the study programme gave experts’ panel contradictory information regarding this Advisory board giving the impression that the Advisory board might not function as intended or programme management is not properly informed about activities made by the University within their study field. However external stakeholders should be involved on a continuous basis into study field development and implementation processes, therefore recommendation can be considered as partially completed.

For professional bachelor programme “Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship”, which after the changes was renamed to “Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship” recommendations were following:

1. Establish a Programme Board (or one joint Study Programme Board) composed of faculty members and a student enrolled in each study programme each year.

Direct management of the study programme is being implemented through the Study Direction Board. There are indications that students' representatives are present in the Faculty Board, however there is no indication in the provided documentation that student representatives are present in the Study Direction Board as well. In experts' opinion there are no current issues regarding direct management of study programme therefore recommendation can be considered as completed.

2. Introduce a compulsory in-service training programme in pedagogy and evaluation for all newly recruited teachers.

ViA has provided some training programmes within SAM 8.2.2. framework, however methodological support still can be strengthened, especially the learning outcome based approach or improvement of assessment methods. In depth analysis regarding this issue can be found in chapters 2.2. of Joint Report. Recommendation can be considered as partially completed.

3. Improve cooperation between ViA and industry. Collaboration may also result in various industry-based projects, which may be related to the themes of bachelor theses.

The recommendation is the same for study direction as a whole. As already pointed out previously - there is the Advisory board set up in the VRSTAO study field consisting of 12 members from industry. University is participating as a member in various associations. Industry representatives are participating in evaluation of the final thesis. It is hard to track cooperation between ViA and industry in a consistent manner, as the institution lacks trackable KPIs following defined outcome metrics of industry cooperation. University notes that within the framework of SAM 8.2.2 staff members are participating in professional traineeships within companies, however statistics regarding this are not available in SAR. However, cooperation is at a good level and scope can be further deepened across the field. Full analysis of this recommendation regarding cooperation between ViA and the industry can be found in Joint Report chapters 1.5 and 1.4.3. Therefore recommendation can be considered as completed.

4. Programme management should review the course "Finance", as it is difficult for students.

Decision was made to change the lecturer in the course in question. There were no indications of current issues from student representatives. Recommendation is completed.

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

In general ViA has mostly completed recommendations set forth by previous evaluation procedure. There are still some issues that require further action, as there is still room for improvement regarding the need to further the cooperation with industry which is already at decent level, methodological assistance to teaching staff and further improvement of digital platforms.

Strengths:

1. Actions taken by ViA in order to improve and formalize cooperation with industry is commendable.
2. ViA has made administrative reforms by setting up the Study Direction Council to further optimize management of study direction.
3. ViA has reduced the total number of digital platforms to enhance student and staff experience.

Weaknesses:

1. There is no minimum required maintenance level for e-learning platform regarding individual study courses.

2. The methodological support to available teaching staff members is not sufficient enough to achieve defined study outcomes fully.
3. There are no defined KPIs that allow tracking the cooperation level with industry stakeholders.

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

In general, most recommendations have been fulfilled. There are still some areas which demand further continuous action in order to improve them even more, however demonstrated action indicates, that ViA complies with previous recommendations.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

- | |
|---|
| 1. IQA system (incl. processes and procedures) needs to be formalized, structured and publicized. It also needs to have ownership by a unit/position and clear processes (especially appealing, internship etc.). |
| 2. Create clear and systematic procedures for student appeal. |
| 3. Institution needs to set up systematic feedback collection, implementation and communication processes (who, when, why, through which channels and forms are asked to give feedback, where and by whom the feedback is used and who and how gives feedback for the survey respondents (incl. public availability of survey results)) |
| 4. ViA should clarify, which are the KPIs and other performance indicators of the university, study field and study programmes, analyze which (statistical) data need to be collected to measure those KPIs. More meaningful usage of the data will give evidence base for the further improvements and decisions. |
| 5. Industry stakeholders must be engaged within the decision making processes at all levels like strategic plan, curriculum design, learning outcomes etc. by actively taking a role in the boards and committee. ViA should enable and also attract all interested alumni to participate in activities of their former university. The external partners should be more and actively involved in the decision making process at all levels such as strategic plan, curriculum design, learning outcomes. |
| 6. Update and add necessary information to the webpage, both in Latvian and English. |
| 7. The Study Quality Assurance Policy must be revised and improved to describe the procedure of the development of the existing programme beside the study programme initiation and formal confirmation. |

Long-term recommendations

- | |
|--|
| 1. Improve the institution's understanding about the learning outcome based studies and assessment. Teachers need additional courses/training and support to implement the LOB (Learning Outcome Based) principles into the studies and courses. |
| 2. Minimum requirements for e-learning content maintenance has to be developed. |

3. Involvement possibilities of the alumni should be better described, published, formalized and integrated into the general quality management system of the ViA.

4. Provide methodological and pedagogical support to staff members.

5. International cooperation in scientific research is organized, but limited and it is recommended to expand in the directions of research where ViA is strong and which are ViA's priorities and to promote recognition of ViA in the international academic environment.

6. ViA needs to find and open more sustainable support (incl. financial) for the research groups and areas in order to avoid just random and one-time research initiations.

7. Work on issues to ensure a long-term and predictable financial flow to support the sustainability of the research area and the continuation of already established research directions.

II - "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" ASSESSMENT

II - "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1.

Professional bachelor study programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" by its curriculum, awarded qualification and goals does comply with the VRSTAO study field. There is no indication that casts doubts on compliance with the chosen study field.

2.1.2.

Study programme code is 42812. Code 42 corresponds to second level professional higher education. Code 812 corresponds to the field of "Tourism and Recreation Organisation" under section of "Individual Services". Study programme code is relevant.

Degree to be obtained after graduating the study programme is Professional Bachelor degree in Tourism Management with professional qualification of Manager of Tourism Services. The draft of the professional standard of Manager of Tourism Services corresponds to level 6 professional qualification.

The duration of the study programme is full-time 4 years (160CP) or 5 years as part-time extramural studies. However there is no information available on how many part-time students there are in the study programme. And there is conflicting information within ViA website (<https://va.lv/lv/studijas/bakalaura/turisma-organizacija-un-vadiba/par-programmu>) - there is no mentioning of part-time study option and website still features old study programme title. The study languages are Latvian and English. At this moment only Latvian language version of the programme is being implemented. During visitation, management of the study programme noted that there are plans to implement programmes in English in the future as well.

Admission requirements for the study programme is high school diploma - centralized exam in mathematics, Latvian and foreign language. As well as average grading mark in chosen foreign language and Latvian. Grade in mathematics is required as well. Points are awarded accordingly with a minimum point threshold. Without a contest automatically study place is awarded to winners of the provided list of relevant olympiads and competitions. In general, admission requirements are

reasonable and logical.

Study programme has a defined goal: “To prepare highly qualified specialists for the tourism and recreation industry in order to promote the sustainable development of the industry and territories.” The defined tasks and learning outcomes are interrelated and coherent.

2.1.3.

