

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: ISMA University College

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

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

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ISMA University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter - ISMA or the HEI) has developed and is implementing a clear vertical development strategy that aligns with its overall growth strategy. Currently, a notable weakness in this development is that only one study programme (short-cycle) is offered within the field, which restricts its full potential, especially in science and research. The management structure of the study field is geared towards its development, with all necessary regulations in place for enrollment and the study process. Student achievement assessments follow ISMA regulations, outlining the study process and assessment types. However, specific assessment criteria are sometimes not included in course descriptions, potentially leaving students unaware of them.

ISMA has established procedures for handling plagiarism but could benefit from more widely applicable plagiarism detection databases. Stakeholders participate in surveys, and aggregated data is reviewed by competent bodies, yet there is a lack of comprehensive feedback on results to students, graduates, and employers. This gap contributes to insufficient understanding of changes in study programmes and other quality-related matters. While procedures for corrective and preventive actions are defined, the institution's small size means that much of these processes occur informally. Information about study programmes is collected and processed, though some published on ISMA's website may be outdated and irregularly updated.

ISMA has demonstrated strong adaptability, market alignment, and a commitment to sustainability and transparency. However, to enhance long-term academic quality, competitiveness, and institutional resilience, it is critical to diversify income streams, increase investment in academic resources, address infrastructure gaps, and systematically evaluate ICT and recruitment strategies. Cooperation with other institutions in Latvia and abroad is established, though not always directly connected to the study field. Industry collaboration with the specific sector of travel agencies and tour operators is present but remains underdeveloped. Nearly all recommendations from the previous accreditation have been implemented.

The Level 5 professional standard defined in the "Vocational Education Law" and the competencies outlined in the professional standard for a "Tourism Service Organizer" raise concerns about whether the study programme's title - Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business, aligns with its content and requirements. According to the "Map of Professions Included in the Tourism Industry Structure," the role of "Tourism Service Organizer" pertains specifically to tour operators and travel agencies. The professional standard further emphasizes that this role is intended for work within tourism service organizations. However, the study programme's title, objectives, outcomes, and content align only partially with these standards. The experts recommend aligning the title of the study programme more closely with the 5th level of the professional qualification level, suggesting alternatives such as "Tourism Services Organizer" or "Travel Organization Specialist".

The programme has been deliberately broadened to encompass three main tourism industry sectors: accommodation, catering, and tour operations/travel agencies. While this multidisciplinary approach is commendable, it does not fully conform to the profession map or the defined standards. On a positive note, the programme incorporates diverse teaching methods, encourages the use of the Scopus database, and emphasizes practical training supported by strong ties with employers. However, challenges persist, including minimal use of academic sources in final theses and a lack of stable state funding. The absence of a clear plan for securing additional funding or allocating resources for scientific activities undermines the programme's competitiveness. The teaching staff meet programme requirements, with 74% engaged in research and publication. However, most publications appear in journals not indexed by Web of Science (WoS) or Scopus, and few are directly relevant to tourism or business.

While ISMA encourages cooperation among teaching staff, this remains informal and lacks systematic or formalized processes. Additionally, the current lecturer-to-student ratio of 1:1, as noted during the self-assessment report preparation, is neither cost-effective nor conducive to pedagogical and methodological development. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure the programme fully aligns with its stated objectives and professional standards, fostering its growth and sustainability.

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

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

##### **Analysis**

###### **1.1.1.**

The Self Assessment Report (henceforward - SAR) highlights that ISMA has a highly developed strategy, which is well-aligned with its defined mission and vision ([https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA\\_strategija\\_2024\\_2030\\_ENG\\_new.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA_strategija_2024_2030_ENG_new.pdf)). The objective of the study field aligns with the overall development strategy of the entire university (SAR p. 16). It is grounded in the priorities outlined in the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 and the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027. The objectives of the study field have been defined with consideration of the overall needs of the national economy, with particular emphasis on the requirements of the tourism industry. The objectives include the necessity to educate versatile and creative specialists capable of competing in the global tourism industry (SAR p 16). The implementation of the study programmes within the study field contributes to society as a whole. However, it must be concluded that the current short-cycle study programme as the only study programme within the field does not fully enable the achievement of the defined goal.

The interconnection of the study programmes included in the study field can not be assessed as there is only one study programme in the study field at the moment.

###### **1.1.2.**

ISMA has thoroughly identified its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (ISMA University of Applied Sciences Development Strategy for 2024. - 2030.). Based on this analysis, the study field has also outlined its own strengths and weaknesses and identified opportunities and threats.

Based on the assessment of the stated strengths (SAR p.17), as well as observations made during the visit and information gathered from interviews, it appears that not all of the mentioned aspects can be fully substantiated. For instance, the experts were not convinced that a comprehensive evaluation system has been designed and implemented. Additionally, there was a lack of clear evidence supporting the regular administration of surveys to stakeholders (e.g., graduates and employers) and the consistent implementation of their recommendations.

At the same time, the identified weakness regarding students' lack of interest in participating in scientific research activities does not align with the experts' findings. Both students and faculty members emphasized the opposite, highlighting that students actively participate in various conferences, including scientific ones.

Additionally, opportunities and threats have been clearly defined. The opportunities within the study field highlight potential for its development, including the incorporation of additional study programmes into the field.

The comprehensive SWOT analysis provides valuable insights that support the development of effective strategies. A comprehensive development plan for the study field has been created, clearly outlining both the planned activities and the responsible parties (Attachment 2.1.1. Development\_plan\_direction.docx). The plan outlines clearly defined goals aimed at the overall development of the university, including the development of the study field. These goals are

structured into four distinct areas: the creation and development of study programmes, the development of the study environment, the promotion of partnerships and internationalization, and the establishment of sustainable development practices. Each goal is supported by specific activities with set implementation timelines. However, it should be noted that experts did not find sufficient evidence to confirm the successful implementation of all planned activities. For example, under Goal 1.1, "Updating the study programme 'Entrepreneurship in Restaurant Business'," which includes a comprehensive evaluation of the study programme to identify outdated content and revise learning outcomes to align with the latest employment requirements, convincing proof was not obtained during interviews or from the documents provided during the visit.

Overall, it can be said that the process for evaluating the progress of the plan's implementation is unclear. During interviews, it was stated that the ISMA's management regularly ensures the attainment of these goals, but, a systematic approach for monitoring goal achievement has not been established.

#### 1.1.3.

The management structure of the whole ISMA is explained in the document "Administrative structure chart" (attachment 1.3.). The administrative structure is extensive, encompassing a significant number of administrative positions, including six vice-rectors (for studies, science, academic work, international relations, administrative work, and development and innovation) and a chancellor, all of whom are involved in academic-related activities. Structure of Study field (attachment 2.1.2.) foresees collaboration with three vice-rectors and director of study programme. The structure of the study field also includes a Study Direction Council, consisting of students, academic staff, and industry employers. According to the information provided in the SAR (p.19), the council meetings are convened at least twice a year and at the meetings "the topical issues of the study direction and study programmes are discussed, students and employers' viewpoints are listened to, the prospective challenges are assessed". The minutes of the Study Direction Council meetings, that experts have reviewed, do not reflect real discussions or exchanges of opinions during meetings. Consequently, there is insufficient evidence to confirm the effectiveness of this body in contributing to the development of the study programme.

#### 1.1.4.

The admission of students is regulated by the document "ISMA University of Applied Sciences Admission Regulations for the academic year xx". The rules and procedures developed by the HEI are in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations of Latvia (Law on Higher Education Institutions, Cabinet Regulation No. 846 and Cabinet Regulation No. 795). Admission requirements are also published on ISMA's website under the category "For Applicants" and "Admission". Admission procedures are logical and well explained.

Starting studies at subsequent stages of studies is possible according to Regulations on Studies ([https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA\\_Studiju\\_nolikums\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA_Studiju_nolikums_ENG.pdf)). This regulation outlines the rules and procedures for the recognition and transfer of credits earned at other higher education institutions. ISMA has developed a specific regulation ([https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents\\_en/Nolikums\\_par\\_rpus\\_formls\\_izglbtbas\\_rezulttu\\_atzanu\\_2023\\_lat\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents_en/Nolikums_par_rpus_formls_izglbtbas_rezulttu_atzanu_2023_lat_ENG.pdf)), in compliance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Cabinet Regulation No. 505, which establishes the procedure for recognizing competencies acquired through non-formal education. It should be noted that the website lacks information regarding admission at later stages or the recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education.

#### 1.1.5.

The assessment of students' achievements is organized in accordance with ISMA's "Procedures for the Organisation of Testing" regulations. This document outlines the types of examinations and the procedures students must follow when completing assessments at the HEI. The regulations also define what constitutes plagiarism and the consequences of its use.

According to the SAR (p 22), the final examinations for a course may take the form of an exam, a

pass/fail test, or a graded test. However, upon reviewing course descriptions, it is noted that the final examination format is not specified in all syllabi.

The descriptions of the study courses included independent assignments to be completed within the course, with clearly defined expected outcomes for each assignment. However, it is unclear whether these requirements apply equally to both full-time and part-time students. Especially, as the last point in almost every independent assignment part states that assessments for part-time students are based on assignments completed during the study course, without specifying which assignments are included. The lack of precise reflection of the overall final evaluation in course descriptions prevents students from fully understanding the requirements for mastering the study courses.

The assessment criteria included in the syllabi is very general (the table defined in the Cabinet of Ministers regulations). These criteria are not specified for each individual study course. Therefore, it cannot be considered that the assessment criteria for a specific course as a whole, or for each assessment component, are clearly defined. Experts were also unable to confirm that such criteria are presented at the beginning of the course (e.g., in presentations).

It should be noted, however, that during interviews, students indicated they had not encountered situations where the assessment criteria were unclear, even if they were not explicitly defined in writing. Consequently, experts conclude that the assessment criteria are possibly communicated orally, but there is a lack of a clear system and designated place (such as the syllabus or presentations) where the lecturer is required to define the assessment criteria.

#### 1.1.6.

ISMA has defined procedures for dealing with plagiarism (SAR, p.23). Kinds of violation of students' academic integrity and punitive measures are explained in the document "ISMA University of Applied Sciences Procedures for the Organisation of Testing". It foresees that in a case of suspected plagiarism, the lecturer informs the Study Department, the Director of the study programme or Vice Rector for Studies (in case of the final paper/thesis). The consequences are also explained in the above-mentioned document. However, during the interviews, experts were unable to obtain information regarding the frequency and effectiveness of the procedure outlined in the regulations, as students unanimously stated that they had never used unauthorized sources themselves and were not aware of any situations where other students had done so.

The university has not developed recommendations for the use of AI in the study process. As a result, there is currently no unified system for permitting or prohibiting the use of AI, nor for verifying the use of various AI tools in cases where their application is not allowed.

ISMA is also part of the University of Latvia Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System. Currently, the university does not utilize any alternative plagiarism detection systems.

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

ISMA has developed and is implementing a clear vertical development strategy that reflects the growth of the study field in alignment with the overall development strategy of the HEI. Currently, a notable weakness in the development of the study field is the fact that only one study programme (short-cycle) is being implemented within the field. This limits the full development of the field, particularly in the areas of science and research. The aim of the study programme is clear, but the formulated tasks lack specificity and alignment with the objectives of the study programme.

The management structure of the study field is oriented towards the development of the study field. There are all necessary regulations for the enrolment and study process into force.

The assessment of students' achievements is organized in accordance with regulations of ISMA, where the study process and types of assessments are defined. According to the syllabus evaluation, it can be concluded that specific assessment criteria are not reflected in the course

descriptions, nor is there complete certainty that students are made aware of them through other means.

