

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Riga Technical University

Study field: Economics

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Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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RTU implements 3 study programmes in the study direction "Economics" (further in the report the term "study field" is used): BA programme "Economics" - 43311, MA programme "Economics" - 45311, MA programme "Urban and Regional Engineering" - 47311.

After getting acquainted with the self-evaluation report and supplemented documents, as well as the materials and the information obtained during the on-site visit, the experts have concluded that the study field is partially compliant with the requirements since insignificant shortcomings and deficiencies have been identified and they can be eliminated within the accreditation term of the study field. Most of the shortcomings relate to modest internationalization (in terms of academic staff), insufficient level of cooperation with the private sector. These shortcomings do not affect the quality of the study field. Although in general RTU has developed and operates a quality system at the management level, in the study field it would be necessary to promote cooperation among the field and programme management with the academic staff and students. The most significant disadvantage of study programmes is the overlap of the content of study courses in one-level programmes and between bachelor's and master's study programmes. These shortcomings affect the quality of studies and this applies to both study programmes in Latvian and English.

Positive aspects: 1. The goals of the study field "Economics" are clearly defined and achievable. They correspond to the overall strategic development of RTU. 2. RTU quality system has been established. 3. The legal regulation of processes in the study field and at RTU in general is publicly available. 4. Developed infrastructure, with the help of which students are provided with opportunities to study and conduct research. 5. Good cooperation with the public sector. 6. It would be necessary to involve foreign lecturers more in the study process, which would promote the quality of studies, exchange of experience, because there are very few representatives of the academic staff and students who use the ERASMUS + mobility opportunities.

Negative aspects: 1. There is a lack of effective field and programme management cooperation with the academic staff and students in the decision-making process. 2. Academic staff is overburdened and there is an imbalance between academic, scientific and administrative workload, which affects their availability and motivation to participate in activities for their further professional development, academic mobility and international research projects. 3. BA study programme and MA study programme have the same title "Economics", which also coincides with the name of the field. 4. There is an overlap between the study courses. 5. The descriptions of many study courses in English do not indicate the implementation of these courses in a foreign language, which, respectively, does not meet the condition that the programmes implemented in Latvian and English must coincide in content. 6. Not all lecturers have the appropriate knowledge of English for teaching in a foreign language.

1. Management of the Study Field

Analysis

The "Economics" study field (with three study programmes) is one of the four study fields implemented by the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management (hereinafter referred to as FEEM) (<https://www.rtu.lv/en/feem/ievf-about-us/accreditation-1/study-direction-accreditation>). The main goal of the study field "is to provide students with a competitive, scientific research-based, multi-level education in the field of economics that meets the requirements of the Latvian and European labor market", as stated in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), page 16. This goal is divided into other sub-goals, such as:

- "ensuring the continuity of studies at all levels corresponding to the study direction;

- implementing internationalization activities, involving foreign students in the study process, as well as promoting the participation of students and academic staff in exchange programmes;
- providing representation in professional organizations relevant to the study direction;
- integrating research into programmes at all education levels” (SAR, page 16).

The goals of the three programmes are part of the aim of the study field of Economics, they state that:

- “The purpose of the academic bachelor study programme is to educate and train the specialists who are able to analytically understand economic processes and whose knowledge and expertise enable them to take decisions, plan and coordinate economic processes;
- The academic master study programme aims to educate and train the analysts of economic processes and industry specialists to address economic challenges and decision-making in today's changing economic environment;
- The professional master study programme has been implemented since 2003 and has experienced significant structural changes and the changes in its curriculum as it is constantly being updated and developed” (SAR, page 15).

As a consequence, the study field and the relevant study programmes comply with the main fields of the strategic development of the higher education institution and meet the needs and the development trends of the Latvian society and economy. In addition to these, the whole approach is compliant to the institutional strategy where it is stated that “The main target of the RTU Strategy is to ensure implementation of the leitmotiv referred to in the National Development Plan for 2014-2020 - to achieve the “economic breakthrough” in Latvia” (file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Strategija_RTU.pdf , page 3).

The management of the study field and study programmes is clearly set up, being provided by the Council of the FEEM, by the Study Direction Committee and the Heads for both Study field and study programmes; another role includes the Student Self-government of FEEM. This was described in SAR, page 19 but was also revealed from the site-visit meetings; heads proved to be open to changes and willing to adapt to become more efficient in their management tasks. The management system is structured in both directions - from top - bottom and bottom - up, contributing to the efficiency of the decisional process. According to SAR (page 20): “The management of the study direction “Economics” is provided by the Study Direction Committee” and “Support functions for the development and implementation of study programmes are provided by RTU Study Department. RTU Programmes Management and Curriculum Design Unit plays an important role supporting the improvement of the study programme which includes specialists in the field of Economics and comprises both the members of the academic staff and industry representatives”. During the visit, it was revealed that the opinion of different interested parties such as employers, academic staff and students is considered.

RTU has established a clear system and procedures for the admission of students. The admission process and procedure of student enrollment (matriculation) is stipulated in the RTU Admission Regulations, based on the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers Nr. 846 issued 10 Oct 2006. In addition, the institutional Admission Regulations are approved by the RTU Senate and published annually, on November 1. In SAR (pages 20-21) the centralized examination system is clearly described, as well as the two ways to apply for the state budget funded seats in undergraduate study programmes. The rules of recognition of non-formal education are also described. In addition, according to SAR (page 23): “Recognition, depending on the situation, is performed by the director of the study programme or by the member of academic staff responsible for the study course”. The assessment system is complex, summative. “Assessment of student learning outcomes is carried out in accordance with the “Regulation on the Assessment of Learning Outcomes”, as it is described in SAR (page 23). During the visit, it was revealed the fact that students know about the procedures for admission and enrollment and also about their right and obligations, having a student self-government active.

The higher education institution has a certain interest in academic integrity principles and mechanisms. Besides the Code of Academic Integrity adopted in 2016 and the student obligations to upload their graduation thesis in ORTUS portal, beginning with 2018, a new software started to be used - Turnitin which is used worldwide. There is also a Researcher Code of Ethics which has been used since 1997. In addition, the faculty has set up a cooperation regarding the Joint Computerized Plagiarism Control System (SAR, page 24). Based on the discussions carried out during the site visit it appears that the institution has still to work on the development of the internal culture based on plagiarism detection. Teaching staff explained that students break rules sometimes. The institutional culture has to develop in the sense that all internal stakeholders assume responsibility and engage at all levels regarding following the ethical regulation, principles and mechanisms. In order to contribute to this engagement, the institution should make efforts in making these formal regulations more effectively applied by regular training and workshops on academic writing and also, concentrate not only on detecting plagiarism, but on preventing it. As part of a culture based on ethical principles, relevant documents could be revised every 2 years, such as the Code of Academic Integrity. Students can take a mandatory course on academic writing and several workshops can be organized.

The information published on the website of the higher education institution regarding the relevant study programmes of the study field provides important information for the candidates and the students and is published in all languages in which the study programmes are implemented. Main issues include: education opportunities explained in Latvian and English languages, detailed description of the study courses in the Latvian and English languages and also student mobility opportunities (<https://www.rtu.lv/lv/studijas>, <https://www.rtu.lv/en/studies>, (<https://stud.rtu.lv/rtu/vaaApp/sprpub>, <https://info.rtu.lv/rtupub/disc2/list>, <https://fsd.rtu.lv/>). These links were provided in the documents submitted for the accreditation and during the discussions, stakeholders confirmed that they were aware of these.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Management of the study field proved to be open to discussion and ready to implement pertinent changes that will help the entire academic community to improve their institutional activity regarding teaching, research and societal involvement. It is important to specify that the management role is not only to set up responsibilities, but to monitor the implementation of the decisions and to correct these, when necessary; all management participants proved awareness on the institutional and study field needs.

Strengths:

1. The institution has a formal mechanism for the management and development of study programmes, where the opinion of different interested parties such as employers, academic staff and students is considered.
2. Institutional representatives and the management of the study field and programmes have a clear understanding of the goals and they are committed to quality improvement.
3. Admission procedures are clear and students know about this.
4. Student self-government is active and aware of the student rights and obligations.

Weaknesses:

1. There is no clear evidence on the student involvement in the decision making process.
2. Based on the information included in the self-evaluation materials and obtained during the site visit, there is a room for improvement in the area of plagiarism detection and plagiarism culture development
3. Code of Academic Integrity has not been revised since 2016.

2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

RTU has a strategic interest in providing quality processes in teaching, research and commercialization. Based on the current institutional strategy “The vision of Riga Technical University until 2020 is to become the leading University of science and innovation in the Baltic States. In order to achieve it, the strategy defines three objectives of the University – high quality study process, excellence in research and sustainable innovation and commercialization activities” (<https://www.rtu.lv/en/university/strategy>). The institution has the “RTU Quality Policy” which has been functional since 2017 and “RTU Quality Policy” is reconciled with the ENQA standards and guidelines. RTU Excellence Approach and Quality Policy are reciprocally integrated documents, which determine that RTU employs the EFQM quality model “ (SAR, page 26). Although there is not enough information (such as Quality assurance procedures of the Study Field “Economics”, feedback of students and measures adopted) on the quality policy publicly available on the institutional website, at least not in the English version, the institution proves transparency and the current self-assessment report is publicly available (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1z6wKkCjMCqz_MeBSZ6oD8bxJmjz0caeA/view). In addition, “Quality assurance procedures of the Study Field “Economics” are closely related to the RTU Quality Management System. The Study Field Committee has been established and operates, the Committee monitors academic activities in the study field, is responsible for the quality of the content and its relevance to the intended aims and tasks of the study programmes within the study field, as well as for the self-assessment of the study field” (SAR, page 27).