Main changes to study programme indicators were change of study duration - from 3.5 years to 4 years (5 years for part-time studies). Also the study programme title has been changed to “Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship”. It must be highlighted that in various documents the study programme is presented still with its old title “Tourism Organisation and Management”. For example, the contracts with other institutions of higher education for providing opportunities to continue studies if the study programme is closed still features the old title. Documents have to be fully updated with recent changes regarding study programme title. The justification provided for changing of title is that it reflects the content of the study programme better as “programme offers two specializations - “Smart Tourism Entrepreneurship and Tourism” and “Event Experience Designer” - one of them has to be chosen after the second year of studies.” (SAR 3.1.1). Previous iteration of the study programme was developed with the old professional standard Company Manager/Deputy Manager in mind, therefore changes include developing the study programme in accordance with the new professional standard of Tourism Service Manager. All changes made to the indicators of the study programme are justified.

2.1.4.

The economic justification of the study programme is well analyzed, as there is reasonable demand for specialists within the field. Also the scope of study programme is in accordance with external planning documents. As of now there are 63 students within the study programme. The dropout rate is below average in comparison with other study programmes within ViA. However, during recent years enrolled student numbers are at low level, which can be explained by external events like Covid-19 restrictions on the tourism industry and general trends of demographics.

2.1.5.

N/A

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

Study programme complies with study direction. Indicators are correlated and interrelated. Admission requirements are reasonable. Changes made to the study programme are justified. However at this moment there is no English language version of the study programme being implemented, also there is no indication that part-time study mode is implemented as well.

Strengths:

1. Study programme title, degree, aims and goals are well interrelated and coherent.
2. Dropout level is according to SAR chapter 3.1.4. and provided statistics are below average.
3. Strong economic justification for study programme within the context of industry.

Weaknesses:

1. Study programme title has not been fully updated in various documents.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1.

Due to the reorganization of the studies, changes in the tourism labor market and in the environment in general, the professional bachelor tourism programme was redesigned in 2021. In the development of the Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship study programme different input was considered - recent events (Covid-19 pandemic, military operations in Ukraine) and changeability of the specifics and skills necessary for the tourism and leisure industry, and necessary skills of future professionals (incl. E³UDRES²'s skills). Based on the mentioned resources, analysis and feedback, the courses are divided into the five blocks (SAR, p. 73) - destination, entrepreneurship, experience design, digital skills and general intelligence. The matrix of the correlation between study programme level learning outcomes and course level learning outcomes (SAR, appendix "Mapping of the study courses/ modules for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme") shows that the courses are tightly linked with the SP level learning outcomes and every course/subject contributes to the achievement of the general (SP level) outcomes. More detailed analysis shows that several courses (e.g. Leisure and tourism experience design II and III, Planning of recreation and tourism places etc.) contribute to the achievement of the all 14 study programme level outcomes, which is definitely an overstretched approach - good vertical alignment in curricula should show the SP level learning outcomes/competences are developing during the courses, but each course does not need to contribute to each SP level outcome.

Nevertheless, some main principles of learning outcome based approach should be considered in further development of the programme and courses:

- * Learning outcomes should express the different parts of competences - knowledge, skill or attitude/ability/responsibility. Each learning outcome has just one verb to enable clear and fair student assessment. Therefore e.g. the outcome "Student achieve knowledge about responsible action principles- student is able to determine and to evaluate the difference between activities of seller and buyer on the market as well as he knows methods how to identify and to use for analysis only reliable data from various sources" (Introduction to entrepreneurship) has 6! verbs in one outcome and this means 6 correct learning outcomes, not just one and the outcome is incorrect.
- * One course should have not more than 4-6 learning outcomes to focus on specific competences during the particular course (recommended by EU HE framework and OECD). Lower number of intended learning outcomes also enables the learning outcome based student assessment where the achievement of every learning outcome must be evidenced and clear.
- * Based on the higher education taxonomies and qualification frameworks, the professional bachelor level programme learning outcomes (both in programme level and course level) must be focused more on achieving/teaching higher level outcomes (based on the verbs) - less describing, implementing, understanding and more applying, analyzing etc.
- * Some of the learning outcomes are not formed as learning outcomes and rather describe the study methods and process (e.g. In form of seminars, business imitation games and practical group works student develop their team activity coordination skills and understanding how representatives from different business sectors are able to work and to make decisions together about entrepreneurial activities. This helps students as future business managers and owners to get practical skills how to find and manage an optimal collaboration models with other team members) or are just the study topics (e.g. time management, leadership, crisis management etc.).
- * Learning outcomes are overlapping or partially overlapping within the same course (e.g. Investment and risk management course outcomes) or different courses (e.g. Experimental Marketing and Global economy (market research part), Intro to entrepreneurship and Building Start-ups etc.).

EQF sets general criteria to bachelor level programmes (6th3 level,

<https://europa.eu/europass/en/description-eight-efl-levels>):

* Knowledge (Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles): In the “Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship” programme most of the courses indicate the basic level knowledge, described with the outcomes like “Knowledge of the basic principles, approaches, methods and tools of planning recreation and tourism places” and “Knowledge and understanding of basic concepts (work, work organization, remote work, employee, employer, contract, responsibility, notice., etc.)” etc. Although most of the outcomes just reflect the “knowledge” not specifying the level of the gained knowledge, the proper course assessment criteria should indicate the level of knowledge. Unfortunately, the course assessments are not described enough and assessment criteria are missing in most cases, so the level of intended knowledge remains unclear.

* Skills (Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study): Many of the outcomes express implementation of the skills in traditional ways and do not encourage students to use learnt skills in complex situations, but beside those are some courses which also support student to work with crucial and speciality oriented challenges (e.g. Able to evaluate export and import possibilities for a specific product/service; Analyze and argue the sustainability (both positive and negative) of a specific tourism product or part of the value chain of the tourism and leisure industry).

* Responsibility and autonomy (Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups): Based on the given outcomes, the study programme encourage students to take responsibility, work independently as well in teams and lead the projects.

Despite the formulation problems, the labor market needs are clearly expressed in the study programme, specializations are represented and the order of the courses is justified. The comparison with the national standard regulations (SAR, appendix “Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard”) shows some possible problems in meaningful study modulation: 1) based on the learning outcomes, the courses Global Economy, Labour Law, Business Ethics and Corporative Social Responsibility, etc. are more like general courses and not professional specialization courses - they do not teach tourism specific skills or competencies; 2) the structure of the study programme is inconsistent - some courses are integrated into the module eg. Leisure and tourism experience II, but some courses are short and separate from the others and do not form meaningful entities (eg. Business ethics., Experiential Marketing, Internship in Hospitality Service, etc.), although the titles (and aims) of those courses allow more meaningful connections with the other courses.

The structural challenges and problems in formulation of the learning outcomes should be solved, but the chosen courses are a nice mix of traditional and new competences necessary for the market and reflect also the new approaches (eg. Dark Tourism) and necessary scientific trends in the field.

2.2.2.

N/A

2.2.3.