ISMA has defined procedures for dealing with plagiarism. However, more widely applicable plagiarism detection databases would be desirable (currently, only the University of Latvia system is available). Additionally, there is no established policy or guidelines regarding the use of AI in the study process.

Strengths:

1) Very well developed “Development plan for 2023/2024 – 2028/2029 ac. yrs.”, which foresees development of the study field. The plan outlines the development of the study field in four distinct directions.

2) Clear and quite well communicated (on the web page) admission procedure.

Weaknesses:

1) Currently, only one study programme is being implemented within the study field, which limits the full development of the field, particularly in the areas of science and research.

2) “Development plan for 2023/2024 – 2028/2029 ac. yrs.” lacks a control mechanism for the included activities, which prevents a comprehensive assessment of whether all planned activities have been implemented.

3) Currently, ISMA uses the LU Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System, which focuses on detecting plagiarism in final theses but not in examination papers for individual courses. Therefore, academic integrity is not effectively monitored throughout all stages of study.

4) There is no established policy or guidelines regarding the use of AI in the study process.

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

### **Analysis**

#### 1.2.1.

Internal quality within the Study field is ensured through the following measures (SAR p.24): a) Conducting surveys among students of the study programme to assess the quality of academic staff performance and the implementation of the study programme. b) Each participant receives their individual survey results, and the summarized findings are discussed at the relevant Study Direction Council meeting. c) Analyzing annual surveys of employers who supervise students during their traineeships, as well as gathering feedback from employers who participated in the traineeship defenses regarding the completion of traineeship tasks. d) Reviewing and updating study course programmes, methodological materials, study literature, and proposed topics for research and final papers at least once per academic year. e) Organizing courses and seminars on the latest teaching and pedagogical methods for academic staff, and encouraging participation in further education and professional development opportunities.

Experts confirm that the quality policy is publicly available on the ISMA’s website. Students and graduates stated they are receiving and filling out surveys each year. Surveys’ results are being analysed regularly. This makes it possible for the system to ensure continuous improvement and development of the study field and study programme in question.

#### 1.2.2.

In SAR (p.25) it is written that the development, preparation for licensing, implementation, monitoring, and updating of new study programmes are governed by the ISMA Quality Management System (QMS) procedure titled Study Programmes).

Based on the SAR, the study programme has been developed and updated in accordance with applicable laws and regulations (such as the Law on Higher Education Institutions, State Education Standard, and Occupational Standard). ISMA’s management and study field director argue that the study field and study programme also reflect recommendations from accreditation experts following

previous assessments of the programme, feedback from student and graduate surveys, results from final theses, and relevant scientific research, including studies conducted by ISMA academic staff. Additionally, the programme incorporates input from employers, gathered through internship references, conference meetings, consultations on thesis development, thesis reviews, and participation in State examination commissions (thesis defenses).

Experts found out that there is no formal procedure to engage with employers, it happens informally through tourism associations, meetings with representatives of restaurants and hotels at qualification paper defenses, discussions with practice supervisors etc. There is also no formal feedback mechanism in place that would allow the sharing of information back to internal and external stakeholders. It has been told to experts by the study field director, that SAR will be published publicly on the website (at the moment there is no similar practice). Website presents some obsolete information, for example the name of the study field director is another, although the present director is in function since March 2023 already. They are waiting for the website to be renewed, no answer when this should happen.

Students confirmed they are well informed about the quality assurance issues, but there was no deeper understanding shown or interest. Together with teachers they stated that if they would need such information, they would get it, as the HEI is small and they know each other well.

### 1.2.3.

According to the SAR (p.26) the process for submitting complaints, proposals, and reporting observed errors, undesirable situations, or imperfections is governed by the ISMA QMS procedure "Nonconformance Management." This procedure also outlines the steps for implementing corrective and preventive measures, from the initial reporting of an issue to the analysis of its underlying causes. Students are informed about how to submit complaints and proposals to the relevant ISMA department during the introductory lecture by the Director of their study programme. Additionally, this information is made available in writing to all ISMA students and employees through the intranet.

If students were to complain with his/her email address, they would be notified electronically within one day of the corrective or preventive actions taken, regardless of whether the complaint was submitted electronically or in paper form. Students confirmed that the study field director is easily approachable, and that the response times are very short. There were no examples of any complaints they would remember. But they confirmed they are acknowledged about the different possibilities to file their complaints.

If the complaint arrives anonymously, it is forwarded to the Student Council. In this case, the response would also be sent to the Student Council. For instance, if a complaint is submitted by the Student Council to the Study Department, stating that a lecturer consistently delays the start of their lectures by 5-10 minutes, the Head of the relevant department will meet with the lecturer on the same day to discuss the issue. Neither students nor graduates recalled the use of any of the described procedures, they confirmed they would go directly to the teacher or study field director.

If at the end of the semester, the majority of students would express negative feedback about the course as a whole, the lecturer would be offered the opportunity to attend communication psychology seminars. If he/she declines, as a result, ISMA decides not to continue working with this guest lecturer in the following semester. It already happened in the past, according to the interviews.

### 1.2.4.

The HEI regularly collects, processes, and analyzes the following data related to its study programmes (SAR, p.27): a) Student data, including matriculation, exmatriculation, academic progress, and mobility. b) Teaching staff data, such as the number of hours worked, the quantity and evaluation of supervised works, scientific and practical activities, and staff mobility. c) Survey results, reflecting the opinions of students, staff, graduates, and employers. d) Expenditure data related to the improvement of the HEI's material and technical infrastructure.

Besides the surveys, there are no other regular and formal methods used for gathering feedback from students, which might give a deeper insight into the (dis)satisfaction of the main stakeholders. Students' surveys are being regularly implemented, analyzed and used to improve the study field. Also the feedback from graduates and employers is being gathered, but it happens mostly informally.

#### 1.2.5.

The information is to be found at the website: [www.isma.lv](http://www.isma.lv). The responsible person is the Vice-Rector for Development and Innovation. Main Goals: Content Management: Posting, editing, and removing content on the website, including articles, images, and videos. Types of content: information provided by Directors of study programmes, Vice-rectors, departments, international cooperation partners, academic staff, the Student Council, and the ISMA Fergana Branch. Internal documents, details about study programmes, and the admission procedure at ISMA are available in both Latvian and English. The website features information about ongoing conferences, publications, and traineeships. For both Latvian and international students, the website provides details on the traineeship completion process, scholarship opportunities, as well as the activities of the Business Incubator, library, and Student Council. Information about ISMA's partners and alumni is also available (SAR, p.27).

The information on the website aligns with information from other sources and offers applicants and students crucial details published in all languages used for implementing the study programme. As already explained in 1.2.2, the institution's website presents some obsolete information.

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

Stakeholders fill out surveys, aggregated data is processed and discussed at competent bodies, but there is a lack of wider feedback about the results to students, graduates and employers. This also results in insufficient knowledge of changing the study programme and other quality-related topics. Adopted procedures define the steps for implementing corrective and preventive measures, but due to the small size of the institution, everything happens mainly informally. Information about the study programmes are gathered and processed. The information about the study programmes is published on the ISMA's website, some of them are obsolete and not updated regularly.

Strengths:

- 1) the quality policy is publicly available on the ISMA's website,
- 2) the mechanism for collecting statistical data is in place and operational.

Weaknesses:

- 1) no other formal and regular methods of gathering feedback from students, besides surveying,
- 2) lack of formal feedback mechanism to internal and external stakeholders,
- 3) complaints and proposals are not submitted according to the prescribed procedures, thus making traceability difficult,
- 4) weak interest and motivation of stakeholders to monitor quality assurance,
- 5) not updating the ISMA's website with current information.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

ISMA ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study

field through the implementation of its internal quality assurance system, however some of the processes lack the formalization (e.g. gathering feedback from graduates and employers).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The quality policy is publicly available on the ISMA's website. Students and graduates are receiving and filling out surveys each year. Surveys' results are being analysed regularly.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

A comprehensive development plan for the study field has been developed, clearly outlining both the planned activities and the responsible parties (Attachment 2.1.1.Development\_plan\_direction.docx).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The evaluation of students' achievements is organized in accordance with ISMA's "Procedures for the Organisation of Testing" regulations, but it cannot be considered that the assessment criteria for a specific course as a whole, or for each assessment component, are clearly defined in every syllabi.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Human resources management and development, and people responsible for the process have been appointed: Vice-Rector for administrative work and Personnel department. The Human resources development strategy has been developed ([https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents\\_en/ISMA\\_Cilvkresursu\\_attstbas\\_ratija\\_lat\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents_en/ISMA_Cilvkresursu_attstbas_ratija_lat_ENG.pdf)).

- 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

ISMA collects, processes, and analyzes data related to its study programmes: a) Student data, b) Teaching staff data, c) Survey results, d) Expenditure data. Feedback from graduates and employers is being gathered, but it happens mostly informally.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The established quality assurance system ensures continuous improvement and development of

the study field. Programme content is only partly matching with the professional standard; the employers are not involved in the improvement of the study programme.

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

#### **Analysis**

##### **1.3.1.**

ISMA's financial system is structured to support sustainability, but it has certain limitations. Being a private higher education institution, ISMA depends heavily on tuition fees, which make up 75% of its income. While this is typical for private institutions, it also leaves ISMA exposed to changes in student enrollment. Although additional income sources, such as training courses, contract research, and other activities, contribute 25% of the budget, this may not provide sufficient flexibility to manage financial challenges during difficult periods.

One aspect that stands out is the institution's planning process. ISMA allocates 10% of its total revenue for future development, indicating a forward-looking approach. Additionally, they employ a mixed planning model that adjusts funding based on both projected and actual student numbers. This adaptability is commendable, as it allows for corrections when enrollment figures differ from initial expectations. However, certain allocations seem relatively modest. For instance, the 5-6% dedicated to teaching aids and library resources may not sufficiently support the academic demands of modern higher education.

Regarding research, ISMA's efforts appear well-aligned with market needs. They fund applied research projects in areas such as tourism, technology, and environmental modeling, many of which are commissioned by private businesses. This focus on practical applications ensures relevance and fosters partnerships with the private sector. Yet, the scale of funding—ranging from 3,600 to 8,500 EUR per project—raises concerns about the depth and potential impact of these initiatives. While applied research is valuable, there seems to be limited emphasis on fundamental research, which could contribute to long-term academic and scientific advancements.

ISMA's investment in student life is another notable aspect of its resource distribution. Funding for activities such as festivals, conferences, and student events creates a vibrant and engaging campus environment. However, the emphasis on social activities and promotional campaigns, including active marketing efforts on social media, may detract from investments in core academic resources. This raises questions about whether the balance between academic and extracurricular priorities is optimal.

On the administrative side, the financial planning process appears systematic and well-coordinated. Decisions are made by the Board and Rector, with adjustments informed by enrollment data. While this centralized approach ensures control and consistency, it may also limit broader input and innovation in resource allocation.

Overall, ISMA demonstrates a structured and adaptable approach to managing financial resources, which is particularly important for a private institution. However, the significant reliance on tuition fees, relatively low allocation for academic resources, and modest research funding could constrain the institution's ability to expand and innovate. Diversifying income sources further and increasing investments in teaching aids and research would likely enhance its long-term competitiveness and academic quality.