The Study Direction Committee has the responsibility to revise the study programme curriculum. The involvement of stakeholders and the realization of major projects is part of the responsibility of the Vice-Rector for Strategic Development (SAR, page 28). Therefore, although there are responsibilities and mechanisms established to get feed-back from all interested parties (students, employers and graduates), the procedures are not very impactful on the development of the study programmes. In addition, the report shows that the university is one of the most recommended universities, but the mechanisms might not go further to study direction or study programs. A good thing is that “It is planned to develop and improve the tool for collection of statistical data necessary for evaluation of the study programme performance and data visualization within the framework of 8.2.3 SSO project”. (SAR, page 38). Accelerating the process of having this tool available will make all internal stakeholders efficient in contributing to the improvement of the study direction in a clear formal way. Participants in the groups of graduates and employers at the meetings during the site-visit were not providing evidence on the surveys filled in regularly, describing the cooperation with the institution more informally conducted than formal mechanisms. This is why the Alumni Association established at an institutional level (SAR, page 28) might become more active with coordination at a faculty level, or even at a Study field level. “Student complaints and proposals are considered in compliance with “Procedure for Submission and Examination of RTU Students' Proposals and Complaints” (published at <https://www.rtu.lv/en/university/suggestions-and-complaints>); this proves the interest of the institution to provide to their students a quality experience during their studies. During the site visit it was revealed the interest of international students in becoming more involved in the changing process to increase their learning experience while studying (having access to more information in English might help, such as to the quality policy). Therefore, some quantitative tools based on online surveys might be systematically applied to different categories of stakeholders, especially graduates, employers and international students with clear feedback for concrete ideas for improvement.

According to SAR (pages 30-32):

- “RTU draws up quality reviews based on the analysis of processes and their results. Quality reviews

are drawn up once a year, summarizing the data on performance indicators of RTU administration, core activities and support processes;

- 28 performance indicators characterizing process quality are set for one of the core RTU activity processes "Organization and Management of the Study Process". The data are summarized once a year for the previous academic year by study level and study program;

- The data in the quality review that is submitted to RTU administration are analyzed by study level, by faculty and study direction. Indicators of numerous study programmes are compared with the general average RTU level".

In addition to these, the institution uses a so-called radar chart which includes several indicators, such as: academic staff vs. number of students, academic staff with scientific degree, ratio of graduates to the number of matriculated students, number of students who continue studies (not exmatriculated), proportion of foreign students, number of outbound mobility students, bachelor programme graduates who continue studies at RTU, number of matriculated students from the respective bachelor study programmes, average assessment of the study programmes in student polls, number of study materials published in ORTUS learning environment and applicability thereof, as well as financial revenue generated by study programmes per student (SAR, page 31). Therefore, comparative reviews of the study programmes results are available to management to support the decision making process efficiently. There is a clear fact that the institution collects and uses the above mentioned statistics for improvement. People involved in the site visit demonstrated awareness and professionalism in using these indicators for decision making (Quality Management and Management of the Study Direction).

The institution, and therefore, the study field and study programmes too, apply the student-centered learning, teaching and assessment, perceiving the development of curriculum and study forms as one of the most significant challenges. The institution has established the Center of Academic Excellence, which provides an interesting combination of teaching with different learning cultures, meaning that local students use exchange programmes, although not very intense, but they can benefit from international guest lecturing (stated in SAR, page 33). The integration of the standards included in the ESG is included in "Integration description of the first part of the ESG standards", provided as an appendix. Unfortunately, this document provided as annex is only in Latvian (ESG pirmajā daļā iekļauto standartu integrēšanas raksturojums), but the dialog with the participants at the visit proved the same challenges like those considered in the report. Therefore, one main challenge related to the ESG is reaching agreement on the common structure and curriculum of separate sections for the study programmes submitted for licensing. In addition, student-centered learning is applied properly by using different methods of teaching delivery, flexibility in pedagogical methods, procedures for dealing with students' complaints etc.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Quality assurance system is developed at an institutional level, which means that at the study field or study programme levels, the main role is to implement the established procedures. In general, the institution has an efficient system, with people in charge who know about the continuous improvement principle and make the system functional. Like all systems that evolve, there is room for improvement.

Strengths:

1. Professional people work in the QA department at the university level.
2. There is a huge interest in being compliant with ESG which is reflected in concrete actions.
3. There is an institutional Alumni Association which can be helpful in the process of collecting feedback from graduates.

4. There is a clear procedure on student complains and proposals.
5. There is a general good cooperation with stakeholders (although not always formalized).

Weaknesses:

1. During the site visit experts noted that some quality assurance documents are not translated in English and international students (and not only them) are limited in being active in this area; Quality Policy is in Latvian and should and could be translated: <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/universitate/dokumenti/kvalitates-politika>
On 8th January 2021 the experts received additional information, stating that the Quality Policy is now available on the RTU website also in English. The experts acknowledge this information.
2. Based also on discussions conducted during the site visit employers, graduates and academic staff are not effectively involved in quality assurance process and the development of the study field and study programmes in a clear formal way base.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

According to SAR, RTU has a decentralized budget and it is planned separately for each structural unit. As the evaluated study field "Economics" is implemented at the FEEM, the funding of the field is allocated to the faculty, where a total of four study fields, five institutes with their subordinate departments and several independent organizational units are implemented. Such a financing model gives an opportunity to make decisions that relate to the development of the faculty, including the field of study. According to the information provided by the SAR, the total funding of the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management is stable and tends to increase, where the increase in the number of foreign students has a significant impact.

During the on-site visit experts made sure that RTU has the infrastructure, resources and the material and technical provision required for the implementation of the study field. The students and the teaching staff have access to the necessary basic resources.

According to SAR, RTU is developing the Ķīpsala student campus. The Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management is located at 6 Kalnciema Street, Riga. The total area of the building is 6627 square meters with 5 above-ground floors and a basement. The study building has 30 classrooms with a total area of 2425.6 square meters and one laboratory room with an area of 50.7 square meters. During the visit, the experts were able to visit several auditoriums and make sure that they are fully equipped with the necessary technical equipment, which is easy and convenient to use. There are also some computer classes where it is possible to organize classes, as well as computer classes that are equipped with special software (computer class, which is specially equipped for the MA study programme for Urban and Regional Engineering Economics, Bloomberg class).

RTU Scientific Library is located in Ķīpsala and its total area is 6393 square meters and users have access to 713 workplaces. During the visit, the experts saw that the number of jobs currently available to users is lower, as all epidemiological safety measures are complied with. Both individual booths and a rarity reading room are available in the premises of RTU Scientific Library. The library is equipped with various technological solutions that allow readers to perform self-service (ATMs for receiving and transferring books). RTU Scientific Library is available 24 hours a day, equipped with a small dining room, it has several entrances, as well as an outdoor terrace, where students can also work.

According to SAR, RTU widely uses various IT management systems, which allow to effectively manage processes, provide users with up-to-date information. During the visit and meeting with RTU representatives, students, the experts managed to make sure that, for example, using the ORTUS portal, students can use the self-service ATMs of the RTU Scientific Library, receive the latest

information, etc. According to SAR, RTU uses the portal ORTUS, Study Management System, study schedule and premises are available in digital format, digital document management system, digital student survey system, science support system, Moodle.

In accordance with SAR, RTU has a human resources development plan, in which the development of staff is determined in three fields: involvement of doctoral students in academic work, improvement of competencies of existing staff and attraction of foreign teaching staff.

54 lecturers participate in the implementation of the study field "Economics", of which 37 are elected academic staff and 17 are guest lecturers.

As the experts observed during the visit, the academic staff are specialists in their field. However, it is very necessary for the academic staff to work more as a team, which would allow to avoid duplication of content in study courses both in one-level programmes and between BA "Economics" and MA "Economics" programmes. The elected academic staff involved in the study field also has a research workload and, in some cases, administrative work is also performed.

The involvement of academic staff in scientific work is confirmed by both publications and research projects, however, as noted in the SAR, the involvement of academic staff in science could be much greater and more significant. For example, by personally addressing and motivating students to engage in research activities that result from expert discussions with students during the visit. RTU provides didactic support and other competency development courses for academic staff to improve pedagogical skills and abilities. Representatives of the academic staff confirmed this during the experts' visit. Great emphasis is currently placed on IT training. In expert talks with academic staff, it was mentioned that there is not always time to attend courses.

According to SAR, foreign lecturers participate in the study programmes "Economics" mostly using ERASMUS + mobility and in the 2018/2019 academic year there were 10 guest lecturers. During the meeting it was mentioned that currently a lecturer from Lithuania is involved in the study field, within the project SAM.8.2.2. During the visit, the experts confirmed that the study field "Economics" needs to attract more foreign lecturers.