The principles of student centered learning and teaching are described in the document “Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences”. Document states inter alia that “The diversity of student needs is respected during the study process at ViA by choosing appropriate learning approaches. ViA uses innovative teaching methods and implements an individual approach.” and “ViA ensures the implementation of the Programmes in such a way as to encourage

students to become actively involved in the development of the study process". Beside those two principles, the learning outcome based studies in general also should be highlighted, to show and encourage lecturers to plan, implement and assess courses following the output (what student will learn) not input (what lecturer wants/can to teach) based principles. As it is stated in the SAR (p. 81), upon planning the study courses, lecturers paid attention to the planning of student individual and group work in such a way to allow students to consolidate or test the knowledge acquired by the help of practical assignments - based on the syllabi, this principle is implemented. The variety of the used study methods is wide and many chosen methods prove that the students are actively involved in the study process. Methods like lectures, seminars, discussions, practical classes, use of online resources, social simulations, role play, literature studies, applied games, individual and group consultations, study visits, hiking, outdoor life internship, integrated field internship, field trips, case analysis, students' independent practical work (individually and in groups), presentations and conferences on the MS Teams platform are used to enable student participation and support more likely deep learning and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Some of the courses use project-based learning elements, field studies and encouraging collaboration between studies and industry are definitely good and modern study methods. During the assessment interviews the students appreciated the interesting and active lectures, field studies and visits to the companies. ViA has done several positive and modern learning approach supportive adjustments in the classrooms (readiness for hybrid learning) and equipment.

According to the courses syllabi, the student assessment is not observe the learning outcome based principles in following reasons:

- * Assessment is not specified at all - based on which assignments/tests etc. the final grade will form - e.g. Leisure and tourism experience design III
 - * Assessment methods are the same for all learning outcomes - e.g. Leisure and tourism experience design III, Planning of recreation and tourism places
 - * No assessment criteria or course-related grading criteria. Grades descriptions do not reflect the learning outcomes (grades do not show the achievement of the LO's) - all courses
- Therefore, it is impossible to evaluate whether the assessment methods support and confirm the achievement of learning outcomes.

2.2.4.

There are six internships in the Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship study programme: Internship in the company I (6 CP); Internship in the company II (8 CP); Integrated field internship (4 CP); Field trip (1 CP); Internship in hospitality service (1 CP) and Entrepreneurship practice (2 CP).

Integrated field internship (4 CP) - the idea for the internship is good (to enable students to improve their practical skills in organizing and managing events, organizing recreation and tourism, working with tourism information etc.). Unfortunately the possible/recommended range or direction of those events or other activities is not given anywhere. Also, the content of the internship regulation is confusing (e.g. p 9.3 refers that students definitely need driving licenses of bicycle to travel and carry out surveys - why the event organizer needs bicycle licenses and how the aim and outcomes of the internship are linked with the carry out of the survey), remains unclear and needs clarification.

Field trip (1 CP) - The aim of this trip is to improve students' practical skills in guiding and organizing tourist groups and working with tourism information. There is no information about the accepted/expected content of the field trip in the field trip regulation - what kind of trips, which field, what activities/tasks etc. are not explained. For some reason the students are graded at the end of this internship, but due to the short duration, general structure and missing of the objective grade

criteria, the better assessment form could be passed/fail.

Internship in hospitality service (1 CP) - based on the general definition of the internship and the internship regulation of this particular internship, this is more like practicum (practical assignments in school/laboratory/artificial environment). The students can not meet the real market players and experience a real work environment. The regulation lacks the details about the internship place(s) and the requirements for this, requirements for the supervisor, duration of the internship (especially "implementation" stage) etc.

Internship in the company I (6 CP); Internship in the company II (8 CP) - traditional internships, main responsibilities are described and tasks of the student during the internships are listed.

The proper assessment criteria are missing (based on the specific grade or pass/fail will be awarded) and there are no specific learning outcomes given in the internship regulations to allow meaningful overview of the particular internship (what are the expected outcomes for the students, how those can be achieved (what student can do/learn to achieve those) and how the achievement of those outcomes could be assessed). During the interviews the students and representatives of the social partners were not aware of their roles during the different internships and were not even able to clarify general roles of themselves.

2.2.5.

N/A

2.2.6.

Topics of the final thesis match with the ViA research directions, study programme field and the level of study programme. Graduation papers written by the students of the VRSTAO study field are recognized and highly valued among industry professionals, as evidenced by the awards won in competitions (Competition of Student Scientific Research Papers; International Green Flag). Also, several graduation papers are implemented in real life. It is appreciated that ViA encourages the industry partners to give topics for the students' final papers and supports students to solve real life issues. The representatives of the industry partners are also asked to participate in the defense committees to give feedback from the industry point of view.

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

ViA has a practical and popular Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship undergraduate level study programme and teachers who are dedicated to find and use interesting and active study methods. Programme has a close link with the industry and students are introduced to the real world of work. At the same time more effort must be paid for the study organization and implementation of the learning outcome based approach into the student assessment and study methodology.

Strengths:

1. Study programme is in line with the general requirements for the 6th level bachelor studies and represents main competences necessary in the labor market.
2. The variety of the chosen study methods is high and study methods support active and deep learning.
3. Practical approach of the studies, initiations to allow students to experience the real world of work.
4. Students' papers are at a good level and papers are connected with the research areas of the ViA.

Weaknesses:

1. The formulation of the learning outcomes is incorrect and needs mutual efforts and learning to improve.
2. Student assessment is not in line with the principles of the outcome based studies
3. The structure of the study programme needs comprehensive analysis and improvements
4. The internship regulations are superficial and do not open what competences students could learn/improve during the particular internship. Distinguishing between internship and practicum would be beneficial.

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

N/A

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1.

The compliance of the resources and provision (study provision, scientific support, informative provision, material and technical provision, and financial provision) with the conditions for the implementation of the study programmes and the learning outcomes is appropriate. ViA does not separate infrastructure by study programmes, but resources are assessed for the entire university as a whole. The base available for the implementation of the "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" study programme (auditoriums, computer auditoriums, laboratory, library resources) is fully sufficient.

The ViA HESPI unit is coordinating and cooperating with research activities in regional development and planning, sustainable development, development of high added value products based on local resources as well as to strengthen research institution capacity and cooperation with stakeholders in the region.

Students have opportunities to participate in Erasmus+ programme which gives an opportunity to expand knowledge about the industry on an international scale and provides an exchange of experience.

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the corresponding transition to online studies fully confirmed that ViA is ready to adapt to the changing situation and the infrastructural base is fully suitable for it. Already from the first day of online studies in March 2020, classes (it was held on the Cisco Webex platform, currently, if necessary, MS Teams), the Moodle system and the e-mail system fully support the exchange of information, notification of news, announcement of changes between lecturers and students.

The library is open to readers 51 hours a week, during study hours, every working day and on Saturdays. ViA students and teaching staff have 24/7 remote access to the subscribed databases and the electronic catalog. The library is also accessible to persons with mobility impairments. The library provides all traditional library services. Information about the library's working hours and the

resources and services available in the library can be found on the ViA website, in the library section <http://va.lv/lv/studentiem-un-darbiniek/biblioteka/par-biblioteku>. Full-text databases: EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science. Travelnews.lv Lursoft, i-finance and i-rights are also available.

Taking into account the previous analysis, it can be concluded that the prerequisites for achieving the learning outcomes have been created.

2.3.2.

N/A

2.3.3.

Statistical data on students reflect both the process of economic development influence, as well as the general demographic situation of Latvia - the total number of students in the reporting period has decreased. In the year 2019 in this programme 30 students, 2020 - 17 students, 2021 - 17 students and 2022 - 14 students. In 2020 and 2021 there is a significant decrease in the number of enrolled students, which can be explained by the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on choosing the tourism and recreation industry as a career. However compared to 2019 there is a lower % dropout rate from the number of enrolled students.

Funding for research activity at ViA is not divided by fields of study, but is directed to scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned works, in which academic, scientific staff and students from various fields of study work, and in 2021 it reached 1.9 million EUR. There are different funding sources to the study programme. Funding sources and the use of funding ensures full implementation of the study process.