##### **1.3.2.**

The study programme is implemented in Riga, where the institution has transitioned to new and upgraded premises designed to create a supportive and effective learning environment. The new facilities at Valērijas Seiles Street, 1, feature modernized lecture rooms equipped with movable chairs and attached tables, which facilitate flexible configurations for group work and interactive learning activities. The infrastructure is generally adequate to support the study process, including practical facilities such as a functional kitchen.

However, during the field visit, students highlighted the need for a separate, quiet study room to enhance academic performance and overall well-being.

The experts do not have information on whether the HEI has established a unified system and procedure for the improvement and acquisition of material, methodological, informational, and other resources. The SAR does not indicate the existence of such a system. However, considering that the university is relatively small and decision-making is centralized within the senior management, it can be assumed that the acquisition and enhancement of resources necessary for the study process are managed centrally.

### 1.3.3.

The ISMA library, with a total area of 286m<sup>2</sup> and a seating capacity of 37 in the reading room (mentioned in the SAR 2.3.3.), operates daily, ensuring accessibility for users. Its services include access to physical textbooks, scientific collections, electronic resources (e.g., EBSCOhost), and practical tools like printing and scanning. (SAR p. 32) Additionally, consultations on electronic resource use and scientific information searches enhance student and faculty capabilities. During the assessment field visit it was noticeable that the majority of the books available in the library are in Russian, with limited availability in Latvian or English. For instance, Service Operations has all its resources in Russian. Similarly, Tourism Advertising and Tourism Management also consist entirely of Russian-language materials. This raises concerns about accessibility and inclusivity for students who require resources in Latvian or English to engage with their studies. During the interviews with teaching staff it was mentioned that the process of getting new material is simple and straightforward. In the SAR 2.3.3. it is mentioned that the replenishment of library resources and subscriptions follows a systematic process. Annual budget allocations of €15,000 (for the whole HEI) facilitate the updating of the library's resources. Orders are coordinated with study programme directors and department heads, while purchases are overseen by ISMA administration, ensuring alignment with academic needs. New acquisitions are communicated to the academic community and showcased in exhibitions.

### 1.3.4.

The SAR 2.3.4. highlights a well-developed information and communication technology infrastructure (ICT), which plays a central role in supporting its study field. The HEI emphasizes the use of platforms such as Moodle and Zoom, which facilitate effective student-teacher communication and provide students with access to learning materials, assessment tools, and course-related information. The Moodle platform, in particular, ensures that all relevant data, including study courses, user groups, and access rights, is compiled in an automated and efficient manner, thereby enhancing the learning experience for both on-campus and distance learners. Additionally, the use of the Zoom platform for live video conferencing is a valuable tool for interactive online learning.

Further supporting the study process, ISMA has implemented digital scheduling and classroom management systems, which optimize the planning and use of resources. These systems allow students and academic staff to access real-time information on lecture schedules, place, and teaching staff, contributing to the smooth functioning of the study process. The IT infrastructure also supports a digital student survey system, which collects feedback on the quality of study courses and programmes each semester. This demonstrates the institution's commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement through ICT solutions.

However, while ISMA's ICT infrastructure appears on a good level, certain aspects require further evaluation to fully align with the criteria, the SAR does not provide a detailed analysis of the specific effectiveness of these tools in the study process. It is also unclear whether additional tools, such as virtual labs, simulation software, or collaborative platforms, are employed to enhance the online learning experience in fields requiring practical or interactive components.

Moreover, while it is highlighted that ISMA has integrated ICT solutions into administrative and academic processes, it does not address whether these solutions are systematically evaluated for their effectiveness.

### 1.3.5.

The institution has established transparent and structured procedures for attracting and employing qualified teaching staff, ensuring alignment with academic standards and institutional goals. The recruitment process begins with a public announcement of vacancies on the ISMA website, ensuring accessibility and openness (SAR, p.36). For candidates unfamiliar with ISMA, the process includes a guest lecture hosted by department heads or appointed lecturers, followed by a student survey to evaluate the lecture's effectiveness. This involvement of students in the evaluation process, including their veto rights, underscores the institution's commitment to inclusivity and stakeholder engagement (SAR, p.36).

The decision-making process continues with the Study Direction Council, where candidate qualifications and survey results are analyzed. Successful candidates are then subject to open elections during the Senate meeting, ensuring transparency in the final selection stage (SAR, p.36). Upon election, the Rector formalizes the appointment through a contract.

ISMA's Human Resources Development Strategy, developed in 2023, further strengthens the recruitment framework by emphasizing the importance of qualified, scientifically capable, and methodologically skilled lecturers. The strategy mandates that at least 50% of teaching staff are elected at ISMA, with half of them holding doctoral degrees, ensuring a high level of academic expertise. Additionally, ISMA prioritizes the involvement of industry professionals in teaching to integrate practical business experience into the curriculum (SAR, p.36).

To support continuous improvement, the institution encourages academic staff to enhance their qualifications through seminars and courses, both locally and internationally, within ISMA's financial capabilities. Performance evaluations, including self-assessments and student surveys, are conducted regularly to maintain high standards of teaching and professional development (SAR, p.36). Overall, the academic staff recruitment process ensures the selection of the most suitable educators. However, greater involvement of industry professionals in the implementation of the study programme would be beneficial.

### 1.3.6.

While analysing ISMA's developed Human Resources development strategy itself - it can be divided into multiple parts. The document outlines ISMA's Human Resources Development Strategy (HRDS) for 2024-2030, detailing the institution's procedures for attracting, implementing, and following guidelines for recruiting qualified teaching staff. To begin with, ISMA has developed internal regulations and guidelines that govern the recruitment and selection of academic staff. These include structured processes for competitions and elections to academic positions, as well as clearly formulated requirements for lecturers to standardize the selection process (p. 5). This approach is further reinforced by Priority PR.1 of the HRDS, which focuses on the attraction, selection, and retention of human resources. Specific tasks under this priority include creating a detailed communication plan to enhance ISMA's employer image, developing methodological recommendations for recruitment, and establishing unified personnel selection procedures (pp. 10-12).

ISMA places a strong emphasis on openness and transparency in these processes. Recruitment advertisements are thoughtfully designed to be easily understood, highlighting job duties, remuneration, and additional benefits, making ISMA's job offers stand out in the competitive academic landscape (p. 11). Additionally, the HRDS document itself is publicly accessible on the ISMA website, ensuring that stakeholders are well-informed about its content and implementation (p. 18). The strategy actively involves multiple stakeholders, such as ISMA students, administration, and industry partners, reflecting a collaborative approach to human resources development (pp. 3, 5).

In terms of implementation, ISMA has established mechanisms to ensure systematic progress. Regular analyses and updates to recruitment methods and procedures are planned, with specific KPIs, such as increasing foreign teaching staff by 5%, set to monitor achievements (p. 12). The

HRDS also emphasizes renewal and continuity in human resources by fostering mentorship programmes and integrating younger employees to ensure knowledge succession (p. 11). The institution plans to implement a unified personnel performance management system to monitor and improve the quality of work and employee satisfaction (p. 16).

Currently, academic staff performance is assessed by analyzing academic staff self-evaluations and compiling student survey results. However, experts were unable to review academic staff self-evaluations, and during interviews, faculty members did not confirm the regular compilation of such assessments. It can be concluded that the evaluation process primarily relies on student feedback and the assessment of scientific activities.

Experts highly appreciate the developed Human Resources Development Strategy and believe that its implementation will ensure a comprehensive and well-founded approach to the recruitment, evaluation, and motivation of academic and administrative staff.

#### 1.3.7.

The institution employs a structured system for calculating teaching staff workload, categorizing responsibilities into three primary aspects: academic tasks (e.g., teaching and consultations), organizational activities (e.g., administrative duties), and research-related endeavors (SAR, p.38). This division ensures that diverse facets of academic engagement are accounted for and provides a framework for equitable workload distribution.

Organizational tasks are detailed with specific hours allocated for key roles. For instance, the Vice-rector is allotted 300 ac.h./year, while the Head of Study Direction dedicates 150 ac.h./year to programme management (SAR, p.38). However, certain roles, such as curatorship of a student group or record-keeping for departments, are assigned 60 ac.h./year (SAR, p.38), which may appear insufficient given the potential demands of these responsibilities.

The research workload is clearly outlined, with specific guidelines for tasks like preparing study materials (1 ac.h. per A4 page), writing scientific articles (3 ac.h./page), and creating conference theses (2 ac.h./page) (SAR, p.38).

One of the strengths of the workload management system is that it acknowledges the variety of roles academic staff take on, including teaching, administrative, and research duties. This balanced perspective shows that all aspects of academic work are appreciated. However, managing these roles can be challenging, especially when administrative tasks like programme accreditation preparation require a significant time investment (200–300 ac.h./year) (SAR, p.38). Finding ways to balance these responsibilities more effectively would help prevent staff from feeling overwhelmed and ensure each role gets the attention it needs.

#### 1.3.8.

During the field visit, it was evident that students value the support ISMA provides, both to local and international students, particularly in areas related to academic queries, visas, and other administrative matters. Students also highlighted the open dialogue with teaching staff, which facilitates the resolution of issues and ensures that students feel heard. Additionally, the availability of course evaluation surveys offers students a platform to express their feedback. While a student council is in place as mandated by the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the competencies and influence of the student body could be further enhanced.

ISMA demonstrates a notable sensitivity to the needs of its multicultural student body, as illustrated by its structured support for international students. The assignment of tutors who assist not only with academic guidance but also with practical matters such as transportation and accommodation is a commendable initiative (SAR, p. 39). This hands-on support plays a crucial role in easing the transition for international students. However, while this support addresses immediate challenges, it may lack a comprehensive, long-term strategy for integration. To strengthen this, ISMA could consider implementing intercultural workshops or mentorship programmes that promote interaction between international and domestic students. The university also demonstrates awareness of accessibility needs by leasing wheelchair-accessible facilities (SAR, p. 39). However, this remains a

temporary solution. To improve the long-term sustainability of accessibility measures, ISMA could integrate these features into the main campus infrastructure. Moreover, expanding support services for students with special needs, including the introduction of assistive technologies and specialized counseling, would further enhance ISMA's inclusivity and ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

ISMA's flexible approach to learning, incorporating methods such as group work and providing accessible course materials for students who miss lectures, supports the success of both full-time and part-time students (SAR, p. 39). However, there is room for improvement in ISMA's digital infrastructure. The implementation of a more advanced learning management system (LMS) would better support hybrid and online learning, aligning with the growing trend toward digital education and ensuring that ISMA's offerings are flexible and accessible for all students.

Finally, the student-teacher relationship at ISMA fosters mutual respect, with students actively contributing to curriculum development and decision-making processes (SAR, p. 39). While the "Complaints and Suggestions" box is a useful tool for collecting feedback, formalizing this process through regular student surveys or focus groups would provide more actionable insights. This approach would further enhance the academic environment and allow for continuous improvements based on student input.

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

ISMA has demonstrated strong adaptability, market alignment, and institutional commitment to sustainability and transparency. The HEI's financial capacity to sustain the study process can be considered satisfactory. However, it should be noted that it primarily relies on tuition fee revenue, which accounts for approximately 75% of total income. At the same time, the university's management allocates 10% of funds as reserves for institutional development. When planning the distribution of funding for a specific study field and its associated study programmes, the ISMA Board considers various parameters; however, scientific research is not explicitly prioritized among them. However, diversifying income streams, increasing investment in academic resources, addressing infrastructure gaps, and systematically evaluating ICT and recruitment strategies are critical to enhancing long-term academic quality, competitiveness, and institutional resilience.

The infrastructure resources, as well as the material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study field, can generally be considered sufficient and appropriate.