As mentioned in the SAR, the mobility of academic staff is relatively low. Taking into account that 54 lecturers are involved in teaching the study field "Economics", however, in the mobility programme in the period from 2013/2014 to 2018/2019 there have been only 23 mobilities (Appendix "Statistical data on ERASMUS outgoing mobility") and 12 representatives of the academic staff have participated in them. During the visit, the experts concluded that the academic staff mentions family circumstances as the main reason for not participating in ERASMUS + mobility. According to experts, the participation of academic staff in mobility is important, as it provides an opportunity to gain new experience and improve the quality of lectures.

According to the information available on the RTU website (<https://www.rtu.lv/lv/studijas/pakalpojumi/studentu-servisa-centrs>), the Student Service Department has been established at RTU, where the RTU Career Center also operates. The career center would promote cooperation and communication between the university, students, employers and RTU graduates, as well as help young people to integrate into the labor market and develop a professional career, the center also offers psychological support. There is no information about the Student Service Department in the English version of the RTU website. According to SAR, international students are supported by International Information Centers (<https://www.rtu.lv/en/internationalization/international-information-centers>). According to the information available on the RTU website, the Career Center has an employee who works directly with foreign students and the Career Center website is also available in English.

During the visit of the experts, it was possible to make sure that the environment and infrastructure of RTU in general (library) and FEEM are designed to be attractive to students. FEEM has access to both lounges and rooms for co-production, the rooms have books that students can freely choose and read, and the collections are replenished.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

RTU decentralized budget and the study field to be evaluated accordingly are included in the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management. The available infrastructure and databases show that the funding allocated to the evaluated field of study is appropriate. 3.2. The buildings and infrastructure are well maintained, the equipment is relatively new, available to both students and academic staff in the study process and research. 3.3. The academic staff are specialists in their field. It would be necessary to promote the work of the team of academic staff to avoid duplication of content. The opportunities for the academic staff to use the competence development programmes offered by RTU must be improved. It is necessary to find an opportunity to attract foreign lecturers and promote the mobility of academic staff. 3.4. RTU uses the support of the Student Service Center and the Career Center (psychological help, career counselling, etc.) and especially the International Information Centers for foreign students.

Strengths:

1. Well-developed infrastructure, including library.
2. Possibility to use library services (databases) not only physically in the library, but from anywhere, as well as library working hours 24 h.

Weaknesses:

1. There is a need for a fundraising strategy based on the diversification of fundraising tools.
2. Low involvement of academic staff in mobility.
3. Lack of time for academic staff to participate in competency development courses.

4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

The scientific core profile of RTU is technical and engineering sciences. The programmes are provided by the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management focused on social sciences. According to SAR (p. 52) there are two main research areas of the study field "Economics": "Challenges of Socio-Economic Development of Small Countries" and "Challenges of Sustainable Development of Latvian Regions and Cities". These research areas are linked with study programmes especially with the study programme "Economics" which has the academic profile.

The academic staff involved in research in Economy at RTU has a quite high domestic recognition. It should improve international recognition - the research is oriented on Latvian context. The research and its outcomes are generally integrated in the study process. The academic staff involved in research also gives lectures where students have the opportunity to get information about their present research. The SAR lists the research and their links with study courses (p. 55). Interviews with students confirmed their involvement in the research.

There is research conducted with foreign partners. SAR lists 7 research projects conducted from 2012 until now (p. 55-56). The number is not high so the impact of international research on the study programmes is limited. RTU recognizes this weakness in the SAR and declares activities that should lead to an increase in the number of international research, to an increase in the number of scientific publications and articles, and generally should assure international cooperation.

RTU is successfully developing its mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research. In 2015 the Research Program was launched - annual action plan and dedicated funding from the Research Support Fund (SAR, p. 58). This program led to an increase in scientific publications of the academic staff - from about 440 in 2013 to 750 in 2018 (SAR, p. 58, Appendix: List of the publications of the teaching staff 2013-2019). The interviews confirmed involvement in the research of the academic staff but they also identified some opportunities in more orientation

towards the private sector. The research collaboration might be increased and it should lead to more visible involvement of the private sector in the study programme.

There is an annual Student Scientific and Technical Conference where all Master students present and publish their master's thesis and bachelor students might present their research. Interviews confirmed some involvement of students in research - some students informed about their joint scientific contribution to articles with the academic staff. The strength of the Faculty is a very engaged and supportive academic staff that actively invites students in scientific activities.

According to interviews, students are interested and very positively react to innovative solutions in the study process like trips, site visits, and involvement of external partners to courses.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Scientific research is conducted successfully, results are integrated in the study programmes, internationalization is sufficient however it might be improved and there is not visible synergy of conducting research for external stakeholders of the university, especially for the private sector.

Strengths:

1. Scientific research is conducted in the field of economics.
2. Results of scientific research are integrated in study programmes of all levels.
3. Students are involved in scientific research.
4. Good collaboration network with public institutions

Weaknesses:

1. Number of publications in the international journals with high impact and/or monographs with established international publishers should be improved.
2. Limited interest of the private sector in research activities run by the FEEM.
3. Academic staff should promote common research with students

5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

The higher education institution cooperates with institutions from Latvia and abroad, however more emphasis is placed on cooperation with employers representing the public sector. Cooperation contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programmes. The cooperation partners are selected in view of the specific features of the study direction and the relevant study programmes however the cooperation partners represent the public sector which restricts opportunities for students. Industry representatives participate in lectures. Although employers are invited as guest lectures, employers recommend inviting highly skilled foreign lecturers. However, there was a proposal to attract more guest lecturers from the industry as well (despite the regulations as an obstacle), as part of lectures. It is welcomed that RTU sees it as an opportunity to further improve the existing study programmes in accordance with the needs of the labor market, it is a path that must be maintained and improved all the time. Employers would like to see more practical things - more computer skills, students need information analysis skills, decision making, statistics analysis, presentation skills. Employers suggested courses on public procurement.

RTU is involved in many research and scientific projects, however there is a large variety of the project proposals and this gives the impression that the projects have not been selected or written in a sufficiently targeted way.

RTU is very good in attracting foreign students despite their different motivation to study however the procedure for attracting the teaching staff from abroad is not functioning well. Mobility is very

low due to family reasons and the fact that mostly students are working. Erasmus mobility opportunities are used by teaching staff more than students however there is room for scientific research and international cooperation.

A common system for the provision of traineeships is in place however students mainly choose their workplaces for internships. Not in all cases internships have been developed within the study field.

RTU is in process to develop joint study programmes. RTU works together with other faculties and develops common projects.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

One of the strengths is the cooperation with the public sector, creating confidence in close and professional cooperation between RTU and public sector institutions/ employers. At the same time, it can also be seen as a weakness, as too much focus on cooperation with the public sector reduces the scope for cooperation with the private sector. In addition, most students work in the private sector. Young people admitted that during internship they did extra work that complements the knowledge gained at university.

The strength of RTU is definitely the attraction of foreign students, but there is also a negative side, because foreign students are not fully integrated into students' self-government, evaluation of study programmes and other activities. Although the number of foreign students is increasing, the downside undeniably is the decrease of local students.

Although RTU successfully attracts foreign students, the downside is definitely the fact that RTU doesn't have enough foreign academic staff. The need to invite more guest lecturers was also suggested by the students of the evaluated programmes.

Strengths:

1. Good cooperation and close contacts with the public sector.
2. Growing number of foreign students and well-established procedures/infrastructure.
3. Well-developed system for the provision of traineeships.

Weaknesses:

1. The private sector is insufficiently involved.
2. Foreign students are not fully integrated in quality assurance process.
3. Limited number of foreign academic staff.
4. Lack of well-targeted project planning leads to large variety of research project proposals.

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

Analysis

During the meeting with RTU, it was very visible that the RTU has taken into account the previous assessment visit recommendations, and still are trying to improve parts that they had historically lacked in quality. Study programmes are being improved by inviting lecturers outside of RTU because of agreements with other universities with similar study programmes, as well as students have options to change universities, but stay in a similar field of study in case of something happening in one or other universities with their study programmes, like for example, in case of economics study programme closing in another university, students from that study programme can come to RTU and continue their studies there.

Internationalization is part of the good, simple, and steady progress RTU is making. The total number of international students is growing year by year, which means that there is a growing interest in specific study programmes and education offered by this faculty. There should still be an

improvement in communication with international students about study field development, as they feel that faculty underestimates their importance in decision-making processes.

RTU has implemented another recommendation from the previous assessment visit, that is the closing of the Daugavpils branch, and it has helped to concentrate financial, human, and material resources in one place in order to have successful further development of this faculty and its study programmes.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

SAR attached documents and also during the expert visit, it was visible that the RTU has taken into account the previous assessment visit recommendations, and still are trying to improve parts that they had historically lacked in quality.

Strengths:

1. Management has assured that it has regular meetings and specific agreements with other universities with similar study programmes and this is one of the biggest strengths.
2. Another strength is that study programmes are quite unique following the recommendations from the previous visit to concentrate on its niche.
3. Internationalization is evolving, yet it could be improved more by exploring the possibility of creating an MA Urban and Regional Economics programme in English because international students were interested in that.

Weaknesses:

1. Even though it is only part of the internationalization, it is a very important one - communicating and involving international students in decision-making processes and further development of the study field.

7. Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

- 1 Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: RTU has developed and documented a quality system that successfully functions at the university level, but evaluating the information submitted by SAR and also during the visit, the experts did not gain confidence that the quality system also works successfully in the study direction "Economics".

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: RTU has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of RTU (SAR point 1.3., annexes).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: RTU has a Senate regulation on the procedure for applying, developing and making amendments to study programs. The SAR explains the modalities of this procedure, but experts at various meetings of the visit found that this procedure could be improved on the study direction level to ensure that the content of the study courses does not overlap between bachelor and master level programmes.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The RTU Senate has also approved regulations that regulate the procedure for assessment of study results and the procedure for final examinations. RTU has publicly available descriptions of study courses, which include basic information (number of credit points, responsible lecturer, course annotation, goals, content, literature and achievable results). The descriptions of the study course are expanded in the appendices to the SAR, in which, in addition to the publicly available information, the evaluation criteria of the study results can also be found.

All students' examinations, works and assessments are evaluated in scale 1-10 (from very, very unsatisfactory to outstanding), providing a record within this scale, to which extent the learning outcomes have been reached. However, the procedure of oral exams is not recorded, the assessment carries a high risk of subjectivity. The result of this evaluation is difficult to challenge with so little evidence and lack of the second opinion.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: In 2018, the Center of Academic Excellence was established at RTU, the task of which is to develop a strategy for the professional development of the academic staff. However, the SAR and the accompanying documents do not clearly define the procedures and mechanisms for ensuring the qualifications and quality of work of academic staff. There are procedures and arrangements for the recruitment or election of academic staff. Conclusion was formed based also on discussions conducted during the site visit especially during the meeting with the staff.

- 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

Justification: RTU collects and analyses several data. There is still room for improvement regarding collecting data from graduates and employers, as well as for the efficiency of the work of the academic staff. This conclusion was formed based also on discussions conducted during the site visit.

- 7 1.6. The higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their quality assurance systems.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: RTU has established a quality assurance system (see point 1.1). The development plan of the study field "Economics" attached to the SAR shows that it is planned to improve the quality aspects - to attract foreign lecturers, to promote mobility, etc. However, the above-mentioned procedures and documents did not provide the experts with full confidence in the continuous improvement, development and efficiency of the study field during the visit.

- 8 R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Very good cooperation with state institutions, but it is necessary to promote cooperation with the private sector and with foreign organizations.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The academic staff involved in research in Economy at RTU has a quite high domestic recognition. It should improve international recognition - the research is oriented on Latvian context.

10 R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Recommendations are fully implemented.

8. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

More integrate foreign students in the study and research process and in the decision - making process.
To involve the students more in the decision - making process.
To motivate academic staff to be more active and involve students in common research.
Make surveys for graduates and employers functional.
Set up period for revision of procedures (some should be annually revised, some every 2-4 years).
To review the content of the study courses and to ensure that courses do not overlap.

Long-term recommendations

To develop MA Urban and Regional Engineering Economics programme in English.
To revise BA Economics and MA Economics curriculum and make a clear difference between the overlapping BA and MA level courses.
The study direction needs to cooperate more directly with the private sector.
Revise periodically the regulations and procedures.
Make publicly available more information on quality policy especially in English.

II. "Economics" ASSESSMENT

II. "Economics" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

The "Economics" as an academic bachelor programme aims to ensure acquisition of theoretical knowledge in the field of economics in accordance with the national standards of academic education and to train specialists, whose knowledge and skills will allow them to take decisions, plan and coordinate economic processes (SAR, page 74). The programme is designed for the 6th level of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) with the capacity of generating the following learning outcomes (SAR, page 75):

- "to understand the economic theory, assess the current situation and problems in the national

economy;

- to define and apply various alternative solutions to the use of financial resources;
- to demonstrate their understanding of the structure and main directions of the European Union policy;
- to show their understanding of the operating principles and economic performance of enterprises, government or non-governmental institutions;
- to collect, process, analyse and apply information; to use information technologies in the solution of specific economic issues;
- to carry out research on economic development issues, interpret and analyse the results;
- to properly elaborate and present projects related to economic issues;
- to apply the knowledge acquired during the studies in various life and business situations, working in a team or individually thus ensuring their competitiveness in the labor market”.

The objectives are clearly stated (8 objectives at page 74 in SAR) and the qualification awarded is Bachelor Degree of Social Science in Economics. The total number of students has not changed significantly in the reporting period: 122 students in the academic year 2013/14 and 130 students in the academic year 2018/19, but in this period significant changes in student composition are considered and declared. The report describes the dynamics in the student number, graduate number and dropout rate (poor academic results) as stated in SAR, page 76. There is no evidence on an effective procedure to deal with the drop out situation. Management of the programme could set up a team to support students in achieving proper academic results as this is the main reason for them to drop out. The team would come up with solutions and mechanism to improve academic performance and therefore, decrease drop out, such as mentoring students on a voluntary based when best students can help those in need.

According to SAR, pages 76-77:

- “Bachelor Degree of Social Science in Economics is awarded after the acquisition of theoretical study courses of the study programme and the public presentation of the Bachelor Thesis in the State Examination Commission.
- Having analyzed the interrelation between the name of the study program, the degree to be obtained, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, as well as the enrollment requirements, it can be concluded that it is in place”.

Nevertheless, the name of the study programme is the same with the name of the study field and of course with a subject that is taught and divided into Micro and Macroeconomics, and also with the master title in the same field. This might not be very relevant from the study programme attractiveness point of view. The same concern was mentioned by some students during the meetings integrated in the site visit. A differentiation of the title might contribute a lot to the visibility of the study programme (for instance, from the current “Economics”, to “Basics of Economics”, or many other options). It is important for all students to understand the level of study from the title of the program. In addition, in case one student studies both programs this will not be relevant for him to mention in the CV the same program. He or she would have to prove the differentiation between the two programmes (bachelor and master) only by the diploma supplement.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The study programme is well organized and clear indicators describe the evolution of students and graduates. The management of the study programme is aware of the trends regarding main indicators.

Strengths:

1. Management of the study programme is aware of the student dynamics.

2. The aim and the objectives of the study programme are clear.
3. Learning outcomes correspond to the qualification level.
4. Admission requirements are clear in Latvian and English (<https://international.rtu.lv/entry-requirements-for-master/>)

Weaknesses:

1. There is no clear procedure to support students at risk of dropout (as the main reason is poor academic performance).
2. The name of the study programme is less attractive being identical with the name of the study field and a subject taught (and the master).

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

Descriptions of study courses are in accordance with the study plan. The descriptions of the study courses comply with the requirements specified by law. [...] However, in some study courses (IUV303, ITA709, IUE219, IUE328, IUV106, IUV229, HSP378, IBO304, IET313, IET522, IRE302, IRE701, IRE709, IRE301, ITA702, DSM102, DSM270, IET127, IRE705, IRE717, IUV207) it is indicated that the study course is implemented only in Latvian, although the programme is also implemented in English. In one of the study courses (IUV 337) it is indicated that the study course is implemented in Latvian - English and Russian". On 8th January 2021 experts received additional information that this mistake has been eliminated. The experts confirm that this information is correct and acknowledge it.

This was approved by students, with whom the experts talked about understandability and information availability for their exact study programme. Final thesis are of good quality, themes are in accordance with study programme students are learning.

Content has its specifications and complies with the title of this study programme. A big advantage from the student's point of view is learning the history of economics more deeply than in other universities.

Students are offered a chance to be involved in academic research and they are very well informed about the criteria of evaluation methods, as well as learning outcomes are what students expected when they applied to study in this exact HEI.

Outcomes of student surveys are split - local student surveys are being heard and suggestions are being implemented, but international students feel like their surveys are not read or acknowledged. Unfortunately, graduates only have one survey after graduating and their activity in decision making and study field improvement is not sufficient. Suggestion for the RTU would be to create more surveys for graduate students, possibly after more than a few years from graduation, to understand more precisely about this specific study programmes quality and necessity in the labor market.

Almost all employers are from public sector organizations. Even though RTU mentioned that their strategy is to concentrate on cooperation with private sector employers, they should not make 100 percent of employers, as most of the students are actually studying and working at the same time, and most of them are working for public sector companies.

Student mobility opportunities are not used due to having jobs in Latvia and not wanting to leave their family. That is more specific to the Latvian mentality and RTU can not influence it as much as they would like. Possibly information about the benefits of mobility opportunities are not as emphasized as the information about the application procedure.

In the study course descriptions attached to the SAR and also during the visit, the experts did not gain unequivocal assurance that the study courses did not overlap in the bachelor's and master's study programs, for example, the study course "History of Economic Thought". According to the

course content, students have Econometrics and then they study Modelling of Macroeconomic Processes (https://stud.rtu.lv/rtu/spr_export/prog_pdf_en.110). A possibility to avoid overlapping is to reconsider the content according to "Advanced Econometrics" and then "Modelling the Impact of Macroeconomic Policies and Shocks". Such a re-naming of disciplines might generate from the very beginning a different understanding of knowledge learned which has no repetitions or overlapping.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

In conclusion, student mobility is offered, but not used due to personal reasons. Implementation of suggestions from students is mixed. Description and content of the study programme is good.

Strengths:

1. Descriptions of study courses are very clear and understandable for students.
2. Content of the study programme is very specific and suitable for this study programme.
3. Implementation of suggestions from local students are being implemented.