Information about the minimum number of students to ensure the profitability of the study programme was not provided in the division by programmes in the SAR. From the meetings with ViA programme directors information was that with the bachelor's programme the number of students is as planned.

The financial base is sufficient for the implementation of study programmes, taking into account that the costs of implementing study programmes are covered from various financial sources: project financing, state budget funds, ViA's own revenues.

The study provision, scientific 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 a high-quality study process.

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

Via has reasonable amount of resources necessary for the provision of the studies in the particular study programme. The institution has shown good development and commitment in enabling the local and international collaboration.

Strengths:

1. ViA previous experience with the VRSTAO study field programs implementation.
2. In the study programme modern infrastructure and technical provision is provided.
3. Strong cooperation between ViA faculties and other structures including ViA HESPI for research projects.
4. Commendable cooperation for Erasmus+ contacts and experience.

5. Graduates can continue studies in the masters programme in the same university.

Weaknesses:

1. A decreasing and a small number of students is a risk for the sustainability of the study 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

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

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1.

Based on the current needs of the industry and trends one of the reasons why several guest lecturers have been attracted to the programme - to ensure the adequacy of the lecturer's competence; teaching staff was sought outside the study field and ViA.

Both academic work experience and professional experience in the industry were also taken into account when attracting guest lecturers. Most of the lecturers have a long-term scientific background (regular involvement of the lecturers in research is confirmed by their work in scientific institutes of ViA or elsewhere).

Nine of the lecturers work for ViA, and it is their main place of work, one of the guest lecturers represents Riga Stradiņš University, besides, she has previous teaching experience in ViA's tourism Master's degree programme.

The study programme received a license at the end of 2021, and the analysis of changes in the composition of the teaching staff for the reporting period is not applicable, however, since the date the license was received, Dr. oec. Aija van der Steina has been elected to a position of an associated professor at ViA, as well as associated professor A. Klepers has obtained a certificate certifying that his English language knowledge corresponds to the level C1. Ilona Beliatskaya has started doctoral studies at the Estonian Business School (EBS).

As for the offer of the elective courses of the programme, it is possible to attract lecturers from ViA cooperation networks, more specifically from the E³UDRES² project of the European University Alliance, where courses are taught to international students groups in cooperation with teaching staff of several partner higher education institutions.

During the interviews with the teaching staff, it was clear that the qualifications of the teaching staff members (PhD) involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the

requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments. The management interviews also indicated that this enabled the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses.

2.4.2.

There is a good balance between full-time and guest lecturers teaching in the Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship study programme. Although full time teachers are expected to have close connections and/or previous experience in industry and guest lecturers are expected to have some pedagogical experiences, then the parties collaborate and support each other in the teaching process. The diverse structure of the lecturers also enriches the students' learning experience. It was also observed that some lecturers do have heavy teaching loads which might affect their performance on research as well.

2.4.3.

N/A

2.4.4.

The involvement of the VRSTAO study field lecturers in the grant projects of Valmiera municipality is significant, solving economic and business problems relevant to the region. In the past, they were "Possibilities and prerequisites for attracting human resources (including talent) for the city of Valmiera. Development of population attraction strategy for the city of Valmiera" and "Development of the project of the administrative structure of the municipality of the newly created Valmiera region".

The involvement of the VRSTAO study field lecturers in scientific research is subordinated to the priorities set in the ViA development strategy for 2016-2020: developing study programmes and study directions in education; to develop research in the field of science, which would be a proactive response to society's challenges in accordance with study directions and external demand; in the field of knowledge transfer and idea leadership, to implement the transfer of knowledge to cooperation partners, fulfilling the role of the intellectual leader of the Vidzeme region in promoting the growth of the country and the region. The scientific research work carried out by the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field also corresponds to the specific strategic goals of the studies set by the VRSTAO direction - it provides the content of internationally competitive higher education in the field of tourism and recreation, through research, it promotes the VRSTAO study field as a center for learning, popularizing and supporting entrepreneurship in Vidzeme region. The scientific and research activity of the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field corresponds to the research goals - to create the direction as a scientific research center in the field of sustainable development of regional tourism and recreation, to promote the involvement of master's and doctoral students in research.

2.4.5.

Lecturers communicate through regular meetings as per the structure. An additional communication tool for the programme lecturers is the Lecturer Handbook for internal use, which emphasizes the concepts to be integrated into the study courses, the importance of connectivity with the industry, and various forms of how it can be implemented, as well as there is an emphasis on a student-centered approach.

In order to increase the quality of the lecturer performance and the benefit students can gain from the courses, several study courses are taught by two or even three lecturers who mutually

collaborate (courses with the involvement of two or more lecturers).

The EU Structural Fund project SAM 8.2.2, implemented by ViA, has made a great contribution to the improvement of mutual communication and the improvement of the study process; joint training for lecturers to improve their digital and pedagogical competence has been organized within the framework of the project. The whole system ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and the interconnection of the study courses within the programme.

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

The qualifications of the teaching staff members (PhD) involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments. This also indicated that this enabled the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. The combination of the staff structure as being full time or part time is well balanced as per the requirements by the regulation. The communication channel both informal and formal is open and the cooperation between the management, staff and lecturers are well coordinated.

Strengths:

1. The qualifications of the teaching staff is up to the standards and they are able to carry out individual and joint research.
2. EU funded projects are commonly carried out.
3. A strong communication and cooperation culture is established within the institution to carry out collaborative research to achieve the goals of the study field and the programmes.

Weaknesses:

1. Teaching loads are high for some faculty members.
2. Research funds are limited with regional and EU level

Assessment of the requirement [7]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The qualification of the varied teaching staff meets the requirements and enriches the students' learning experience, as well supports the quality of studies.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Annex "Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard" ("24P-TPDU_Atbilstiba_MK_noteikum-Compliance to regul_LV-ENG-red02112022.docx") confirms that the study program complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 512 "Noteikumi par otrā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības valsts standartu"

- 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

Annex "Compliance of the qualification to be acquired upon completion of the study programme with the professional standard or the requirements for professional qualification" ("25P-TPDU-atbilstība profesijas standartam-Compliance to prof.stand..docx") confirms that the programme is compliant with the draft Tourism Service Manager professional standard. However it must be noted that the professional standard has not been fully approved yet, so it is very likely that, immediately after its approval, it will be necessary to make changes to the study program.

- 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: Partially compliant

Attached study course descriptions ("27P-Kursa apraksti TPDU.zip") are prepared in Latvian and English. Descriptions formally complies with regulations set forth in Law on Higher Education Institutions. However, some of the study course descriptions are missing. It is not indicated that the course is to be implemented in both Latvian and English (including courses which are also implemented in the study programme in English). In several course descriptions, not all mandatory information on study courses has been completed.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The provided Diploma sample complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued according to MK No. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus".