The HEI has a library that operates daily, providing students and academic staff with books and access to scientific databases such as EBSCO and ScienceDirect. However, the book collection cannot be considered sufficient for the implementation of study programmes within the study field, particularly regarding resources in English and Latvian. The procedure for expanding the library's collection is straightforward, allowing any faculty member to initiate the acquisition of necessary literature.

ISMA's ICT infrastructure appears on a good level. There are additional tools such as virtual labs, simulation software or collaborative platforms that are used, but their role in improving the course of study is unambiguously clear.

The institution has established transparent and structured procedures for attracting and employing qualified teaching staff, ensuring alignment with academic standards and institutional goals. ISMA's has developed Human Resources Development Strategy (2023), which will help further strengthen the recruitment framework by emphasizing the importance of qualified, scientifically capable, and methodologically skilled lecturers.

ISMA has developed a structured system for calculating teaching staff workload. It proceeds categorizing responsibilities into three primary aspects: academic tasks (e.g., teaching and consultations), organizational activities (e.g., administrative duties), and research-related endeavors. The system is clear and comprehensive, ensuring that employees have a well-defined

understanding of their performance evaluation.

Strengths:

- 1) The newly upgraded facilities at Valērijas Seiles Street showcase ISMA's commitment to creating an engaging and modern academic environment. The design of lecture spaces to facilitate interactive learning is a noteworthy strength.
- 2) ISMA demonstrates a proactive and structured financial planning process, including allocating 10% of its revenue for future development and employing a mixed planning model adaptable to enrollment variations.
- 3) The university has developed a Human Resources Development Strategy, which outlines the establishment of a comprehensive recruitment, motivation, and evaluation system by 2027.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The allocation of 5-6% of revenue to teaching aids and library resources appears insufficient to meet the demands of modern higher education.
- 2) The dominance of Russian-language materials in the library.

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

### **Analysis**

#### 1.4.1.

The SAR (p.39) highlights three research directions of ISMA: sustainable tourism, artificial intelligence, and educational management, which apply to the short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" as well. The results are predominantly published in journals not indexed in Web of Science or Scopus. One article is published in the journal Mathematics indexed in Web of Sciences and Scopus; another one is published in Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development, also indexed in Web of Sciences and Scopus.

These areas align well with the broader goals of higher education institutions, which often aim to address contemporary global challenges, promote sustainability, foster innovation, and improve educational practices. Research results are integrated into study courses, enhancing the curriculum by using real-world examples and case studies and offering tools and technologies for research and decision-making, demonstrating good practices and innovative solutions. Here are some good examples. For instance, in the subject Tourism basics, the conference proceedings of one lecturer about the development of tourism in Latvia are listed as recommended literature (Descriptions of Study Courses, p. 79). Another's research results have been integrated into the Basics of Project Management (p. 49) and Enterprise Management (p. 129) course. However, although these research areas are significant and relevant, they are not sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes of the short-cycle study programme. Better integration and more research are needed to directly support and advance the educational objectives of short-cycle study programme.

#### 1.4.2.

ISMA's research activities are embedded in the study process. Leading lecturers actively participating in research ensure that the latest scientific findings are incorporated into their teaching. The teaching staff's publications are included in course descriptions and help improve course content, ensuring that students are learning from the latest research. It looks like there might be a discrepancy in the SAR (p.40). The text mentions "four lecturers", but only two are listed. If there are indeed only two lectures recognized by the Latvian Council of Science, the text should be corrected to reflect this. Other lecturers also engage in research, projects, conferences, and seminars, contributing to a vibrant academic environment. Although research is well integrated, it is important to ensure that these activities are closely linked to the specific learning outcomes of the short-cycle study programme. For instance, the study programme includes such specialized subjects as Tourism Service Quality Management, Basics of Tourism, Hospitality Industry, Complex Tourism

Product Development, Marketing in Tourism Business, Catering Enterprises Management, etc. One professor's research interests are related to Social Sciences, Economics and Business, Natural Sciences, Computer Science and Informatics, and another one's with Social Sciences, Economics and Business (SAR, p. 40) but not for tourism.

#### 1.4.3.

ISMA has initiated joint research on artificial intelligence with Klaipeda University of Applied Sciences and the Military University of Veliko Tarnovo. An international working group will be created to research the use of AI in education, aiming to develop guidelines for its application. The results of these collaborations are reflected in several publications from 2024, showcasing the outcomes of international research efforts. ISMA organizes annual conferences such as Information Technologies and Management and Open Learning and Distance Education, providing platforms for lecturers and students to present their research both publicly and virtually. One of the conference proceedings is titled "Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education Challenges and Opportunities" However, on page 17 of the study field SWOT analysis, the use of artificial intelligence is listed as a threat. Experts were not convinced how these two statements align with each other. Concrete future plans for the expansion of international cooperation, such as new potential partnerships, future projects or targeted research areas, are missing.

#### 1.4.4.

ISMA actively promotes the involvement of its teaching staff in scientific research through a structured approach that includes data collection, incentives, and opportunities for professional development. These activities are seen as a positive and integral part of the institution's commitment to academic excellence. To improve the quality of professional study programmes, ISMA collects detailed information on lecturers' achievements in scientific research and practical activities. Lecturers are required to fill in the "Scientific and Professional Activities" table, which includes data on research, project participation, and practical activities outside ISMA. This information, along with student survey results, is used to award bonuses and increase hourly rates, positively reinforcing the value of their contributions. The university management recognizes and rewards the efforts of academic staff through bonuses and hourly rate increases based on their research activities and student feedback. Various forms of internal recognition, such as the Certificate of Merit, gratitude from the Rector, and cash awards, serve as moral incentives. Engaged scientific activity also provides opportunities for promotion to positions like associate professor or professor, which positively affects salary and career progression. (SAR p.42)

The SAR (p.42) lists five fields of scientific activity, two of which are related to tourism. The report does not specify how much the teaching staff has contributed to the development of professional study materials/textbooks. There is also no information on the development of e-courses (electronic courses) in various subjects that could provide a structured learning experience through digital platforms, including online lectures, multimedia content, interactive activities, assessments and discussion forums. Additionally, discussions with the teaching staff revealed that no professional study materials have been created.

#### 1.4.5.

ISMA actively involves students in scientific and applied research both inside and outside the auditoriums (SAR, p.44) These activities are integral to the educational process and are designed to enhance the learning experience. The institution promotes student participation in scientific events by providing timely information about upcoming events on the website isma.lv. Indicators of student scientific activity include their publications and presentations at ISMA`s annual conferences. A good and specific example of student involvement is the Student Conference held in May 2024, where students participated and presented their research on the most current topics in tourism. The students` interest in attending conferences was also evident during the experts group`s discussion with the students, where they enthusiastically talked about their experiences at conferences. Since the new short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism

Business” has not yet been opened, it is difficult to give an assessment, how students will be involved in scientific research in the future. However, the ISMA has a desire to continue and strengthen scientific and applied research, as revealed in a conversation with the programme director.

#### 1.4.6.

ISMA has implemented various forms of innovation, including product, process, marketing, and organizational innovations, to improve the educational experience and attract students. ISMA collaborates with the secondary school by integrating university lectures into school study courses (SAR, p.44). It is very positive, because it helps bridge the gap between secondary and higher education, making the transition smoother for students moving from secondary school to the HEI. Gastro Studio ISMA sparks interest in higher education among prospective students. Gastro studio ISMA has been created and equipped as a laboratory to give students the opportunity to learn the specifics of the restaurant business (SAR, p.31). The integration of modern technology and infrastructure in auditoriums has improved the quality of education and facilitated better learning outcomes. The use of TV screens to visualize advertisements and current information is an excellent way to keep students and staff informed and engaged. This modern approach ensures that important updates are easily accessible to everyone on campus. Additionally, the establishment of a special department to monitor the stay of foreign students in Latvia and their location in Europe during Erasmus+ mobility, including the use of GPS coordinates (SAR p.45), demonstrates a strong commitment to student safety and support. There may be risks associated with this GPS tracking because students might not be aware that they are being tracked. The SAR (p.45) does not indicate whether students are aware of this tracking. Opening representative offices in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Kazakhstan shows ISMA`s commitment to expanding its global presence. Highlighting that ISMA is the only Latvian higher education institution with a branch abroad underscores its pioneering spirit and dedication to internationalization. The SAR (p.45) states that ISMA plans to open a branch in Switzerland as well. However, the report does not explain why it is planned to open a branch in Switzerland, because Switzerland already offers a very high level of tourism and hospitality education. It remains unclear whether this is a realistic plan or just a vision.

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

There are only two scientific papers directly related to tourism that have been completed during the accreditation period. Therefore, the research directions are not very well aligned with the objectives and learning outcomes of the short-cycle programme.

Most of the faculty members are engaged in research activities, but not all. Currently, there is no system in place to support and engage young and beginning lecturers in research activities.

Based on the SAR (p. 44) and discussions with students and the programme director, students have the possibility to be involved in scientific research, mainly through participation in conferences. However, since the library does not have enough literature to support academic research, it would be very beneficial for the faculty to create teaching materials. Especially, to create teaching materials on topics that lecturers have previously researched (such as sustainability and the use of AI), as well as on tourism related topics.

It is very positive that ISMA has implemented various forms of innovation and ISMA is the only Latvian higher education institution with a branch abroad. From the perspective of further development and innovation, it would be worth considering the creation of e-course, which would help increase the flexibility, accessibility, environmental friendliness, cost savings, and interactivity of education.

Strengths:

- 1) the faculty members are engaged in research activities;
- 2) the main motivation for faculty members to engage in research is self-fulfillment;

3) various innovative solutions have been used (collaboration with the secondary school, opening of Gastro Studio, the use of GPS coordinates, etc.)

Weaknesses:

- 1) the research directions are not aligned with the curriculum objectives and learning outcomes;
- 2) there is no system in place to support new, beginning faculty members in initiating research;
- 3) the library's academic literature supporting research is inadequate, as there is a lack of English-language materials that support research;
- 4) no professional study materials (for instance, sustainable tourism, Artificial Intelligence in tourism- in a word, everything related to the research work of lecturers) have been created, which prevents lecturers from integrating their research and the latest scientific discoveries into the teaching and do not encourage academic cooperation and knowledge exchange.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Some of the staff publishes scientific papers in ranked journals, but the research directions are not aligned with the curriculum objectives and learning outcomes.

## **1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

#### 1.5.1.

Based on the SAR (p.46), ISMA overall collaborates with numerous partners in Latvia, including higher education institutions, associations, secondary schools, and employers in Latvia. Some projects were implemented after the successful cooperation with Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and research cooperation with Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. There is no specific evidence of collaboration with the HEI within the framework of the study field or programme.

The number of field trips and discussions were carried up in collaboration with several employer organizations to develop the necessary student skills and industry expectations, to view the potential workplaces. Some examples mentioned are: Kempinski Riga Grand Hotel, Hanza Hotel, Unimarine Spa Hotel.

To establish new connections and expand its network of cooperation partners, the Directors of ISMA study programmes, representatives of the ISMA Career Centre and ISMA management actively participate in national and international conferences, seminars, and international mobility initiatives. To attract new employers, ISMA hosts an annual Internship and Employment Conference, engaging its existing partners and inviting prospective ones to participate (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/conferences-and-research/annual-24-en> ).

The International Inter-University Student Conference on Tourism and Entrepreneurship Research (ISCTER) offers students a platform to explore how emerging technologies, sustainable practices and innovative strategies are transforming tourism and entrepreneurship (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/conferences-and-research/iscter-en>).