Weaknesses:

1. Implementation of suggestions from international students is not enough, students do not feel like they are being heard by faculty.
2. Graduate activity in study programme development is rare and in surveys is only once after graduating.
3. According to the study courses description (available as annex of SAR), not all study courses are available in English language despite the fact that this study programme is realised in Latvian and English.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

During the visit, the experts made sure that the study field "Economics" implemented by the FEEM has the necessary infrastructure, the necessary material and technical support, information support, financial support and a library. All resources are available to students and academic staff both in the study process and in research. The infrastructure is adapted for people with special needs. The auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment and there are also 3 computer rooms. RTU Scientific Library is in Ķīpsala and is available 24 hours a day, there is a self-service machine for issuing and transferring books. The library has available digital resources (databases, electronic catalogue), which students can use through the ORTUS system even without being in the library. The collection of the library corresponds to the study programs implemented in the study field "Economics". In accordance with SAR, RTU has established a Library Council, which decides on the necessary replenishment of library collections and subscription of databases (based on the "RTU Scientific Library Collection Acquisition Policy" approved by RTU). The replenishment of the collections takes place on the recommendations of the study programme managers and researchers.

State budget grants and student funds are available for the implementation of the study programme "Economics"; in the 2018/2019 academic year, the share of funding for foreign students in the total funding structure is the largest. Costs per student in the BA study programme "Economics" are gradually increasing.

All teachers can participate in various competency development courses, use the ERASMUS + mobility programme to promote quality in academia and research. But according to the SAR, which was also verified by the experts during the visit, only a very small number of academic staff were

able to take advantage of these opportunities. Which, in fact, shows the need to promote the use of opportunities to ensure that academic staff also improve the quality of their study courses through the exchange of experience gained during mobility.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

RTU material and technical base and available infrastructure enable academic staff to provide appropriate work environment to promote the quality of the study process (for example, IT provision in classrooms, availability of databases) and students the opportunity to use university infrastructure to develop and improve their skills, knowledge and competencies both in the process and in research.

Strengths:

1. RTU has the necessary resources for the implementation of the BA study programme "Economics".
2. Auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment.
3. State budget financing and student tuition fees are a source of financing for the study program.
4. RTU Scientific Libraries have electronic resources also available outside the library premises through the ORTUS system.
5. All resources are available to students and academic staff for study and research.
6. The library collection corresponds to the curriculum of the BA study programme "Economics".

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

30 academic staff members are involved in the programme. During the reporting period from the academic year 2013/2014 until the academic year 2019/2020 the number and composition of the staff did not significantly change (from 31 to 30 members) (SAR, p. 88). There is a visible positive trend in the age structure - the average age of the academic staff decreased but it is still high (for example, the average age of lecturers is 46,6 years old).

During the visit, there were not identified any gaps in the composition of the academic staff from the perspective of legal requirements. The strength of the academic staff is the high engagement recognized by students.

The qualification of the academic staff is generally adjusted to the study programme: Bachelor, Economics. SAR (p. 88-95) describes well the qualification of all the members of the academic staff. The weakness of this list is that the description of all members is the same in all assessed programmes. The list does not highlight the qualification of the academic staff directly linked with the Bachelor, Economics. Interviews with the academic staff show some confusion among the academic staff in identification with the specific programme. It might lead to risks with overlapping content of courses delivered by the academic staff in different study programmes.

There is a visible contribution of the academic staff in the science economy in the research. But the international contribution might be increased. The interviews showed that the academic staff connection with the public sector is higher than with the private sector but students declare interest on the same level in the public and private sectors.

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff was discussed during interviews and there were identified some areas for improvement. For example, the academic staff was not

fully aware about the differences between evaluated programs. The evidence of some lacks in this field is the risk of overlapping content of courses between Bachelor and Master study programmes reported by students.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The qualification and research record of the academic staff is in general on a satisfactory level. There are some minor areas that might be improved: a more international perspective of the research and the orientation of the teaching staff more on the private sector.

The mechanism of collaboration between the teaching staff and also on information flow between the director of the programme and the teaching staff should be improved. There is a risk of content of courses being repeated.

Strengths:

1. Proper qualification and research record of the academic staff.
2. High engagement and student-focused approach of the academic staff.

Weaknesses:

1. Relatively low participation of the academic staff in international research.
2. Relatively low collaboration of the academic staff with the private sector.
3. Insufficient collaboration among academic staff.
4. Study programme director should have closer collaboration with the academic staff.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Economics"

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Sample of the Diploma".

2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "RTU agreement with the University of Latvia and Banku Augstskola" .

3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: A document is available in the appendices, which confirms that RTU will compensate students for losses incurred in the event of non-accreditation of the program. This document indicates that the cases and forms of compensation are stipulated in the valid RTU study agreements.

- 4 4. The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Annex “Confirmation about the language knowledge of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of study programs corresponding to the study direction “Economics””.
- 5 5. The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: The study programme is also implemented in English, all representatives of the academic staff have English language skills in accordance with SAR.
- 6 6. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme, at least three of which are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of a professional doctoral study programme in arts.
Assessment of compliance: Not relevant
Justification:
- 7 7. The academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: According to the SAR, the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education both in terms of staff composition and qualification (example, in academic year 2018/2019 - in programme were involved 2 professors and 7 associated professors).
- 8 8. The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Annex “Study agreements”.
- 9 9. The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Descriptions of study programs are available in both languages in which the programme is implemented - Latvian and English. The descriptions comply with the requirements specified by law. However, in some study courses (IUV303, ITA709, IUE219, IUE328, IUV106, IUV229, HSP378, IBO304, IET313, IET522, IRE302, IRE701, IRE709, IRE301, ITA702, DSM102, DSM270, IET127, IRE705, IRE717, IUV207) it is indicated that the study course is implemented only in Latvian, although the programme is also implemented in English. In one of the study courses (IUV 337) it is indicated that the study course is implemented in Latvian - English and Russian”. On 8th January 2021 experts received additional information that this mistake has been eliminated. The experts confirm that this information is correct and acknowledge it.
- 10 10. The study programme complies with the valid professional standard or the requirements for the professional qualification (if there is no professional standard required for the relevant occupation) provided that the completion of the study programme leads to a professional qualification.
Assessment of compliance: Not relevant
Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: An annex certifying compliance with Section 55, paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education is attached to the SAR.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Compliance with the State Education Standard".

13 13. The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

14 14. Each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions (if they have worked for a shorter period of time, the number of publications shall be in proportion to the work period), or artistic creation achievements (for instance, exhibitions, films, theatre performances, and concert activity), or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Not all academic staff have publications in the last 6 years or practical work experience. According to the CVs attached to the SAR, I.Ezera, J.Saulītis, L.Krilovs, L.Tīse do not meet these criteria.

15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Most of the requirements for the study programme are fulfilled. All the identified deficiencies can be eliminated in the short term.

Requirements (R6-R8)

1 R6 - The compliance of the study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: RTU has infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision, informative provision, technical provision, financial provision required for the implementation of the study field.

2 R7 - The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: All representatives of the academic staff have appropriate qualification according with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

- 3 R8 - The study programme leading to the master or doctoral degree is based on the advances and findings in the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The most requirements for the study programme are met. Only minor deficiencies have been identified.

Strengths:

1. Management of the study programme is aware of the student dynamics.
2. The aim and the objectives of the study programme are clear.
3. Learning outcomes correspond to the qualification level.
4. Admission requirements are clear.
5. RTU has the necessary resources for the implementation of the BA study programme "Economics".
6. Auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment.
7. State budget financing and student tuition fees are a source of financing for the study programme.
8. RTU Scientific Libraries have electronic resources also available outside the library premises through the ORTUS system
9. All resources are available to students and academic staff for study and research.
10. The library collection corresponds to the BA study programme "Economics".
11. Proper qualification and research record of the academic staff
12. High engagement and student-focused approach of the academic staff

Weaknesses:

1. There is no clear procedure to support students at risk of dropout (as the main reason for dropout is poor academic performance).
2. The name of the study programme is less attractive being identical with the name of the study field and a subject taught (and the master's study programme).
3. Relatively low participation of the academic staff in international research.
4. Relatively low collaboration of the academic staff with the private sector.
5. Insufficient collaboration among academic staff.
6. Study programme director should have closer collaboration with the academic staff.
7. Implementation of suggestions from international students.
8. Graduate activity in study programme development and survey.

Evaluation of the study programme "Economics"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Economics"

Short-term recommendations

Create a procedure describing a mechanism to support students at risk of dropout.

The director of the study programme should promote cooperation with the representatives of the academic staff involved in the implementation of bachelor's study programme and master's study programmes in order to improve the content quality of study courses and avoid duplication of study content, especially in bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

To develop a motivation system that would promote the interest of the academic staff to participate in international research, cooperation with students (involving them in research work) and participate in mobility programmes.

The director of the study programme together with the Dean of FEEM should more seriously evaluate the objections of foreign students regarding the quality of the study process, the overlap of the content of study courses and take these objections into account.

Long-term recommendations

Reconsider the name of the study programme and reflect on the possibility of differentiating it from the study field name and the subject name.

To develop mechanisms to promote greater involvement of students in research work (as it is an academic study program), as well as to promote more active participation of students in mobility.