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

Assessment of compliance: 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

Attached resumes of staff and ViA confirmation letter "Apliecinajums-VRSTAO-valsts-valoda.edoc" verifies that state language proficiency is compliant with MK. Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi". There is also foreign guest lecturer present whose language skills do not impact ability to perform professional and office duties.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Attached resumes of staff and ViA confirmation letter "Apliecinajums-VRSTAO-anglu-valoda.edoc" verifies that language proficiency in English is at least B2.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Sample of attached study agreement complies with MK. 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: Partially compliant

There is cooperation agreement in place with Liepāja University (Nr. 1.-2022/274) and Turība University (Nr.615-2022) for possibility to continue studies in Liepāja University professional bachelor programme "Tourism and Recreation Management" (only in Latvian) and Turība University professional bachelor programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management" (Latvian and English). However in contracts ViA study programme is named as "Tourism Organisation and Management" not "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship", therefore contracts have to be updated. Also it must be highlighted that Liepāja University study programme "Tourism and Recreation Management" is in a different study field - it is included in "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" study field.

- 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: Partially compliant

ViA has provided a study contract sample which includes section as follows "2. ViA obligations [...] 2.8 To guarantee a compensation for losses to the Student for the credit points not obtained (for which it is not possible to issue an academic statement, if the credits are not obtained due to a fault of ViA) by transferring tuition fee paid by the Student to his or her specified bank

account within 1 (one) month if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme license is taken away due to ViA's activity (or inactivity), and the Student does not want to continue studies in another study programme.". Current interpretation is only partially compliant with requirements as compensation should be guaranteed in full, not partially. Ability to complete a study programme in full and possibility to receive a degree in chosen institution constitutes the main right of enrolled students. If the study programme license is revoked or the study programme is not accredited due to actions of HEI, student financial status in regard to tuition fees must be returned to the position before the infringement of rights as students in their good faith have believed in the ability to fully finish study programmes in chosen institutions.

- 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

Cooperation contract has not been updated with the current study programme title.

Compensation is not guaranteed in full. Professional standard is not yet formally approved.

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

After all evaluations, the panel agreed that the Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship study programme is in line with the general requirements for the 6th level bachelor studies and represents main competences necessary in the labor market. Study programme title, degree, aims and goals are well interrelated and coherent. The variety of the chosen study methods is high and study methods support active and deep learning. Also, the qualifications of the teaching staff is up to the standards and they are able to carry out both teaching responsibilities as well as individual and joint research. There is a strong communication and cooperation culture established within the institution to carry out collaborative research to achieve the goals of the study field and the programmes. There is an opportunity for the graduates to continue studies in the masters programme in the same university. Practical approach of the studies, initiations to allow students to experience the real world of work.

On the other hand, the teaching loads for some lecturers are high and affect the research performance. The research funds are limited mainly at regional and EU level. There is a decrease in the student numbers and this might be a risk for the sustainability of the study programme, more attention must be paid on the application of the learning outcome based studies principles. Also, the involvement of alumni for the new student attraction could be more effective.

Evaluation of the study programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship"

Short-term recommendations

1. Correct the title of the study programme in all materials. The ViA names this programme "Tūrisma organizācija un vadība" or in English "Tourism Organisation and Management" in their website and in their internal documents.
2. Student assessment principles need to be improved and align with the principles of the outcome based studies.
3. Improvement of the use and formulation of the learning outcomes has to be done. European Commission or its' institutions (eg. OECD, Cedefop etc.) have published several policy papers, recommendations, standards etc. about the learning outcomes (e.g. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4156_en.pdf).
4. The structure of the study programme needs comprehensive analysis and improvements to meet the requirements of the field, labor market and contemporary methodological approaches.
5. The internship regulations and process descriptions must clearly indicate the roles of each party in the internship process and open what competences students could learn/improve during the particular internship. Distinguishing between internship and practicum would be beneficial.
6. Coordinate activities for more active alumni involvement in new students' attraction.
7. Compensation for losses should be guaranteed in full if study programmes are closed and students choose not to continue studies in provided study options in other institutions.
8. Contracts with other institutions regarding the opportunity to continue studies if the programme is closed should be updated with correct titles.
9. There should be critical reassessment of chosen programmes as this study programme has a contract with Liepaja University to provide opportunities to continue study within the study programme "Tourism and Recreation Management", however this study programme is in a different study field.
10. Balance the workload of individual employees between research, teaching and administrative work.

Long-term recommendations

1. There has to be a balance between the teaching load and research duties of the lecturers
2. More international collaborative research could be encouraged.
3. To work more effectively in attracting new students involving more active graduates in the process.

II - "Tourism Competitiveness Management" ASSESSMENT

II - "Tourism Competitiveness Management" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1.

Academic master study programme "Tourism Competitiveness Management" by its curriculum, awarded qualification and goals does comply with the VRSTAO study field. There is no indication that casts doubts on compliance with the chosen study field.

2.1.2.

Study programme code is 45812. Code 45 corresponds to academic master higher education. Code 812 corresponds to the field of "Tourism and Recreation Organisation" under section of "Individual Services". Study programme code is relevant.

Degree to be obtained after graduating the study programme is Master of social sciences in tourism and leisure organization.

Duration of the study programme is full time 1 year 6 months (60CP) and 2 years (80CP). In the 80 CP study programme, students have to additionally do 20 weeks of research internship. In order to enroll in the 60 CP study programme, the applicant must have a professional Bachelor's degree in social and human behavioral sciences, commercial sciences and administration, or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management or equivalent education. In order to enroll in the 80 CP study programme, the applicant must have an academic Bachelor's degree in social and human behavioral sciences, commercial sciences and administration, or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management, or equivalent education. (SAR 3.1.2)

Study programme has a defined goal "To provide internationally competitive tourism education to prepare highly educated professionals for work in the public, NGO and private sectors." The defined tasks and learning outcomes are interrelated and coherent.

2.1.3.

Study programme has been licenced only recently - in 2021. There has been no changes to the study programme indicators. However, other changes in the study programme are related to the decision of cooperation partner SAMK (Satakunta University of Applied Sciences - Finland) not to start the implementation of the programme at the moment, therefore some of the optional courses in the programme have been expelled (SAR 3.1.1).

2.1.4.

The economic justification of the study programme is well analyzed, as there is reasonable demand for specialists within the field. Also the scope of study programme is in accordance with external planning documents. As of now there are 9 students as the first cohort in the study programme. Given the circumstances with cooperation partners and the fact that the study programme is new and in the approbation phase, dynamics of number of students are reasonable and justified.

2.1.5.

N/A

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

Study programme complies with study direction. Indicators are correlated and interrelated.

Admission requirements are reasonable. However, the study programme is new and still in process of approbation.

Strengths:

1. Study programme title, degree, aims and goals are well interrelated and coherent.
2. Strong economic justification for study programme within the context of industry.

No weaknesses identified.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1.

This study programme was developed together with the Satakunta University of Applied Sciences with the intention to implement it as a joint study programme. Because of the Covid-19 and changed economic and social context/environment, the study programme was implemented as a traditional master level programme, only in ViA in fall 2022.