During the expert visit ISMA management confirmed that, given the relatively small size of the HEI, activities are generally focused on fostering collaboration, benefiting everyone regardless of the study field or programme.

The list of cooperation agreements includes 11 contracts with institutions in Latvia: Baltic International Academy, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, Daugavpils University, BA Turība,

College of Business Administration, Hotel School, EKA University of Applied Sciences, Riga Management College, Air Baltic Corporation AS and 5 internship bilateral agreements: Accenture Latvia, AS Exigen Services Latvia, Riga Technical University, SIA Komplains, SIA Devnrise. (Annex 2.5.1. List of cooperation agreements). The experts' opinion is that not all agreements are relevant to the study field and that there is no evidence available to confirm implementation of each agreement in practice.

It must be said that during the expert visit, when meeting with employers, there was no impression of sufficiently extensive cooperation with employer organizations and professional associations in the sector like tour operators, travel agencies, Association of Latvian Travel Agents and Operators (ALTA). Only membership in the Latvian Hotel and Restaurant Association (LVRA) was mentioned by ISMA management and the director of the study field.

#### 1.5.2.

According to the SAR (pp.47-48), ISMA actively utilizes Erasmus+ mobility opportunities to build connections with a variety of international HEIs. The BIP (Blended Intensive Programme) was successfully implemented bringing students and teaching staff from Poland, Lithuania, and Portugal to ISMA for a week. Additionally ISMA teaching staff participated in the BIP programme organized by Kaunas University of Applied Sciences. The BIP programme is scheduled to take place during the spring semester of each academic year enhancing ISMA's visibility among European Union students and fostering stronger collaboration with foreign universities and their academic staff. Unfortunately the content of the study courses provided in BIP is not provided by ISMA.

The Director of the study programme participated in a project organized by the National Education Directorate of Edirne Province (Turkey), where the Director shared various teaching methods with the staff of technical schools in Edirne and led seminars on burnout. A total of 5 educational institutions were visited, and seminars were held for over 150 teaching staff members. Vocational education institutions (VET) were also visited, where ISMA and its programmes were introduced.

The Director of the study programme received an invitation to Klaipeda University of Applied Sciences to showcase ISMA University of Applied Sciences and offer her insights on cross-cultural management. Ongoing collaboration with Klaipeda University of Applied Sciences is being enhanced annually.

International cooperation agreements for joint project development, guest lecturer exchanges, conferences and similar initiatives are not customized or signed separately for individual programmes, except in specific cases, such as students' mobility agreements targeting particular programmes. This approach is influenced by ISMA's institutional framework as a small private university without a traditional faculty-based structure. All departments and units function within a unified matrix system for study field and support with academic and administrative staff collaborating on an integrated basis. In the experts' opinion the cooperation agreements with the National Education Directorate of Edirne Province (Turkey) and Klaipeda University of Applied Sciences are implemented successfully.

The list of cooperation agreements includes 39 contracts with institutions in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Georgia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Cyprus, Russia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Moldova, Mexico, Poland, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and 36 contracts within the framework of ERASMUS+ Programme with institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, UK, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Finland, Spain, Turkey, Germany (Annex 2.5.1. List of cooperation agreements). In the experts' opinion and according to the available information there are only some international cooperation agreements implemented in the field of tourism and relevant to the study field.

#### 1.5.3.

According to the SAR (p.50), ISMA engages teaching staff from abroad by hosting several annual conferences (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/conferences-and-research>).

ISMA's involvement in the Erasmus+ programme plays a vital role in fostering mobility.

To attract international students ISMA employs several strategies: conducting promotional tours and participation in educational fairs; establishing representative offices in countries such as Belarus, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Switzerland; collaborating with agents offering mediation services in regions like India and Azerbaijan; engaging students as ISMA Ambassadors who share their positive study experiences to encourage relatives, friends, and acquaintances to enroll; offering family discounts on tuition fees. However the number of international students in the study field is relatively low in the past two years - 6 students each year.

One foreign faculty member from abroad (Cyprus) was engaged in the study field in 2023.

The primary criteria for selecting students to participate in traineeships or studies under the Erasmus+ Programme are: completion of the first year of studies and progression to the second year; academic success; adequate proficiency in the relevant foreign language.

The selection of students is managed by the ISMA Council of the Erasmus+ Programmes: head of the study department; vice-rector for international relations (Erasmus coordinator); representatives from the international relations department; representatives from the student council; representative from the international business communication department; head of the career centre. Erasmus coordinator recommends convening a Council meeting to assess each application and determine the students selected for participation in the Erasmus+ Programme.

Statistical data on the incoming and outgoing mobility of students in the study field shows zero level mobility.

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

Conclusions:

Overall, collaboration with other institutions in Latvia and abroad has been established, but only a few cooperation agreements are relevant to this study field and help in achieving the objectives and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programme. Collaboration in the form of internships works sufficiently with the hospitality industry but not with travel agents and tour operators sector. Students and teaching staff's outgoing mobility is on zero level. The system and procedures for the attraction of the teaching staff and students from abroad within the study field is not developed sufficiently.

Strengths:

- 1) A wide list of cooperation partners from institutions abroad in ISMA overall.
- 2) Organization and hosting of international conferences in tourism, internship and employment.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Students are not interested in Erasmus+ programme.
- 2) The cooperation with the specific industry sector related to the study programme - travel agencies and tour operators - has not been established.
- 3) Low involvement of faculty members from abroad.
- 4) Among the many international cooperation partners of HEI only a few are relevant to the study field.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Cooperation with the institutions in Latvia and abroad is established although a few are directly linked to the study field. The cooperation with the industry has been established but there is a lack of collaboration with a specific industry sector-travel agencies and tour operators-which

would be relevant to the study field.

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

### **Analysis**

#### **1.6.1.**

The fulfillment of the recommendations issued during the previous accreditation (2012) is outlined in Annex 2.6.1. A comprehensive plan has been prepared to implement a total of 15 recommendations. Some of the recommendations provided during the previous accreditation pertain to study programmes that are not part of this study field (master's level study programme and short cycle study programme "Entrepreneurship in the Restaurant Business") and, therefore, their implementation is not subject to evaluation.

In accordance with the SAR, the information provided during interviews, and observations made during the visit, it can be concluded that the majority of recommendations have been implemented. However, it must be noted that Recommendation No. 2 (Annex 2.6.1.), which, among other things, suggested making the evaluation of the study results system more transparent and comprehensible, has been only partially implemented. The assessment of study results remains inadequately stated and communicated.

Similarly, Recommendation No. 3, which requires that feedback on stakeholders' opinions be provided on a regular basis, has also been partially implemented. A systematic approach for obtaining industry feedback has not been established. The current system provides collecting feedback from employers either after students return from internships or from employers who hire students and graduates. The submitted recommendation plan does not clearly explain how employers' feedback is gathered and how their input is considered in the development of the study programme.

In the recommendations from the previous accreditation, it was advised to enhance the library's resources with industry-specific books. While this has been addressed, it is recommended to further expand the collection by acquiring additional and more up-to-date industry-specific books.

Recommendation No. 10 foresees "In order to develop the study direction in the approach that is sustainable, competitive and not overlapping, an approach of deeper rather than wider specialisation should be continued". According to their statements, the management of the study field chose to take an opposite approach by designing the study programme to be more generalized. It can be concluded that the current approach and the developed study programme only partially align with the requirements set out in the professional standard.

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

Almost all recommendations from previous assessment procedures have been implemented. Certain recommendations made during the previous accreditation process (no. 2. and 3.) still require more comprehensive implementation. Some of the previously suggested recommendations (for ex., no. 5., 13., 14.) require continued implementation to further enhance the study process and improve its quality.

Strengths:

- 1) Collaboration with industry representatives has been enhanced and intensified, resulting in the implementation of guest lectures, educational excursions, and other initiatives.
- 2) English language skills are improved for both - academic personnel and students.

Weaknesses:

- 1) No system or procedure has been established for creating evaluation criteria and ensuring that students are adequately informed about them.

2) A system and method for obtaining meaningful and well-founded feedback from employers has not been developed.

#### Assessment of the requirement [4]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Recommendation No. 2 (Annex 2.6.1.), which, among other things, suggested making the evaluation of the study results system more transparent and comprehensible, has been only partially implemented. The assessment of study results remains inadequately stated and communicated. Similarly, Recommendation No. 3, which requires that feedback on stakeholders' opinions be provided on a regular basis, has also been partially implemented. A systematic approach for obtaining industry feedback has not been established. Uncertainties also arise regarding the alignment of the study programme's title and content with an entirely different professional standard.

### 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

#### Short-term recommendations

Experts recommend to consider acquiring one of the plagiarism detection systems that offer broader capabilities for plagiarism control and are widely used by many higher education institutions in Latvia (e.g., Turnitin, CAPS, or other similar systems). Additionally, a simple yet effective system for identifying academic integrity violations within study courses should be established.

It is recommended to develop rules on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and its resources in the study process.

Experts advise to develop a system that includes the creation of assessment criteria for each examination (midterm tests and exams) and ensures that students are informed about these criteria.

Experts advise to collect feedback through the use of focus groups so that there are diverse instruments to learn how students experience their study programmes and the University, thus making the feedback stronger and more reliable.

It is recommended that the Vice Rector for Students may call biannual town halls where information about quality matters is shared orally and there are opportunities for question-and-answer sessions. This may be a more effective channel than through the Student Council, or at a minimum a complementary approach. Such sessions may also be conducted in a hybrid format (online and in person) thus maximising attendance and engagements.

Experts recommend to ensure that eventual complaints and proposals are submitted according to the prescribed procedures, in order to assure their traceability.

Experts advise to update the ISMA's website regularly with current information.

It is recommended to include mechanisms and criteria in the ISMA's development plan to evaluate the implementation of the activities outlined in the plan.

## Long-term recommendations

It is essential for the study field development to have more than one study programme, thus ensuring succession and acquisition of higher level knowledge. ISMA shall either develop a new undergraduate study programme or consider transferring the current tourism area undergraduate programme to this study field.

It is advised that the cooperation with the specific industry sector - travel agencies and tour operators must be reinforced.

It is recommended to develop strategy to attract more teachers from abroad.

Experts recommend to engage with alumni through the creation or use of a Graduate Advisory Board.

Experts advise to better align the research directions with the curriculum objectives and learning outcomes.

It is recommended to establish a system to support faculty members at the beginning of their careers in initiating research.

Experts recommend to acquire the current academic literature supporting research, also English-language materials in the library that support research.

Experts recommend to implement intercultural workshops or mentorship programmes that promote interaction between international and domestic students.

## II - "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

##### 2.1.1.

The goal of the study field is preparing versatile and creative specialists that would be able to compete in the global tourism industry and contribute to its sustainable development (SAR p.59). The aim of the study programme is formulated emphasizing competence, social responsibility and a sustainable approach to development and marketing of tourism services (SAR p.59).

The "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" study programme aligns with the "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organization" study direction.

##### 2.1.2.

The short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" awards the professional qualification of "Tourism Service Organizer," corresponding to Level 5 of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (SAR p.59).

Section 5 of the Vocational Education Law defines the fifth level of professional qualification as having "theoretical and practical preparation that enables individuals to perform complex tasks as executors as well as to organize and manage the work of other specialists." Based on this definition and the provisions outlined in the professional standard ("Tourism Service Organizer"), the experts consider the title of the study programme, "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business," to be debatable. This title implies a broader scope of professional competencies, which is more aligned with the qualifications expected at Level 6. The experts recommend aligning the title of the study programme more closely with the 5th level of the professional qualification level, suggesting

alternatives such as "Tourism Services Organizer" or "Travel Organization Specialist".