The economics study direction has close cooperation with the public sector, but it would also be important to develop cooperation with the private sector.

To cooperate more with graduates in the content improvement of the study programme.

II. "Economics" ASSESSMENT

II. "Economics" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

Academic master study programme in Economics is dedicated to “to provide students with an in-depth theoretical knowledge in compliance with the master’s level education and national standards for academic education, as well as to develop research skills necessary for analysts of economic processes and industry specialists to resolve economic issues and take decisions in today’s changing economy”, according to SAR, page 134. The objectives are clearly stated, as the following ones:

- “to develop skills necessary for conducting scientific research in the field of Economics and to enable students to obtain academic master’s degree in economics;
- to organize the study process with the aim to develop students’ knowledge and competences, to promote their use in the study process and in further practical work;
- to organize the studies so that the programme graduates will have sufficient academic research skills necessary to evaluate the sectors of national economy;
- to foster students’ analytical skills, to promote acquisition and development of scientific research skills;
- to create the necessary preconditions for educating and training competitive economic analysts for the Latvian and international labor market;
- to develop students’ ability to apply knowledge and skills in practice in order to address complex economic problems related to micro- and macroeconomics, econometrics, environmental economics and marketing;

- to develop students' ability to formulate aims and tasks, to take socially and ethically responsible decisions in relation to the ongoing economic processes in the world;
- to promote students' interest in the processes of society, to enable students to become positive, modern, responsible and capable individuals, who can act independently and make autonomous decisions;
- to provide students with an opportunity to continue their education at the doctoral study programmes after receiving the master's degree;
- to promote students' interest in pedagogical work".

The learning outcomes (eight) are well described. The admission requirements consist of a Bachelor Degree of Social Science in Economics or in Management Science, or a comparable education, for both programmes - in Latvian and in English. According to the input in SAR (page 135): the "degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in English)" is Master Degree of Social Science in Economics. The programme corresponds to the 7th level of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF). Like at the previous programme (Bachelor one) the dropout risk is mentioned as being generated by the poor academic results.

Nevertheless, the name of the master's programme, as being the same with the bachelor's programme might create confusion among different interested parties, especially being the same as the name of the study field. It could be easily considered and promoted as "Advanced Economics", an example which would allow candidates to better understand the differences in terms of level of degree and qualifications.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The programme is a continuation of the bachelor studies in the field of Economics and this should be reflected in the name of the programme.

Strengths:

1. Clear admission procedures in the languages of the study programme (also for studies in English).
2. Clear learning outcomes.
3. Clear objectives.

Weaknesses:

1. The name of the programme might create a confusion with the bachelor study programme, study field and subject called Economics.
2. No procedure to support students to avoid dropout, as the main cause for dropout is poor academic results.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

Descriptions of study courses are in accordance with the study plan. Descriptions of study programs are available in both languages in which the programme is implemented - Latvian and English. The descriptions comply with the requirements specified by law. However, in some study courses (IET218, IET503, IET511, IEU537, HFL432, HFL438, HSP484, HSP488, IET507, IET530, IET537, IET708, IEU542, IRE502) it is indicated that the study course is implemented only in Latvian, although the programme is also implemented in English. On 8th January 2021 the experts received additional information stating that this mistake has been corrected and adding a proof of corrected course descriptions. Experts acknowledge this information and were able to confirm it.

The general quality of the course descriptions was approved by students, with whom the experts

talked about understandability and information availability for their exact study programme. Final thesis are of good quality, themes are in accordance with study programme students are learning.

Content has its specificities and is suitable for the name of this study programme. Big advantage from the students point of view is learning the history of economics more deeply than in other universities. Disadvantage for the content is overlapping of study courses from bachelor's study programme Economics in RTU.

Students are offered a chance to be involved in academic research and they are very well informed about the criteria of evaluation methods, as well as learning outcomes are what students expected when they applied to study in this exact HEI.

Outcomes of student surveys are split - local student surveys are being heard and suggestions are being implemented, but international students feel like their surveys are not read or acknowledged. Unfortunately, graduates affirmed experts, that they have only one survey after graduating and their activity in decision making and study field improvement is not sufficient. Suggestion for the RTU would be to create more surveys for graduate students, possibly after more than a few years from graduation, to understand more precisely about this specific study programmes quality and necessity in the labor market.

Almost all employers are from public sector organizations. Even though RTU mentioned that their strategy is to concentrate on cooperation with private sector employers, the private sector should not make 100 percent of cooperation partners, as most of the students are actually studying and working at the same time, and most of them are working for public sector companies.

Student mobility opportunities are not used due to having jobs in Latvia and not wanting to leave family. That is more specific to Latvian mentality and RTU can not influence it as much as they would like. Possibly the information about the benefits of mobility opportunities are not as emphasized as information about the application procedure.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

In conclusion, student mobility is offered, but not used due to personal reasons. Implementation of suggestions from students is mixed. Description and content of the study programme is good.

Strengths:

1. Descriptions of study courses are very clear and understandable for students.
2. Content of study programme is very specific and suitable for this study programme.
3. Implementation of suggestions from local students are being implemented.

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient implementation of suggestions from international students.
2. Graduate activity in study programme development and surveys.
3. Overlapping of study courses content with RTU bachelor programme Economics.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

During the visit, the experts made sure that the study field "Economics" to be implemented by the FEEM has the necessary infrastructure, the necessary material and technical support, information support, technical support, financial support and a library. All resources are available to students and academic staff both in the study process and in research. The infrastructure is adapted for

people with special needs. The auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment and there are also 3 computer rooms. RTU Scientific Library is in Kipsala and is available 24 hours a day, there is a self-service machine for issuing and transferring books. The library has available digital resources (databases, electronic catalogue), which students can use through the ORTUS system even without being in the library. The collection of the library corresponds to the study programs implemented in the study field "Economics". In accordance with SAR, RTU has established a Library Council, which decides on the necessary replenishment of library collections and subscription of databases (based on the "RTU Scientific Library Collection Acquisition Policy" approved by RTU). The replenishment of the collections takes place on the recommendations of the study programme managers and researchers.

State budget grants and student funds are available for the implementation of the MA study programme "Economics". The number of local fee-paying students tends to decrease, but the number of foreign students is increasing. Costs per student in the MA study programme "Economics" are gradually increasing, but this increase is related to the increase in total costs at RTU.

All teachers can participate in various competency development courses, use the ERASMUS + mobility programme to promote quality in academia and research. The SAR stated that academic staff did not take advantage of the international mobility opportunities offered at the university, which the experts were able to ascertain during the visit.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

RTU has the necessary resources for the implementation of the MA study programme "Economics". Auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment. State budget financing and student tuition fees are a source of financing for the study programme. RTU Scientific Library has electronic resources also available outside the library premises through the ORTUS system.

Strengths:

1. RTU has the necessary infrastructure, material, technical and informative support, library, financial support, for the implementation of the MA study programme " Economics".
2. All resources are available to students and academic staff for study and research.
3. The library collection corresponds to the MA study programme " Economics".

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

14 academic staff members are involved in the program. During the reporting period from the academic year 2013/2014 until the academic year 2019/2020 the number of the staff decreased from 19 to 14 members) (SAR, p. 152). The age structure generates significant risks. The average age is in all groups of the academic staff (Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors) higher than 50 years old. For example, in the group of Professors (6 persons) the average age is 66,5 years old.

During the visit, there were not identified any gaps in the composition of the academic staff from the perspective of legal requirements. The strength of the academic staff is a high engagement recognized by students.

The qualification of the academic staff is generally adjusted to the study programme: Master, Economics. SAR (p. 124-127) describes well the qualification of all the members of the academic staff. The weakness of this list is that the description of all members is the same in all assessed programmes. The list does not highlight the qualification of the academic staff directly linked with

the Master, Economics. Interviews with the academic staff show some confusion among the academic staff in identification with the specific programme. It might lead to risks with overlapping content of courses delivered by the academic staff in different study programmes.

There is a visible contribution of the academic staff to the science economy in the research. But the international contribution might be increased. The interviews showed that the academic staff's connection with the public sector is higher than with the private sector but students declare interest on the same level in the public and private sectors.

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff was discussed during interviews and there were identified some areas for improvement. For example, the academic staff was not fully aware about the differences between evaluated programs. The evidence of some lacks in this field is the risk of overlapping content of courses between bachelor's and master's study programmes in Economics reported by students.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The qualification and research record of the academic staff is in general on a satisfactory level. The age structure of staff should be a matter of concern to the directory of the programme. There are some minor areas they might be improved: a more international perspective of the research and the orientation of the teaching staff on more on the private sector.

The mechanism of collaboration between the teaching staff and also on information flow between the director of the programme and the academic staff should be improved. There is a risk of content of courses being repeated.

Strengths:

1. Proper qualification and research record of the academic staff.
2. High engagement and student-focused approach of the academic staff.

Weaknesses:

1. The age structure of the academic staff.
2. Relatively low participation of the academic staff in international research.
3. Relatively low collaboration of the academic staff with the private sector.
4. Insufficient collaboration among academic staff.
5. Study programme director should have closer collaboration with academic staff.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Economics"

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Sample of the Diploma".