In the development of the Tourism Competitiveness Management study programme different inputs were considered - previous research results and recommendations for higher education in tourism, lecturer experience, study courses previously implemented within the framework of ViA Master's study programmes in tourism and student feedback, based on what the seven main integrated competence constructs (competitiveness, technologies and integration, innovation and creative solutions, cooperation, multidisciplinary perspective, sustainability, international environment and markets) (SAR, fig 2, p. 106) areas were worked out as the core of the study programme. The matrix of the correlation between study programme level learning outcomes and course level learning outcomes (SAR, appendix Mapping of the study courses/ modules for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme"") shows that the courses are tightly linked with the study programme level learning outcomes and every course/subject contributes to the achievement of the general (study programme level) outcomes. Nevertheless, some main principles of learning outcome based approach should be considered in further development of the programme and courses:

* Learning outcomes should express the different parts of competences - knowledge, skill or attitude/ability/responsibility. Each learning outcome has just one verb to enable clear and fair student assessment. Therefore the outcome "Student plans and iterates product development processes at product, company and destination level. Applies, compares, justifies different product development and service innovation methods, and implements new product business models. Student enhances stakeholder value and involvement in product and service innovation projects and applies service-design approach from the customer journey. Student integrates value co-creation process, as well as plans and analyses the effect of new products and service innovations on tourists' self-identity." (New product development and service innovation) has 9! verbs in one outcome and this means 9 correct learning outcomes, not just one.

* One course should have not more than 4-6 (recommended by EU HE framework and OECD) learning outcomes to focus on specific competences during the particular course.

* Lower number of intended learning outcomes also enables the learning outcome based student assessment where the achievement of every learning outcome must be evidenced and clear.

* Based on the higher education taxonomies and qualification frameworks, the master level programme learning outcomes (both in programme level and course level) must be focused more on achieving/teaching higher level outcomes (based on the verbs) - less describing, implementing, understanding and more creating, designing, developing and arguing, defending, analyzing etc.

* Some of the learning outcomes are not formed as learning outcomes and rather describe the input than outcome (what student has to learn, not what he/she achieves) - "Knowledge about different data analysis methods", "Teamwork and communication skills (including - outside university: with stakeholders etc.)", "On the sustainability and business model innovation" etc. The better formulation could be, for example, "knows/applies different data analysis methods" - something that a teacher can assess.

EQF sets general criteria to master level programmes (7th level, <https://europa.eu/europass/en/description-eight-efq-levels>):

* Knowledge (Highly specialized knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research. Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields): In TCM programme most of the courses indicate the higher level knowledge, described with the outcomes like "Comprehensive knowledge of competitiveness and how to influence it" and "In-depth knowledge of the research designs and research types" etc. Although those outcomes express right level knowledge, then the learning outcome itself is formulated incorrectly (should be verb-based e.g. "knows different research designs and research types in-depth"). There are still plenty of knowledge - based outcomes, which describe general level and should not be focused on master level programme (e.g. "Knowledge on generic approaches to strategic leadership and an overall model of strategic leadership")

* Skills (Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields): Most of the outcomes express implementation of the skills in traditional ways and do not encourage students to use learnt skills in new or integrated mode or in complex situations: "Improvement of presentation and argumentation skills", "Performs marketing audit of the company or tourist destination and use the appropriate strategic decision methods." etc. There are also some courses which seem to "push" students out of their comfort zone to critically analyze and use their competences in more complex circumstances and are more coherent with the master level requirements e.g. Advanced technology in Tourism, Strategic Leadership in Tourism. Challenging tasks and assignments enable deep learning for the students, richer learning experience and allow students to achieve higher competencies (learning outcomes).

* Responsibility and autonomy (Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams): Based on the given outcomes, the study programme encourage students to take responsibility, lead themselves and teams and to continuous improvements.

Despite the formulation problems, the labor market needs are clearly expressed in the study programme and the range of the courses is well chosen to enable the achievement of intended outcomes/competencies for a successful career in the hospitality field. Chosen courses are a nice mix of traditional and new competences necessary for the market and reflect also the latest trends in the science.

2.2.2.

There are several good approaches to support the students' scientific research and understanding about the necessity of the science in their future work in the Tourism Competitiveness Management study programme. Firstly, lecturers are the researchers themselves and bring the latest news from the particular science field also to their courses, mediating and directing the students to read scientific papers and research (e.g. courses "Competitiveness in Tourism", "New Product Development and Service Innovations" etc.). Secondly, the lecturers involve students in their research projects. Several good examples were given during the assessment visit (research group of

the prof. Klepers) and the students also confirmed that they have introduced the opportunities to participate in the research activities of the university. Thirdly, the students are encouraged to write their master thesis about the practical topic, but based on the research methods, courses and requirements for the master thesis, the thesis must base on the latest scientific researches and achievements and show the use of the new scientific results in practice.

2.2.3.

The principles of student centered learning and teaching are described in the document "Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences". Document states inter alia that "The diversity of student needs is respected during the study process at ViA by choosing appropriate learning approaches. ViA uses innovative teaching methods and implements an individual approach." and "ViA ensures the implementation of the Programmes in such a way as to encourage students to become actively involved in the development of the study process". Beside those two principles, the learning outcome based studies in general also should be highlighted, to show and encourage lecturers to plan, implement and assess courses following the output (what student will learn) not input (what lecturer wants/can to teach) based principles.

The variety of the used study methods is wide and many chosen methods prove that the students are actively involved in the study process. Methods like seminars, practical sessions, workshops, discussions, presentations enable student participation and support more likely deep learning and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Some of the courses use project-based learning elements, field studies and encouraging collaboration between studies and industry are definitely good and modern study methods. During the assessment interviews the students appreciated the interesting and active lessons.

According to the courses syllabi, the student assessment is not observe the learning outcome based principles in following reasons:

- * Some of the mentioned assessment methods are more like study methods (and do not enable assessment (e.g independent reading, lecture) - e.g. Master Thesis (1st seminar);
- * It is unclear what competences/learning outcomes will be assessed - e.g. Revenue management in customer-oriented organizations;
- * Assessment methods are the same for all learning outcomes - e.g. Sales excellence in tourism management;
- * No assessment criteria or course-related grading criteria. Grades descriptions do not reflect the learning outcomes (grades do not show the achievement of the learning outcomes) - all courses;
- * Syllabi states that to get the final grade, all requirements must be met, but those requirements are not mentioned - e.g. Strategic Leadership in Tourism;
- * Incorrect assessment criteria. Based on principles of the learning outcome based studies the grades cannot be lowered because of the failure to meet deadlines - grades must show the achievement of the learning outcomes and nothing else. On time submission can be a prerequisite to allow students to the assessment, but cannot change the final grade - e.g. Strategic Leadership in Tourism.

Therefore, it is impossible to evaluate whether the assessment methods support and confirm the achievement of learning outcomes.

2.2.4.

The duration of the Tourism Competitiveness Management study programme is different for the students with previous academic or professional higher education. The students who previously acquired education in an academic study programme have to pass 20 CP internships, divided into

Research Internship I and II. The aim of the internship is “to approbate and improve the knowledge and skills acquired during the studies in organizations of the industry, as well as to support them in the process of writing the Master’s paper, the subject of which is closely related to the practical challenges of the industry.” The intention to encourage the students to use their scientific research skills for solving the real problems in the real world of work is worthy of recognition.

The student is responsible for finding the internship place and supervisor. During the assessment interviews the ViA's staff confirmed that, if the student has problems finding appropriate company, the Faculty will help.

Based on the Internship regulations, the responsibilities of the parties and formal aspects of the internship are well planned. Still the regulations do not bring out any requirements or expectations to the content of the internship - which specific competences have to be applied, which areas/fields/types of problems are suitable for the master thesis etc. Also the assessment criteria are formal and do not say anything about the level and variety of the achieved skills. Whether the internship has not been carried out yet, then there is no feedback from the stakeholders. Whether this study programme has been running for just a first semester, nobody has passed the internships yet. Therefore, the ViA's ability to engage English-speaking internship supervisors from the industry partners side, is not proven.