According to the SAR (p.59) and to interviews, the study programme "is fully consistent with the qualification to be obtained – Tourism services organizer". However, after evaluating the "Map of Professions Included in the Tourism Industry Structure" ([https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK\\_turisms.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_turisms.pdf)) the experts conclude that the mentioned professional standard is specific to the tourism sector within the broader industry framework. Consequently, it pertains to professions involved in the provision of tourism services. The tasks of professional activity outlined in the professional standard include responsibilities and duties expected of tourism service organizers working within "tourism service organizations" (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-206.pdf>).

Consequently, the experts believe that the aim of the study programme is defined much more broadly than prescribed by the professional standard, as it also encompasses the preparation of "competent and socially responsible tourism service organizers for work in tourism and hospitality companies, who are able to prepare and offer attractive and sustainable tourism service programmes".

The tasks are formulated in very general terms. For example, the task "To organize and develop cooperation with other educational institutions and professional organizations, as well as employers for organizing training based in the professional environment and improvement of the quality of study programmes" can be applied to any study programme. There is a lack of clarification to what sector of industry enterprises cooperation is planned and how cooperation with professional organisations will improve the quality of the study programme.

The defined expected learning outcomes are defined in accordance with the professional standard. However, as the aim is formulated more broadly than specified in the professional standard, it cannot be concluded that the aim, tasks, and expected learning outcomes are consistently aligned with one another.

The programme code is 41812, which corresponds to the educational programme group "Organisation of tourism and recreation".

The study programme will be implemented in two formats: full-time on-site (duration: 2 years) and part-time distance learning (duration: 2 years and 5 months). It will be available in Latvian and English for both formats.

Admission of students to the study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" will take place in accordance with ISMA Admission Regulations, which are approved annually by ISMA Senate (SAR p.59) and published on the ISMA website ([www.isma.lv](http://www.isma.lv)). The eligibility criteria for enrolling in the study programme are defined in accordance with the applicable regulatory requirements (Law on Higher Education Institutions).

The programme is open to Latvian citizens, non-citizens of the European Union, citizens of the European Economic Area, citizens of the Swiss Confederation, and residents of the European Community holding a valid residence permit. Foreigners without a permanent residence permit may study at ISMA according to the conditions outlined in Section 83 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The procedure for the admission of foreigners is provided in Annex 1.4. The study programme accepts students who fulfill the criteria outlined in the Agency's internal regulations, "Admission Rules for Studies in the College of the State Agency of Social Integration." This includes individuals who have completed secondary education and those who have shown suitable qualifications through assessments of prior education, knowledge, skills, motivation, and other relevant factors necessary to commence studies in the specified study programme (SAR, p.59). According to experts, the admission criteria meet the legal requirements.

Graduates and students praised the duration of the study programme, number of contact hours, delivery and implementation of the courses, and also the level of English language (besides the Latvian). In this regard the study programme features are reasonable and justified.

2.1.3.

The study programme has undergone significant changes compared to the previously accredited version, including a new title, a new professional standard, and partially revised content. Consequently, it is challenging to evaluate the modifications made.

According to the SAR, since the previous accreditation of the study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business", several changes have been made to the programme's indicators, taking into account feedback and recommendations from the accreditation experts, shifts in demand, and the need to align with labour market requirements and scientific developments. Specifically, the study programme's name, aim, objectives, awarded qualification, and programme code have been revised. However, the total number of study credits, programme duration, forms of delivery, admission requirements, and final examinations remain unchanged. Previously, the programme was worth 80 ECTS credits; it has now been updated to 120 ECTS credits, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions. According to the ISMA Rector's order, 1 ECTS credit point corresponds to 25 academic hours (SAR, p.58).

The qualification was changed to "Tourism Services Organiser." As a result, the programme name was expanded from "Entrepreneurship in the Restaurant Business" to "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business." Along with these changes, the programme code was also updated to 41812. The aim, objectives, and learning outcomes of the study programme have been partially revised in line with the feedback and recommendations from accreditation experts, the qualifications framework developed by the Tourism and Beauty NEP (Councils of Industry Experts), the Latvian National Development Plan for 2021-2027 (LNAP 2021-2027), as well as the evolving needs of the labour market and trends in scientific development. These revisions align with ISMA's development strategy and the overall goal of the study field.

The full name of the study programme is the short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business", which is only partly aligned with the qualification to be awarded: Tourism Services Organiser. The programme is designed only partly in accordance with the relevant Profession standard for Tourism Services Organiser, which was approved at the meeting of the Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council on Professional Education and Employment on February 9, 2022, Protocol No. 1. Link to the standard: <https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-206.pdf> (in Latvian). The compliance to the professional standard is analysed in detail in the chapter 2.1.2. Given reasoning does not fully explain why the mentioned change was introduced. In line with the Standard and current labour market needs, the aim of the study programme focuses on developing competence, social responsibility, and a sustainable approach to the development and marketing of tourism services, which only partly corresponds to the Standard. The objectives of the programme are designed to achieve this aim, ensuring the alignment of study content, the acquisition of professional knowledge and skills, the study environment, lifelong learning opportunities, and cooperation. However, the purpose of this type of short-cycle study programme is to train specialists with the necessary knowledge, which in this case is a bit too broad and more in line with the objectives of the bachelor's programme.

#### 2.1.4.

According to the SAR (p. 60) the study programme emphasizes fostering the sustainable growth of tourism, supporting economically disadvantaged regions, and contributing to their development. The study programme targets a broad audience, including professionals in tourism, hospitality, and catering across both the private and public sectors (e.g. tourism information centers and organizations focused on tourism promotion). It also caters to individuals interested in starting a business or gaining advanced knowledge and skills in the fields of tourism and hospitality. The study programme "Entrepreneurship in the Restaurant Business," later restructured as "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business," has been attracting young people. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the tourism industry, causing losses and some organizations ceased operations. This downturn affected both the number of ISMA students and the employment opportunities for students and graduates.

Most of the students were studying intramural before the pandemic, and the numbers varied from 35 to 37. During the pandemic numbers have fallen to 12, and after the pandemic was over, the numbers of enrolled students to the previously accredited study programme (Entrepreneurship in the Restaurant Business) started slowly to regain: 12 in 2021, 13 in 2022, and 20 in 2023 (SAR, p. 61).

Interviewed representatives of employers insisted that such a study programme is needed and appropriate. Students and graduates explained their reasons for joining the previously accredited study programme (e.g. first step into higher education, need to gain some theoretical knowledge additionally to already gained practice from work, entrepreneurial goals, etc.) and expressed the need for such a programme (previously accredited or changed) to exist. The number of enrolled students fluctuated, but the enrollment was stable, ISMA also hopes for a greater attractiveness of the changed study programme and a greater enrollment of foreign students. However, experts emphasize that the need to recruit staff and graduates of this study programme does not justify partial non-compliance with the professional standard, as described in the previous chapters.

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

Based on the content defined for the Level 5 professional standard in the "Vocational Education Law" and the competencies outlined in the professional standard "Tourism Service Organizer," the study programme's title only partially aligns with its content and the requirements for the programme.

The "Map of Professions Included in the Tourism Industry Structure" clearly indicates that the profession "Tourism Service Organizer" falls within the tourism section of the broader industry map. This implies that the profession is designed for roles in tour operators and travel agencies. This is also confirmed by the professional standard, which defines that a tourism service organizer works within tourism service organizations. Thus, the experts conclude that the study programme's title, objectives, expected outcomes, and content only partially align with the professional standard. The programme is much broader in scope and, as mentioned during interviews, has been intentionally designed to cover three main sectors of the tourism industry: accommodation, catering, and tour operators/travel agencies. However, this approach does not correspond to the profession map or the standards defined therein.

Strengths:

1) The programme is open to Latvian citizens, non-citizens of the European Union, citizens of the European Economic Area, citizens of the Swiss Confederation, and residents of the European Community. Admission to the study programme is planned according to legislation and requirements.

Weaknesses:

1) The title of the study programme is significantly broader than what is defined in the applicable laws and professional standard, as well as it only partially corresponds to the content outlined in the developed study programme.

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

### **Analysis**

#### **2.2.1.**

The study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" includes the courses which develop knowledge, skills and competences in client psychology, general skills of customer service and marketing. However, the new curriculum does not include the courses of human resource management, conflict management, tourist (tourism) experience design and use of AI in the learning

process and tourism.

The customer service standards course seems too narrow, and there is doubt whether it includes essential topics related to customer service principles, communication skills, and handling guest complaints. Is the content current and reflective to the latest trends and best practices in the hospitality industry.

It is very positive that two traineeships were combined into one, giving students the opportunity to study and understand the company's operations in more depth and to write a qualification thesis based on the company. According to course description (annex 3.1.7., p. 154), students have the opportunity to choose to complete a traineeship in several different tourism companies (in catering enterprise, in hotels, in travel agencies, etc.). On the one hand, it gives the student the opportunity to choose between the field he/she likes, on the other hand, it does not fully meet the professional standard which is "Tourism Service Organizer" and which would assume complete traineeship in tourism organizations. In the professional standard, all competencies are related to working in a tourism organization (annex 3.1.4).

Upon evaluating the compliance of the study programme with national requirements, the experts conclude that the programme meets the criteria outlined in the education standard but only partially aligns with the requirements defined in the professional standard. As previously mentioned, the mandatory content of the programme only partially enables students to acquire the competencies specified in the standard. This is also apparent from the comparison submitted by ISMA regarding the programme's alignment with the standard (annex 3.1.4.). For example, in the professional standard, the ability to communicate freely and constructively about quality changes in the performance of suppliers/cooperation partners is listed as one of the competencies (annex 3.1.4.). At the same time, the very important subject "Tourism Service Quality Management" is offered only as an optional subject. The importance of sustainability is mentioned in the professional standards several times, but the study course "Sustainable Tourism Development" is only offered as an optional study course in the curriculum. Therefore, it is recommended to revise the curriculum and add some optional study courses to the list of compulsory study courses.

In recent years, providing higher education in the form of work-based learning has become more important in higher education policy and practice in almost all EU countries. ISMA does not currently offer work-based learning, which could effectively meet employers' needs. Work-based learning is an effective way to combine theory and practice, providing students with the opportunity to acquire real-world skills and experience that are highly valuable to employers.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3.

The use of various teaching methods such as lectures, seminars, case studies, excursions, and online tools like sli.do, Kahoot!, and Socrative.com (SAR, p. 65) is commendable. Incorporating guest lectures and excursions provides students with practical insights and real-world experience. Encouraging students to use the Scopus database for their research is an excellent practice. Allowing students to influence their study process and making adjustments based on their needs, is highly beneficial. The regular sharing of experiences among academic staff and the organization of conferences like "Open learning and Distance Education" (SAR, p. 66) demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and the adoption of modern teaching methods. The process of informing students about learning outcomes, assessment methods, and final evaluation criteria at the beginning (SAR, p. 66) helps students understand what is expected of them.

Although the teaching methods are very diverse and student-centered, and with practical output, there is still room for development, for example, hybrid learning, e-courses and work-based learning could be developed. The conversation with the teaching staff revealed that hybrid learning is not used in teaching and no e-courses have been developed. Hybrid learning and e-courses make learning more flexible and learner-centered. The short-cycle study programme is more practically oriented than the bachelor's programme, so ISMA could also think about offering work-based study.