2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "RTU agreement with University of Latvia and Banku Augstskola"

- 3 3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: A document is available in the appendices, which confirms that RTU will compensate students for losses incurred in the event of non-accreditation of the program. This document indicates that the cases and forms of compensation are stipulated in the valid RTU study agreements.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Confirmation about the language knowledge of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of study programs corresponding to the study direction "Economics"".

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study programme is also implemented in English and based on the statement of language proficiency attached, all representatives of the academic staff have English language skills.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: According to the SAR, the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education both in terms of staff composition and qualification (example, in academic year 2018/2019 - in programme were involved 6 professors and 3 associated professors).

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Study agreements".

- 9 9. The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Descriptions of study programs are available in both languages in which the programme is implemented - Latvian and English. The descriptions comply with the requirements specified by law. However, in some study courses (IET218, IET503, IET511, IEU537, HFL432, HFL438, HSP484, HSP488, IET507, IET530, IET537, IET708, IEU542, IRE502) it is indicated that the study course is implemented only in Latvian, although the programme is also implemented in English.

On 8th January 2021 the experts received additional information stating that this mistake has been corrected. Experts acknowledge this information and were able to confirm it.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: An annex certifying compliance with Section 55, paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education is attached to the SAR.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Compliance with the State Education Standard".

- 13 13. The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

- 14 14. Each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions (if they have worked for a shorter period of time, the number of publications shall be in proportion to the work period), or artistic creation achievements (for instance, exhibitions, films, theatre performances, and concert activity), or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Not all academic staff have publications in the last 6 years or practical work experience. According to the CVs attached to the SAR, I.Ezera (practical work experience has been until 1997, no publications; teach only in the bachelor's level program), J.Saulītis (last publications are in 2013; work experience only at RTU; teach only in the master's level programs), L.Krilovs (CV work experience is indicated only at TU, but organizational skills are indicated - Supervision of the implementation of plans in the Excise Goods Department of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia, which does not allow unambiguous conclusion of compliance with the requirements of this criterion, no publications; teach only in the bachelor's level program), L.Tise (CV work experience is indicated only at RTU, no publications; teach in the bachelor's level programme and the professional master's level programme in Urban and Regional Engineering Economics) do not meet these criteria.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The most requirements for the study programme are fulfilled. All identified deficiencies are able to be eliminated in short term.

Requirements (R6-R8)

- 1 R6 - The compliance of the study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: RTU has infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision, informative provision, technical provision, financial provision required for the implementation of the study field.

- 2 R7 - The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: All representatives of the academic staff have adequate knowledge of English, which is necessary for the full provision of the study programme in English.

- 3 R8 - The study programme leading to the master or doctoral degree is based on the advances and findings in the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Although the lecturers of the study programme are involved in various projects, it is necessary to further develop international projects, as well as to promote more active involvement of students in them. There should be more emphasis on research and internationalization, plus integration of the research into teaching and learning.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Strengths:

1. Management of the study programme is aware of the student dynamics;
2. The aim and the objectives of the study programme are clear;
3. Learning outcomes correspond to the qualification level;
4. Admission requirements are clear.
5. RTU has the necessary resources for the implementation of the BA study programme "Economics".
6. Auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment.
7. State budget financing and student tuition fees are a source of financing for the study programme.
8. RTU Scientific Library have electronic resources also available outside the library premises through the ORTUS system.
9. All resources are available to students and academic staff for study and research.
10. The library collection corresponds to the MA study programme "Economics".
11. Proper qualification and research record of the academic staff.
12. High engagement and focused on students approach of the academic staff.

Weaknesses:

1. There is no clear procedure to support students at risk of dropout (as the main reason is poor

academic performance).

2. The name of the study programme is less attractive being identical with the name of the study field and a subject taught (and the master).
3. Relatively low participation of the academic staff in international research.
4. Relatively low collaboration of the academic staff with the private sector.
5. Insufficient collaboration among academic staff.
6. Study programme director should have closer collaboration with academic staff.
7. Implementation of suggestions from international students.
8. Graduate's activity in study programme development and survey.

Evaluation of the study programme "Economics"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Economics"

Short-term recommendations

Create a procedure describing a mechanism to support students at risk of dropout.

The director of the study programme should promote cooperation with the representatives of the academic staff involved in the implementation of bachelor's study programme and master's study programmes in order to improve the content quality of study courses and avoid duplication of study content, especially in bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

To develop a motivation system that would promote the interest of the academic staff to participate in international research, cooperation with students (involving them in research work) and participate in mobility programs.

The director of the study programme together with the Dean of FEEM should more seriously evaluate the objections of foreign students regarding the quality of the study process, the overlap of the content of study courses and take these objections into account.

Long-term recommendations

Reflect on the name of the programme in order to provide clear understanding on its competitive advantage (what makes it different from the Bachelor level) rename the programme (example: "Advanced Economics").

To motivate students to participate in international mobility and also to participate in research projects.

To develop mechanisms to promote greater involvement of students in research work (as it is an academic study program), as well as to promote more active participation of students in mobility.

To cooperate more with graduates in the content improvement of the study programme.

II. "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics" ASSESSMENT

II. "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

“Urban and Regional Engineering Economics” is a professional master study programme, with the goal “to provide students with the Master’s level knowledge in the field of regional and urban development; to train socially responsible and highly qualified specialists, whose knowledge in economic and engineering, skills and competences will allow them to make engineering and technical well-founded economic decisions, to plan and coordinate the processes of territorial economic development and governance, as well as conduct scientific research” (SAR, page 102). The programme generates several learning outcomes (SAR, page 103):

- “ability to demonstrate an understanding of the organizational principles of urban development planning and regional development assessment criteria and methods;
- ability to demonstrate an understanding of the issues of economic development and national economic policy;
- ability to carry out economic calculations/feasibility studies related to sustainable development of towns and regions;
- ability to demonstrate an understanding of the factors of economic development regionally, as well as to identify and eliminate potential risks; ability to demonstrate an understanding of the planning and maintenance of engineering infrastructure in urban and rural areas, as well as traffic flow planning principles;
- ability to assess the impact of social and political processes on urban and regional development;
- ability to plan, implement and evaluate the budgetary process at a local and regional level;
- ability to implement “green economy” policies for sustainable development of regions and towns;
- ability to carry out scientific research in the field of territorial development and to justify the advantages or disadvantages of particular decisions;
- ability to formulate aims and tasks and to take socially and ethically responsible decisions related to the territorial development;
- ability to work out and implement national and international projects;
- ability to creatively interact with clients, merchants, professionals and other parties and to work in interdisciplinary teams”.

Admission requirements are somehow different: for full time studies - 1 years, 6 months - in Latvian and part-time extramural studies - 2 years in Latvian the admission requirements are the same (Professional Bachelor Degree and/or Qualification in Economics, Management and Administration, Accounting and Taxation, Financial Engineering sectors, or other recognizable education), but different from those for part-time extramural studies - 2 years, 6 months in Latvian (Bachelor Degree in Economics, Management Science, Natural Sciences or Civil Engineering sectors). The qualification obtained is Economist (except when the qualification of an economist has been obtained at the previous level of study) for the first two variants of the programmes and Economist for the third one, as stated in SAR (page 103). The programme corresponds to the 7th level of the EQF and LQF. The study programme is designed according to the professional standard "Economist" which is up to date and was approved on 18th September 2019. However, according to the map of professions included in the sector, the qualification "Economist" is applicable to bachelor study level (LQF 6) but this is a master study programme (LQF 7).

It is important to mention that depending on previous education of students, there are differences in the content of the studies (SAR, page 111): “Professional qualification for students with previously acquired academic degree is granted after completing additional internship tasks and the necessary requirements for obtaining qualification. In addition, they must acquire the study course “Basics of Occupational Safety” and develop a study project within the study course “Elaboration of the Regional Socio-economic Development Program”.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The programme is an internationally recognized study programme, well developed and in relation to the local market needs.

Strengths:

1. The programme has clear objectives stated and presented in connection with the other elements describing the programme (qualification and learning outcomes);
2. Clear learning outcomes describe what students will achieve as a result of learning.

Weaknesses:

1. Dropout rate is known, but there is no support to students to overcome this risk.
2. The qualification acquired as a result of the study programme currently does not fully comply with legal requirements

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

Descriptions of study courses are in accordance with the study plan and descriptions of the study courses comply with the requirements specified by law. This was approved by students, with whom the experts talked about understandability and information availability for their exact study programme. Final thesis are of good quality, themes are in accordance with study programme students are learning. The study programme is developed according to the professional standard "Economist" and its content fully demonstrates it.

Content has its specifications and is suitable for the name of this study programme. The advantage for specifically Urban and regional development is that this study programme is unique in Latvia, gathering all of the best students interested in exactly this specialization.

Students are offered a chance to be involved in academic research and they are very well informed about the criteria of evaluation methods, as well as learning outcomes are what students expected when they applied to study in this exact HEI.

Outcomes of student surveys are good - students are being heard and suggestions are being implemented. Unfortunately graduates only have one survey after graduating and their activity in decision making and study field improvement is not sufficient. Suggestion for the RTU would be to create more surveys for graduate students, possibly after more than a few years from graduation, to understand more precisely about this specific study programmes quality and necessity in the labor market.

Almost all employers are from public sector organisations. Even though RTU mentioned that their strategy is to concentrate on cooperation with private sector employers, they should not make 100 percent of employers, as most of the students are actually studying and working at the same time, and most of them are working for public sector companies.