2.2.5.

N/A

2.2.6.

The first admission for this particular study programme was just in the autumn 2022 and for the time of study field assessment the topics of the students’ final thesis were not agreed on or developed. Nevertheless, the staff was able to describe and explain how the topics of theses are planned to collect with the help of the partner companies and employers and how the theses topics match with the study programme.

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

Tourism Competitiveness Management study programme is a modern programme, which is in line with the external requirements for the master level studies. Good combination of practical approach and academic requirements allows students to gain useful study experience. More attention must be paid on implementation of the learning outcome based study principles.

Strengths:

1. Study programme is in line with the general requirements for the 7th level master studies and represents main competences necessary in the labor market.
2. ViA uses several approaches to encourage students to use scientific works and results in their studies.
3. ViA has the plan on how to collect the topics for master thesis and support students to use gained competencies in solving practical problems with the help of science.
4. The variety of the chosen study methods is high and study methods support active and deep learning.
5. Linking the internship and master thesis is a good approach to bring students closer to the real world of work.

Weaknesses:

1. The formulation of the learning outcomes is incorrect and needs mutual efforts and learning to improve.
2. Student assessment is not in line with the principles of the outcome based studies.
3. Internship regulations and assessment do not describe the content and specific skills developed during the internship.

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

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme represents the latest achievements in science of the Tourism field and chosen study methods support the students' achievement of this knowledge.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1.

ViA as a regional and comparatively small university does not separate infrastructure by study programmes, but resources are assessed for the entire university as a whole. The base available for the implementation of the "Tourism competitiveness management" study programme (auditoriums, computer auditoriums, laboratory, library resources) is fully sufficient.

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the corresponding transition to online studies fully confirmed that ViA is ready to adapt to the changing situation and the infrastructural base is fully suitable for it. Already from the first day of online studies in March 2020, classes (it was held on the Cisco Webex platform, currently, if necessary, MS Teams), the Moodle system and the e-mail system fully support the exchange of information, notification of news, announcement of changes between lecturers and students.

The programme is essential for connecting with the research projects implemented in the direction of studies, which are implemented in accordance with the research sub-direction determined in the ViA strategy for 2016-2020: nature and cultural heritage research. The Spatial Research Laboratory of ViA has been collecting tourism monitoring data for several years and creating a geospatial data platform for tourism development planning. It is a high-quality addition to the interpretation of analytical results of big data and business intelligence solutions, helps predict the development of tourism in destinations of various scales (http://va.lv/sites/default/files/via_strategija_papildinats_30052017.pdf).

Students are involved in HESPI for research work every year, concluding a contract with them for performing the work of a visiting scientific assistant in research. HESPI supports the tourism studies process with the financial support of study tours implemented in Nordplus programme projects for intensive study courses, such as Spa and wellness. HESPI annually awards students, who have engaged in research work in projects, diplomas and gifts (books, or gift cards), also at ViA students' scientific conferences, prizes are awarded to the best authors of scientific articles.

There is close mutual cooperation between students and academic personnel. Because of the small number of students and available highly qualified lecturers. Some of the graduates are working for

municipal and regional institutions, which strengthens the close relationship between organizations and ViA.

The above prerequisites are sufficient to ensure that the study programme provides planned learning outcomes of the study programme.

2.3.2.

N/A

2.3.3.

Following information provided by ViA, the financial basis is sufficient for the implementation of study programmes, taking into account that the study programme implementation costs are covered from various financial sources: project financing, state budget funds, ViA's own revenues. In recent years, ViA has attracted a large amount from the EU for the development of infrastructure and to modernize laboratories, as well several study rooms were repaired. As part of the project, ViA has also obtained funding for replenishing the library collection.

Funding for research activity at ViA is not divided by fields of study, but is directed to scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned works, in which academic, scientific staff and students from various fields of study work, and in 2021 it reached 1.9 million EUR.

The ViA "Tourism Competitiveness Management" study programme students are offered both study places financed by the state budget and fees are also charged to students.

Since the study programme received the license at the end of 2021, the first nine full-time students were admitted for studies in 2022/2023. Study programme for the first students implementation takes place in Latvian language, but in order to promote the acquisition of international experience, part of the studies is also available in English.

Covid-19 has affected the number of students, which is reflected in incomplete studies or the number of matriculated students. However, student performance and a certain number is an important criterion for the sustainable provision and development of the study programme.

Information about the minimum number of students to ensure the profitability of the study programme was not provided in the division by programmes in the SAR. From the meetings with ViA programme directors information was that at least the Master's programme is unprofitable for now, but ViA wanted not to miss the opportunity and the future is promising.

The resources including financial base is sufficient for the implementation of the study program.

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

The program is well established and relevant due to the current situation in the world. In general resources and provision for master study programmes are sufficient. An appropriate material base and highly qualified teachers can ensure the achievement of the planned results of the program.

Strengths:

1. Students have an opportunity to participate in HESPI research projects.
2. Strong support of the academic staff available, considering the small number of students.
3. Cooperation with municipal and regional authorities for common projects.

Weaknesses:

1. A small number of students is a risk for the sustainability of the study 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

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

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1.

Based on the current needs of the industry and trends one of the reasons why several guest lecturers have been attracted to the programme - to ensure the adequacy of the lecturer's competence; teaching staff was sought outside the study field and ViA.

Both academic work experience and professional experience in the industry were also taken into account when attracting guest lecturers. Most of the lecturers have a long-term scientific background (regular involvement of the lecturers in research is confirmed by their work in scientific institutes of ViA or elsewhere).

Nine of the lecturers work for ViA, and it is their main place of work, one of the guest lecturers represents Riga Stradiņš University, besides, she has previous teaching experience in ViA's tourism Master's degree programme.

As for the offer of the elective courses of the programme, it is possible to attract lecturers from ViA cooperation networks, more specifically from the E³UDRES² project of the European University Alliance, where courses are taught to international student groups in cooperation with teaching staff of several partner higher education institutions. During the interviews with the teaching staff, it was clear that the qualifications of the teaching staff members (PhD) involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments. The management interviews also indicated that this enabled the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses.

2.4.2.

The study programme received a license at the end of 2021, and the analysis of changes in the composition of the teaching staff for the reporting period is not applicable. However, since the date the license was received, Dr. oec. Aija van der Steina has been elected to a position of an associated professor at ViA, as well as associated professor A. Klepers has obtained a certificate certifying that his English language knowledge corresponds to the level C1. Ilona Beliatskaya has started doctoral studies at the Estonian Business School (EBS).

2.4.3.

N/A

2.4.4.

The involvement of the VRSTAO study field lecturers in the grant projects of Valmiera municipality is significant, solving economic and business problems relevant to the region. In the past, they were "Possibilities and prerequisites for attracting human resources (including talent) for the city of Valmiera. Development of population attraction strategy for the city of Valmiera" and "Development of the project of the administrative structure of the municipality of the newly created Valmiera region".