#### 2.2.4.

The study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" includes practice worth 24 ECTS, which is 20% of the total volume of the study programme, which is in compliance with educational standard (annex 3.1.3). Such a volume is very sufficient in a curriculum with a practical orientation. All traineeship objectives are related to the learning outcomes of the study programme, and knowledge, skills, and competences acquired during the study courses. The learning outcomes of the study programme are based on the professional standard, but only partially, because the learning outcomes are more broadly related to different enterprises, but the professional standard is more narrowly related to tourism organizations. The achievement of learning outcomes is checked with a traineeship report. The course description (Annex 3.1.7.) states that the student must conduct a self-evaluation. However, there was no self-evaluation in all reports read by the expert. The traineeship reports can be said to be comprehensive, but some reports lack the self-evaluation section and the link between theory and practice is missing in some reports. Since the traineeship report is an academic document, it could be properly formatted and use academic sources to analyze the connection between theory and practice.

ISMA continuously develops career opportunities for its students, ensuring they are well-prepared for the labour market. New partnerships and regular meetings with employers help expand traineeship opportunities. Regular surveys are conducted to understand students' preferences and opportunities for traineeships.(SAR, p. 67)

Although the internship process is analyzed quite thoroughly in the report and in ISMA study course description "Traineeship" (annex 3.1.7.), it is not clear how the internship takes place if the student is already working in a tourism company. In a conversation with students, it became clear that some students are already working alongside their studies. It is not clear from the report whether recognition of prior learning and work experience is also taken into account when evaluating internships.

The encountered difficulties in the practice arrangement, such as academic debts, language barriers of foreign students and the need for more practical knowledge of students, are honestly analyzed. These are challenges for ISMA to develop new strategies to solve these problems, such as finding new internships for foreign students, etc.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

#### 2.2.6.

The SAR shows that the topics of the qualification work chosen by ISMA students are very important for the hospitality and catering industry. The practical application of the research and the feedback from the employers show the students' potential readiness for the labor market. It is highly appreciated that students' final theses are tightly connected to their practice placements and the problems to be solved in real business. It is greatly valued that the research results are published in a collection of scientific articles, such as the annual scientific theses of the ISMA International Conference IT & Management. ISMA has developed a very precise guide ("Regulations and Methodological Guidelines on Qualification Paper Development"), which helps students prepare their theses. The guideline states that students must find the theoretical grounds of the problem. The curriculum also emphasizes the importance of English language proficiency. Familiarizing with different final theses, it can be said that students have not used academic sources in the theoretical part of their theses. The main sources are in Latvian, with very few sources in English, especially scientific articles in English. Furthermore, it is not clear from English language summaries exactly which research methods have been used.

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

The new study programme is designed according to labor market demand, labor market trends, and student feedback. However, some courses in the curriculum should be critically reviewed and

updated based on research, adding, for example, courses in human resource management, conflict management, tourism experience design, etc. Consideration could also be given to a more modern approach to the customer service standard course.

It is highly commendable that a variety of teaching methods are used in the study process, and that students are encouraged to use the Scopus database. On the other hand, it is noticeable that academic sources are used very minimally in the final theses. Further development could be done on the hybrid learning and e-courses.

It is greatly valued that the curriculum includes a significant part of practical training and the university maintains close ties with employers. Consequently, the topics of the final theses are related to solving real-life problems. These are closely linked to internships and often continue the research topics started during the internships, which is highly encouraged. However, internship reports show that students have not sufficiently familiarized themselves with the literature during their preparation and have not followed the necessary formatting requirements for academic work.

Strengths:

- 1) the study programme is aligned with labor market demand and trends, and student feedback;
- 2) the teaching methods are very diverse and student-centered, and with practical output;
- 3) the significant component of practical training in the curriculum;
- 4) the practicality of final thesis topics and solving employer-relevant problems in final theses.

Weaknesses:

- 1) the curriculum lacks some important subjects, such as human resource management, tourism experience design, etc.;
- 2) students do not use enough academic sources in their final thesis.
- 3) The syllabi occasionally lack specificity. The section "Description of the Organization and Tasks of Students' Independent Work" included in the syllabus reflects both the tasks of independent work and the assessment methods, creating ambiguity regarding what constitutes independent work and which tasks will be evaluated. The assessment criteria are not specifically defined for evaluating the completion of the particular study course.
- 4) The mandatory part of the study programme does not include sufficient courses that would enable students to acquire the competencies defined in the specific professional standard.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

#### **Analysis**

##### **2.3.1.**

The study programme is delivered entirely on the premises of ISMA, which are fully equipped and suitable for the implementation of the programme. The classrooms are sufficient in number and are equipped with computers and the necessary software. There are 4 computer labs available for study purposes.

There are several classrooms specifically equipped for lessons on food service and catering organization. However, it should be noted that catering service organization is not the primary focus of this study programme. According to the information provided in the SAR (p.69), students have the opportunity to learn the operation of the R-keeper and "Storehouse" systems, which are software

tools used for inventory management, calculations, processing, and issuing invoices, among other functions. Unfortunately, while these tools are highly relevant in the catering business, they are not particularly significant for work in the tourism services industry. According to the SAR (p.70), ISMA utilizes Amadeus as one of the essential software tools for this study programme. However, the experts were unable to verify this during the on-site visit. The syllabus for the course “Travel and Hotel Management Information Technology” indicates that Amadeus, among other software platforms, is intended to be taught. As a result, the experts assume that this software will be acquired.

The informational resources, such as study materials, assignments, and selected video lectures, are accessible to students through the Moodle system. Students interviewed during the visit stated that these resources are sufficient and meet their needs. Although ISMA has acquired several industry-specific books for the library, the library's overall resources are not sufficient. The selection of books in English is limited both in variety and number of copies, and there is a notable lack of books on research methodology. A positive aspect is that students have access to the Scopus database, which is a valuable resource.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3.

ISMA is a private HEI. In addition to revenue from tuition fees, the university also engages in other initiatives, such as various courses and international projects, thereby generating additional income for the institution. According to the SAR (p.71), income from tuition fees makes up 75% of all income, income from training courses -6%, income from contract research - 5%, income from other research activities - 11%, and income from rent, utilities and other services - 3%. Based on the information provided during the interviews, it can be concluded that, despite ISMA currently having sufficient resources to implement the study programme, the university does not have a specific plan for securing funding for the particular study programme.

When planning the allocation of funding for study programme, the ISMA board considers specific parameters, including: ensuring administrative and operational activities, maintaining the functionality of the facilities used, providing study materials for the learning process, supporting the university's social activities, offering financial assistance to students, updating and enhancing teaching equipment (e.g., computers, software), and conducting marketing activities (SAR p.72). The SAR (p.73) states that one full-time student costs the university 4997,00 EUR while a part-time student costs 4911,70 EUR. According to the university's calculations, in order to ensure the programme's profitability the minimum number of students in the study programme, regardless of the language of studies, is 4 students in full-time studies, while in part time extramural studies it is 3 students. However, simplified calculations based on a group of 4 students and the tuition fee set by the university for third-country students (3,300,00 EUR) fail to cover the anticipated expenses. Consequently, it is uncertain whether a group of 4 students is financially sustainable for the HEI.

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

The study programme doesn't benefit from stable state funding, which provides a solid financial foundation. This way, it faces challenges in maintaining competitiveness without state support. There is also a lack of a clear plan and motivation for attracting additional funding, and no plan on how to allocate financial resources for scientific activities.

Strengths:

- 1) Fully equipped and suitable for the implementation of the programme premises in the ISMA campus.
- 2) Students have sufficient information resources regarding their study courses on the Moodle system.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The library lacks sufficient informational resources specifically related to the tourism industry and research methodologies.
- 2) The absence of a clear financial plan undermines long-term sustainability.

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

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

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

The programme has adequate infrastructure and basic resources, but gaps remain in the library's tourism-specific and research methodology materials, and the use of essential industry software like Amadeus is unverified. Additionally, the absence of a clear financial plan undermines long-term sustainability.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

#### 2.4.1.

The academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme, its composition, and selection meet the criteria established by the Law on Higher Education Institutions. According to the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Annex No. 2.3.1., the study programme is implemented by a total of 19 lecturers, of whom 8 hold a PhD and 6 are professors or associate professors, which is an excellent indicator for short-cycle programmes. This composition reflects a strong academic presence for implementing practical study programme.

Upon evaluating the CVs of the lecturers involved, it must be concluded that not all lecturers can be regarded as in depth experts in the specific fields they are teaching (e.g., courses such as "Legal Regulation of Tourism Business" and "Logistics"). Several courses are taught by lecturers with educational backgrounds in English philology rather than expertise in the respective subject areas.

For the short cycle study programme more practical knowledge would be necessary. This raises concerns regarding the sustainability and depth of specialized knowledge within the programme. However, academic staff are qualified enough to deliver the study courses that are necessary for the programme.

Information in the annex does not specify whether any of the lecturers deliver courses exclusively in one of the implementation languages (Latvian or English). Therefore, it is assumed that all lecturers teach in both languages. Of the 19 lecturers involved in the programme, based on Annex No. 2.3.1., 10 have English language proficiency at the B2 level, 2 at the C1 level, and 7 at the C2 level. However, observations during interviews with the lecturers suggest that the self-reported highest levels of English proficiency for some lecturers may be subject to discussion. Nonetheless, no significant communication issues in English were observed. It can be concluded that the lecturers' English language skills are adequate for study course delivery, though further improvement in language proficiency is recommended.

#### 2.4.2.

As the study programme offered for accreditation differs significantly from the one accredited in the previous accreditation period, it is difficult to assess the impact of changes in the composition of the academic staff on the quality of the study programme. There are some changes in academic staff that were made during the review period, but, according to the information provided in the SAR (p.73), these changes are not significant ones. In the SAR it is stated that a number of teaching staff members with considerable experience in teaching and practical work have also been involved

(p.73). However, it should be noted that greater involvement of professionals from the tourism industry in the implementation of the study programme is desirable.

To ensure the recruitment of qualified new lecturers (including visiting lecturers), a system has been developed that, in addition to verifying formal criteria, includes candidate guest lectures. These lecturers are evaluated by the programme director, other lecturers, and students, as indicated during the interviews.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4.

A part of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme has published at least one scientific article in the past six years. According to Annex No. 2.4.2, 14 out of 19 lecturers have published their research in Latvian or international scientific journals or conference proceedings. It should be noted, however, that only five lecturers have conducted research specifically in the field of tourism.

While it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from the information provided in the annex (as it is not well-organized and systematized), it can be stated that the majority of publications are not included in Q1 or Q2 journals, nor are they indexed in Web of Science (WoS) or Scopus. Exceptions include publications outside the field of social sciences or a few focused on employment or social aspects unrelated to tourism or business. Given that tourism is an interdisciplinary field, a greater emphasis on research and publications specifically related to tourism or business would be highly desirable.

Five lecturers have professional experience in the specific field.

In conclusion, it can be stated that all lecturers have either published their research in recent years or possess relevant professional experience. Therefore, their competence is appropriate for the implementation of the study programme.

2.4.5.

According to the SAR (p. 74) ISMA implements collaboration of teaching staff in three blocks: 1) Cooperation of the teaching staff in the development and updating of study programmes and study course descriptions; 2) Cooperation of the teaching staff in the improvement of methodological work.; 3) Collaboration of the teaching staff in scientific research creativity. The content of the study courses is regularly discussed by the lecturers at the Study Direction Council meetings, departmental meetings, and also in individual informal meetings of teaching staff where lecturers share information and coordinate their work and study courses. It is possible that collaboration exists among lecturers regarding the development of course programmes and methodological work. However, this collaboration appears to lack sufficient systematization. Neither during the interviews nor from the submitted documents did the experts gain confidence that such discussions and coordination occur regularly or that their outcomes significantly influence the quality and development of the study programme. Based on the SAR (p. 40), it can be inferred that the scientific activities of the lecturers are not specifically coordinated. Lecturers primarily share their research during scientific conferences.