Student mobility opportunities are not used due to having jobs in Latvia and not wanting to leave family. That is more specific to Latvian mentality and RTU can not influence it as much as they would like. Possibly information about benefits of mobility opportunities are not as emphasized as the information about application procedure.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

In conclusion, student mobility is offered, but not used due to personal reasons. Implementation of suggestions from students is good. Description and content of the study programme is good. Student count is rather low.

Strengths:

1. Descriptions of study courses are very clear and understandable for students.
2. Content of study programme is very unique and attracts the best possible students interested in this qualification.
3. Recommendations from suggestions from local students are being implemented.

Weaknesses:

1. A rather low count of students.
2. Low graduate activity in study programme development and surveys.
3. The dropout rate is known, but there is no support for students to overcome this risk.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

During the visit, the experts made sure that the study field "Economics" to be implemented by the FEEM has the necessary infrastructure, the necessary material and technical support, information support, technical support, financial support and a library. All resources are available to students and academic staff both in the study process and in research. The infrastructure is adapted for people with special needs. The auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment and there are also 3 computer rooms. RTU Scientific Library is in Kipsala and is available 24 hours a day, there is a self-service machine for issuing and transferring books. The library has available digital resources (databases, electronic catalogue), which students can use through the ORTUS system even without being in the library. The collection of the library corresponds to the study programs implemented in the study field "Economics". In accordance with SAR, RTU has established a Library Council, which decides on the necessary replenishment of library collections and subscription of databases (based on the "RTU Scientific Library Collection Acquisition Policy" approved by RTU). The replenishment of the collections takes place on the recommendations of the study programme managers and researchers.

State budget grants and student funds are available for the implementation of the study programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics". In the period from 2013/2014 by the academic year 2018/2019, the number of self-paying students decreased. Expenses per student in the master's study programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics" are gradually increasing, but this increase is not related to the increase in the number of students, but to the increase in the total costs of RTU.

All teachers can participate in various competency development courses, use the ERASMUS + mobility programme to promote quality in academia and research. However, both according to the information contained in the SAR and during the visit, it was repeatedly acknowledged that, mainly due to family circumstances, academic staff are very passive in using opportunities to exchange experiences, for example in the framework of the ERASMUS + program. This shows that the mechanism has not been developed by the university to motivate academic staff to actively engage in mobility in order to promote their personal growth and the quality of their lectures.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

RTU has the necessary resources for the implementation of the MA study programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics". Auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment. State budget financing and student tuition fees are a source of financing for the study programme. RTU Scientific Libraries have electronic resources also available outside the library premises through the ORTUS system.

Strengths:

1. RTU has the necessary infrastructure, material, technical and informative support, library,

financial support, for the implementation of the MA study programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics".

2. All the necessary resources are available to students and academic staff for study and research.
3. The library collection corresponds to the MA study programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics".

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

17 academic staff members are involved in the program. During the reporting period from the academic year 2013/2014 until the academic year 2019/2020 the number of the staff a little bit decreased from 20 to 17 members) (SAR, p. 124). The age structure generates significant risks. The average age in groups of the academic staff (Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, Lecturers) is higher than 50 years old. Only in the group of Lecturers (2 persons) the average age is 47 years - still relatively high.

During the visit, there were not identified any gaps in the composition of the academic staff from the perspective of legal requirements. The strength of the academic staff is the high engagement recognized by students.

The qualification of the academic staff is generally adjusted to the study programme: Master, Urban and Regional Engineering Economics. SAR (p. 124-127) describes well the qualification of all the members of the academic staff including their professional experience. The weakness of this list is that the description of all members is the same in all assessed programmes. The list does not highlight the qualification of the academic staff directly linked with the Master, Urban and Regional Engineering Economics. Interviews show some confusion among the academic staff in identification with the specific programme. It might lead to risks with overlapping content of courses delivered by the academic staff in different study programmes.

There is a visible contribution of the academic staff in the science economy in the research. But the international contribution might be increased. The interviews showed that the academic staff connection with the public sector is higher than with the private sector but students declare interest on the same level in the public and private sectors. Especially, the collaboration with sectors is important for this programme because it has a professional profile.

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff was discussed during interviews and there were identified some areas for improvement. For example, the academic staff was not fully aware about the differences between evaluated programs. The evidence of some lacks in this field is the risk of overlapping content of courses between Master, Economics and Master, Urban and Regional Engineering Economics reported by students.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The qualification and research record of the academic staff is in general on a satisfactory level. The age structure of staff should be a matter of concern to the director of the programme. There are some minor areas they might be improved: a more international perspective of the research and the orientation of the teaching staff more on the private sector.

The mechanism of collaboration between the teaching staff and also on information flow between the director of the programme and the teaching staff should be improved. There is a risk of content

of courses being repeated.

Strengths:

1. Proper qualification and research record of the academic staff.
2. High engagement and student-focused approach of the academic staff.

Weaknesses:

1. Too high the age structure of the academic staff.
2. Relatively low participation of the academic staff in international research .
3. Relatively low collaboration of the academic staff with the private sector.
4. Insufficient collaboration among academic staff .
5. Study programme director should have closer collaboration with academic staff.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics"

Requirements

- 1 1. The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Annex "Sample of the Diploma".
- 2 2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Annex "RTU agreement with University of Latvia".
- 3 3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: A document is available in the appendices, which confirms that RTU will compensate students for losses incurred in the event of non-accreditation of the program. This document indicates that the cases and forms of compensation are stipulated in the valid RTU study agreements.
- 4 4. The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Annex "Confirmation about the language knowledge of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of study programs corresponding to the study direction "Economics"".
- 5 5. The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language.
Assessment of compliance: Not relevant
Justification: The study programme is implemented only in Latvian.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Study agreements"

9 9. The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study program is implemented only in Latvian.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: "The study programme is designed according to the professional standard "Economist" which is up to date and was approved on 18th September 2019. However, according to the map of professions included in the sector, the qualification "Economist" is applicable to bachelor study level (LQF 6) but this is a master study programme (LQF 7)."

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex "Compliance with the State Education Standard".

13 13. The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

14 14. Each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions (if they have worked for a shorter period of time, the number of publications shall be in proportion to the work period), or artistic creation achievements (for instance, exhibitions, films, theatre performances, and concert activity), or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Not all academic staff have publications in the last 6 years or practical work experience.

15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Most of the requirements for the study programme are fulfilled. All identified deficiencies are able to be eliminated in the short term.

Requirements (R6-R8)

1 R6 - The compliance of the study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: RTU has infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision, informative provision, technical provision, financial provision required for the implementation of the study field.

2 R7 - The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: All representatives of the academic staff have appropriate qualification according with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

3 R8 - The study programme leading to the master or doctoral degree is based on the advances and findings in the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study programme has a clear potential to integrate research into teaching and to provide knowledge and practices to students that are actual, innovative and based on recent findings. Nevertheless, the research development takes time - new and more projects, new and more international cooperation

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

In general, the study programme meets the requirements, it is an attractive study programme.

Strengths:

1. The aim and the objectives of the study programme are clear.
2. Learning outcomes correspond to the qualification level.
3. Admission requirements are clear.
4. Auditoriums are equipped with multimedia equipment.
5. RTU Scientific Libraries have electronic resources also available outside the library premises through the ORTUS system.

6. All resources are available to students and academic staff for study and research.
7. The library collection corresponds to the MA study programme "Urban and Regional Engineering economics".
8. Proper qualification of the academic staff.
9. High engagement and student-focused approach of the academic staff

Weaknesses:

1. There is no clear procedure to support students at risk of dropout (as the main reason for dropout is poor academic performance).
2. Relatively low participation of the academic staff in international research.
3. Relatively low collaboration of the academic staff with the private sector because this study programme could be very interesting not only for public sector but also for private.
4. Low graduate activity in study programme development and survey
5. Not clear description of the qualification in the case when students have the qualification of an Economist obtained at the previous level of study.

Evaluation of the study programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Urban and Regional Engineering Economics"

Short-term recommendations

Clarify the case of the qualification in the case students have the qualification of Economist from a previous level of study

Create a procedure to diminish the risk of student dropout.

It is necessary to develop motivation system for academic staff more participate in international research activities.
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Long-term recommendations

To implement this study programme in English, it will be attractive for foreign students.

To develop academic staff collaboration with the private sector because this study programme could be very interesting not only for public sector but also for private.

To involve graduates in study programme development and survey.

To clarify the description of the qualification in the case when students have the qualification of an Economist obtained at the previous level of study.

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

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Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:		Partially compliant	RTU has developed and documented a quality system that successfully functions at the university level, but evaluating the information submitted by SAR and also during the visit, the experts did not gain confidence that the quality system also works successfully in the study direction "Economics".
R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.		Partially compliant	Very good cooperation with state institutions, but it is necessary to promote cooperation with the private sector and with foreign organizations.
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).	Fully compliant		The academic staff involved in research in Economy at RTU has a quite high domestic recognition. It should improve international recognition - the research is oriented on Latvian context.
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.	Fully compliant		Recommendations are fully implemented.

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)

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Economics (43311)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
2	Economics (45311)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good
3	Urban and Regional Engineering Economics (47311)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

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