The involvement of the VRSTAO study field lecturers in scientific research is subordinated to the priorities set in the ViA development strategy for 2016 - 2020: developing study programmes and study directions in education; to develop research in the field of science, which would be a proactive response to society's challenges in accordance with study directions and external demand; in the field of knowledge transfer and idea leadership, to implement the transfer of knowledge to cooperation partners, fulfilling the role of the intellectual leader of the Vidzeme region in promoting the growth of the country and the region. The scientific research work carried out by the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field also corresponds to the specific strategic goals of the studies set by the VRSTAO study field - it provides the content of internationally competitive higher education in the field of tourism and recreation, through research, it promotes the VRSTAO study field as a center for learning, popularizing and supporting entrepreneurship in Vidzeme region. The scientific and research activity of the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field corresponds to the research goals - to create the direction as a scientific research center in the field of sustainable development of regional tourism and recreation, to promote the involvement of master's and doctoral students in research.

2.4.5.

Lecturers communicate through regular meetings as per the structure. An additional communication tool for the programme lecturers is the Lecturer Handbook for internal use, which emphasizes the concepts to be integrated into the study courses, the importance of connectivity with the industry, and various forms of how it can be implemented, as well as there is an emphasis on a student-centered approach.

In order to increase the quality of the lecturers' performance and the benefit students can gain from the courses, several study courses are taught by two or even three lecturers who mutually collaborate (courses with the involvement of two or more lecturers).

The EU Structural Fund project SAM 8.2.2, implemented by ViA, has made a great contribution to the improvement of mutual communication and the improvement of the study process - joint training for lecturers to improve their digital and pedagogical competence has been organized within the framework of the project. The whole system ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and the interconnection of study courses within the study programme.

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

The number, adequacy and competence level is up to the standards and when there is a need in a specific area part time lecturers are attracted to the institution. There are also guest lecturers invited to support the program from the professionals in the industry. The involvement of lecturers in scientific research as well as funded projects is available and encouraged. The communication

and collaboration among lecturers is well established. They even have co-teaching courses. The composition of the teaching staff is well-balanced.

Strengths:

1. The qualifications of the teaching staff are up to the standards and they are able to carry out individual and joint research.
2. EU funded projects are commonly carried out.
3. A strong communication and cooperation culture is established within the institution to carry out collaborative research to achieve the goals of the study field and the programme.

Weaknesses:

1. Teaching loads are high for some faculty members.
2. Research funds are limited with regional and EU level

Assessment of the requirement [7]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The qualification of the varied teaching staff meets the requirements and enriches the students' learning experience, as well supports the quality studies.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Annex "Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard" ("31P-TSVK_atbilstiba_izgl_standartam_2022_10.docx") confirms that the study program complies with Cabinet Regulation No. 240 "Noteikumi par valsts akadēmiskās izglītības standartu"

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Attached study course descriptions ("33P-TSVK-kursu-apraksti_Course-Descrip.zip") are prepared in Latvian and English. Descriptions formally complies with regulations set forth in Law on Higher Education Institutions. However some of the study course descriptions are missing in the attached annex (e.g. "Civil Protection", "Environment Management and Protection")

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The provided diploma sample complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued according to MK regulation No. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus".

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Two professors and four associated professors are involved in the implementation of the study programme. This is also confirmed by ViA confirmation letter Nr.1 - 7/116.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Attached resumes of staff and ViA confirmation letter "Apliecinajums-VRSTAO-valsts-valoda.edoc" verifies that state language proficiency is compliant with MK regulation Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi". There is also foreign guest lecturer present whose language skills do not impact ability to perform professional and office duties.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Attached resumes of staff and ViA confirmation letter "Apliecinajums-VRSTAO-anglu-valoda.edoc" verifies that language proficiency in English is at least B2.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Sample of attached study agreement complies with MK 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

There is a cooperation agreement in place with Turība University (Nr.186) to continue studies in the professional masters study programme "Tourism Strategic Management" (only in Latvian).

- 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: Partially compliant

ViA has provided a study contract sample which includes section as follows "2. ViA obligations [...] 2.8 To guarantee a compensation for losses to the Student for the credit points not obtained (for which it is not possible to issue an academic statement, if the credits are not obtained due to a fault of ViA) by transferring tuition fee paid by the Student to his or her specified bank account within 1 (one) month if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme license is taken away due to ViA's activity (or inactivity), and the Student does not want to continue studies in another study programme." Current interpretation is only partially compliant with requirements as compensation should be guaranteed in full, not partially. Ability to complete a study programme in full and possibility to receive a degree in chosen institution constitutes the main right of enrolled students. If the study programme license is revoked or the study programme is not accredited due to actions of HEI, student financial status in regard to tuition fees must be returned to the position before the infringement of rights as students in their good faith have believed in the ability to fully finish study programme in chosen institution.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Study programme in general complies with regulatory enactments, however compensation is not guaranteed in full. Some of the study course descriptions are missing.

General conclusions about the study programme, indicating the most important strengths

and weaknesses of the study programme

Tourism Competitiveness Management study programme is a modern programme, which is in line with the external requirements for the master level studies. The programme is ready to be implemented in all planned forms: full-time and part-time studies, as well in English and Latvian. The study programme is in line with the respective trends and needs in the labor market, offers practical and interesting study assignments and experiences for the students. As appropriate for the master programme, also the students are encouraged and provided with the opportunity to participate in scientific works and projects. Good collaboration with the municipal and regional authorities for common projects and externally funded international projects are the strengths of the programme. A strong communication and cooperation culture is established within the institution to carry out collaborative research to achieve the goals of the study field and the programme.

Attraction of more students, finding additional funding for the research and science activities and better application of the learning outcome based study principles are the main challenges for the programme developers in the near future.

Evaluation of the study programme "Tourism Competitiveness Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Tourism Competitiveness Management"

Short-term recommendations

1. Student assessment principles need to be improved and align with the principles of the outcome based studies.
2. Improve the use and formulation of the learning outcomes. European Commission or its' institutions (e.g.. OECD, Cedefop etc.) have published several policy papers, recommendations, standards etc. about the Learning outcomes (e.g. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4156_en.pdf)
3. The internship regulations and process descriptions must clearly indicate the roles of each party in the internship process and open what competences students could learn/improve during the particular internship. Distinguishing between internship and practicum would be beneficial.
4. Compensation for losses should be guaranteed in full if study programmes are closed and students choose not to continue studies in provided study options in other institutions.
5. Balance the workload of individual employees between research, teaching and administrative work.

Long-term recommendations

1. Attract more students to ensure the sustainability of the programme. Number of the students should be high enough to allow the study programme "Tourism Competitiveness Management" to reach the economic breakeven point of this study field.
2. There has to be a balance between the teaching load and research duties of the lecturers
3. More international collaborative research could be encouraged.

4. In order to attract funding for research, look for ways for international cooperation with other universities.

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 quality assurance process works at a minimum level as collecting the feedback of the main stakeholders and using the received information for improvements. At the same time the the procedure and processes are not connected as one whole and efficient and effective (eg. employers feedback is mainly oral and is not structured, collected, saved to make comprehensive analysis).
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Fully compliant		As a small institution, ViA has established several strong research groups, applied research activities are integrated into the study programmes, study methods and other activities of the institution.
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Fully compliant		ViA provides many good examples and initiations of the collaboration with the appropriate partners in Latvia and abroad.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation			Comment
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			In general, most recommendations have been fulfilled. There are still some areas which demand further continuous action in order to improve them even more, however demonstrated action indicates, that ViA complies with previous recommendations.

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	Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship (42812)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good
2	Tourism Competitiveness Management (45812)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

N/A