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

The qualification of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments. The programme's implementation includes contributions from both industry specialists and HEI faculty members.

Seventy-four percent of the lecturers involved in the programme conduct research and publish their findings. However, it must be noted that the results are predominantly published in journals not indexed in Web of Science (WoS) or Scopus. Moreover, only a very small number of publications are directly related to the fields of tourism or business.

ISMA has a mechanism for mutual cooperation among the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme, however, it is neither systematic nor adequately formalized. In the experts' opinion, the current practice consists primarily of informal discussions and exchanges of opinions, which are not reflected in formal decision-making processes.

During the preparation of the self-assessment report, the ratio between lecturers and students was 1:1 (SAR, p. 75), which is neither cost-effective nor conducive to the methodological and pedagogical development of the lecturers.

Strengths:

1) Academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme include 42% with a PhD, along with six professors or associate professors.

Weaknesses:

1) A relatively small number of lecturers conduct research in the field of tourism, resulting in a very limited number of publications in this area.

2) A relatively small number of publications are in journals indexed in Web of Science (WoS) or Scopus.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments.

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

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme complies with the state standard of short-cycle professional higher education, which is defined in the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of June 13, 2023 No. 305 "Rules on the standard of state professional higher education". Study programme is organised in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions and with ISMA internal normative act: Regulations on Studies and document (SAR Annex 3.1.3.Compliance\_education\_standard\_ETB)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Study programme partially complies with the professional standard: The professional standard of Tourism Services organiser, approved on 09.02.2022. Gaps exist between the required professional qualification and the actual content of the study courses (inclusion of certain study courses, which are more suited as optional study courses, into the mandatory study courses). (SAR Annex 3.1.4. Compliance\_prof\_standard). The document submitted by ISMA, titled

"Compliance with the Professional Standard" (Annex No. 1), reflects the incomplete alignment of the study programme with the professional standard. Several knowledge areas defined in the standard—such as requirements of tax-related regulations and consumer protection legislation—are not addressed within the study courses. Experts noticed, that a significant part of the required competencies is intended to be acquired through the study course "Basics of Tourism" (3 ECTS), which raises concerns regarding the sufficiency of knowledge acquisition at the levels of understanding and practical application. The study course "Information Technologies in Travel and Hotel Management," which, based on its title, should be one of the core courses of the programme, unfortunately only partially covers the competencies required by the professional standard. Half of the course topics (8 out of 16) are related to hotel reservation systems, which are not defined within the scope of the specific professional standard. At the same time, the programme includes "Organisation of Catering Operations" (6 ECTS) as a mandatory study course in the field. The stated objective of the study course is to "provide basic knowledge in the field of catering enterprise management, develop practical application skills, and offer opportunities to identify organisational and managerial solutions.", what does not align with the requirements outlined in the professional standard. The inclusion of study courses such as "Cooking Technologies," "Recreology," and "Accounting and Monitoring at Catering Enterprises" as optional courses within the programme lacks clarity.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in Latvian and English and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (SAR Annex 3.1.7. Course\_Description\_ETB)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The information in the diploma sample for completing the study programme is compliant (SAR Annex 3.1.1. Diploms paraugs\_UTB\_ENG)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Staff is proficient in Latvian language (SAR Annex 2.3.1., 2.3.2., 2.3.3. Info\_Teaching\_staff\_TUR; Teaching\_staff\_CV; Acknowledgment\_language)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Staff is proficient in English language (SAR Annex 2.3.4. Acknowledgement\_English)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement (SAR Annex 2.1.5. Studiju līgums) in accordance with the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of January 23, 2007 No. 70 "Mandatory Provisions to be Included in the Study Agreement" issued in accordance with Section 2 of Article 46 of the Higher Education Law.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution in case of closure of study programme. Cooperation agreement with BA Turība provides for the provision of studies in the first-level study programme "Hospitality Service" and the bachelor's study programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management" which are not relevant to the particular ISMA study programme. Experts confirm that the first mentioned study programme is relevant. (SAR Annex BA\_Turība\_ISMA\_sadarbība)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme's licence is revoked due to the actions (actions or omissions) of ISMA and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme (SAR Annex 2.1.4. Apliecinājums zaudējumu kompensācija)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The format and implementation of the study programme comply with the requirements set out in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other relevant regulatory acts. However, the content of the study programme only partially corresponds to the selected professional standard "Tourism Service Organizer." The document submitted by ISMA, titled "Compliance with the Professional Standard" (Annex No. 1), reflects the incomplete alignment of the study programme with the professional standard. Several knowledge areas defined in the standard—such as requirements of tax-related regulations and consumer protection legislation—are not addressed within the study courses. Experts noticed, that a significant part of the required competencies is intended to be acquired through the study course "Basics of Tourism" (3 ECTS), which raises concerns regarding the sufficiency of knowledge acquisition at the levels of understanding and practical application. The study course "Information Technologies in Travel and Hotel Management," which, based on its title, should be one of the core courses of the programme, unfortunately only partially covers the competencies required by the professional standard. Half of the course topics (8 out of 16) are related to hotel reservation systems, which are not defined within the scope of the specific professional standard. At the same time, the programme includes "Organisation of Catering Operations" (6 ECTS) as a mandatory study course in the field. The stated objective of the study course is to "provide basic knowledge in the field of catering enterprise management, develop practical application skills, and offer opportunities to identify organisational and managerial solutions.", what does not align with the requirements outlined in the professional standard. The inclusion of study courses such as "Cooking Technologies," "Recreology," and "Accounting and Monitoring at Catering Enterprises" as optional courses within the programme lacks clarity.

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

The "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business" study programme aligns with the "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organization" study field. Interviewed representatives of employers and students insisted that such a study programme is needed and appropriate. It awards the professional qualification of "Tourism Service Organizer," corresponding to Level 5 of the Latvian Qualifications Framework. Still, the Level 5 professional standard outlined in the "Vocational Education Law" and the competencies specified in the professional standard "Tourism Service Organizer" raise questions about whether the study programme's title aligns with its content and requirements. According to the "Map of Professions Included in the Tourism Industry Structure," the profession "Tourism Service Organizer" pertains to tour operators and travel agencies within the tourism sector. The professional standard further confirms that this role is intended for work within

tourism service organizations. However, the study programme's title, objectives, outcomes, and content only partially align with this standard. The programme has been intentionally broadened to include three main sectors of the tourism industry: accommodation, catering, and tour operations/travel agencies. While this multidisciplinary approach is commendable, it does not align with the profession map or the defined standards. Positively, the programme incorporates diverse teaching methods, encourages the use of the Scopus database, and emphasizes practical training, supported by strong ties with employers. However, the minimal use of academic sources in final theses and the lack of stable state funding pose significant challenges. There is no clear plan for attracting additional funding or allocating resources for scientific activities, which impacts the programme's competitiveness. The qualifications of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, 74% of them being engaged in research and publication. However, most publications are in journals not indexed in Web of Science (WoS) or Scopus, and only a few are directly relevant to tourism or business. All lecturers have either published their research in recent years or possess relevant professional experience. Therefore, their competence is appropriate for the implementation of the study programme. Additionally, while ISMA facilitates cooperation among teaching staff, this is largely informal and lacks systematic or formalized processes. The current lecturer-to-student ratio of 1:1, observed during the self-assessment report preparation, is neither cost-effective nor supportive of pedagogical and methodological development. Addressing these issues is essential for the programme to fully align with its intended objectives and professional standards.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The programme is open to Latvian citizens, non-citizens of the European Union, citizens of the European Economic Area, citizens of the Swiss Confederation, and residents of the European Community. Admission to the study programme is planned according to legislation and requirements.
- 2) The study programme is designed aligned with labor market demand and trends, and student feedback;
- 3) The teaching methods are very diverse and student-centered, and with practical output;
- 4) The significant component of practical training in the curriculum;
- 5) The practicality of final thesis topics and solving employer-relevant problems in final theses.
- 6) Fully equipped and suitable for the implementation of the programme premises in the ISMA campus.
- 7) Students have sufficient information resources regarding their study courses on the Moodle system.
- 8) Academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme include 42% with a PhD, along with six professors or associate professors.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) The title of the study programme is significantly broader than what is defined in the applicable laws and professional standard, as well as it only partly corresponds to the content outlined in the developed study programme.
- 2) The mandatory part of the study programme does not include sufficient courses that would enable students to acquire the competencies defined in the specific professional standard.
- 3) The curriculum lacks some important subjects, such as human resource management, tourism experience design, etc.
- 4) Students do not use enough academic sources in their final thesis and internships reports.
- 5) The library lacks sufficient informational resources specifically related to the tourism industry and research methodologies.
- 6) A relatively small number of lecturers conduct research in the field of tourism, resulting in a very limited number of publications in this area.
- 7) A relatively small number of publications are in journals indexed in Web of Science (WoS) or

Scopus.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

## **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business"**

### **Short-term recommendations**

Experts recommend changing the study programme's title to one that more accurately reflects its alignment with the professional standard and the content outlined in the developed study programme.

It is recommended to engage more lecturers with knowledge and experience in providing tourism services. This is particularly important for the core professional study courses of the study programme.

Experts advise to establish a mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme.

Experts recommend to expand the library's collection by including industry-specific books and research methodology texts in English.

It is recommended to establish designated quiet study areas and collaborative spaces.

Experts recommend to acquire the Amadeus software to implement the study course included in the study programme.

Experts advise to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the professional standard.

### **Long-term recommendations**

Experts recommend to ensure greater motivation of teachers to apply for research projects in the field of tourism and publish articles in WoS and Scopus journals would contribute to updating the contents of the study programme and acquainting students with the latest research findings.

Experts advise to increase the established partnerships with foreign universities and tourism organizations to create exchange programmes and joint research initiatives.

Experts recommend to improve the balance between academic and administrative roles, set clear metrics for research outputs, and review workload distribution to enhance programme quality and support staff motivation.

Experts recommend preparing a clear financial plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of the study programme.

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

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

## Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:	Partially compliant	ISMA ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field through the implementation of its internal quality assurance system, however some of the processes lack the formalization (e.g. gathering feedback from graduates and employers).
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Partially compliant	Some of the staff publishes scientific papers in ranked journals, but the research directions are not aligned with the curriculum objectives and learning outcomes.
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Partially compliant	Cooperation with the institutions in Latvia and abroad is established although a few are directly linked to the study field. The cooperation with the industry has been established but there is a lack of collaboration with a specific industry sector-travel agencies and tour operators-which would be relevant to the study field.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.	Partially compliant	Recommendation No. 2 (Annex 2.6.1.), which, among other things, suggested making the evaluation of the study results system more transparent and comprehensible, has been only partially implemented. The assessment of study results remains inadequately stated and communicated. Similarly, Recommendation No. 3, which requires that feedback on stakeholders' opinions be provided on a regular basis, has also been partially implemented. A systematic approach for obtaining industry feedback has not been established. Uncertainties also arise regarding the alignment of the study programme's title and content with an entirely different professional standard.

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

<b>No.</b>	<b>Study programme</b>	<b>R5</b>	<b>R6</b>	<b>R7</b>	<b>R8</b>	<b>Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)</b>
1	Entrepreneurship in Tourism Business (41812)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Average

### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

None.