

JOINT REPORT BY THE EXPERTS ON THE INCLUSION OF A LICENSED STUDY
PROGRAMME ON THE ACCREDITATION FORM

Rīga Stradiņš University

STUDY FIELD

Sociology, Politics and Anthropology

STUDY PROGRAMME

Academic Master's study programme "Russia and Eurasia Studies" (Code: 45312)

Experts:

Sigita Struberga

Olga Demetriou

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I. Summary of the Assessment

Summary:

The Academic Master's study programme "Russia and Eurasia Studies" (Code: 45312) (study programme) applied for inclusion in the accreditation form of the study field "*Sociology, Politics and Anthropology*" (study field). Currently, this study programme is licensed and implemented at Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU). The experts committee undertook an assessment visit in hybrid format on 5 October 2023 and subsequently completed its report, based on additional study of reporting materials provided.

The study programme is new, currently in its second year. It is an area studies programme that is chosen by students seeking expertise on Russia and the Eurasian region from a political perspective. Students already have a bachelor's degree in relevant fields. Studies are intended for two academic years.

The qualifications of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme are appropriate to the specifics of the study programme and the conditions of its implementation, as well as to the requirements of the regulatory enactments in the field of education. The academic staff of the study programme are experts in the field, they participate in conferences, prepare publications, present reports, participate in research, scientific and experience exchange projects and activities. The academic staff members are involved in research activities both at national and international levels. They participate in research projects, which help to attract grants. They also spend time as visiting staff in prestigious universities helping to enhance knowledge about the programme and its research capacity globally.

The current study programme is unique and topical for current trends and relevant for Latvia and the region. Being a new programme, it has still to recruit to target, currently set at 15 students. 10 students enrolled last year, hailing from Latvia and abroad. Employment possibilities are good, given the expertise the programme offers for careers in politics, diplomacy, security, defence, and the nonprofit sector. Given these prospects, it would be premature for the programme to suffer negative consequences for failing to achieve recruitment targets in the immediate future and before it has had a chance to reap the benefits of a budding reputation on area-specific expertise in a strategic region.

The RSU has the necessary infrastructure, the necessary material and technical support, information support, financial support, and a library. Compliance of the study base, science base, library, material and technical base fully comply with conditions of its implementation, as well as to the relevant requirements of the regulatory enactments.

All long-term and short-term recommendations made at the accreditation stage were taken into consideration. Some however, have been implemented to a greater degree than others. The experts have noted content structure as the main area that remains in need of improvement. The current structure offers a great amount of background and specific knowledge but lacks coverage of the more general knowledge in international relations and security theory, as well as specific

topics while duplicating to some degree, content across modules. Although improved from the accreditation stage, an even leaner structure, with more content to cover methods, public policy, further critical perspectives, and inter-disciplinary study, would be beneficial and render the programme more competitive and efficient. Due to challenges in recruitment, the intended content and intended changes in the content have not been implemented fully in practice.

Positive aspects are the following:

- 1.Strong programme-based knowledge in the provision of academic composition of well-established academics and practitioners.
- 2.The RSU has the ability to pave the way for an innovative approach to regional studies.
- 3.The study programme complies with the legal framework and vision of international development.
- 4.The study programme is furnished with highly qualified experts and this makes it competitive through the specificity in which coverage of the field is approached.
- 5.The study programme incorporates current perspectives, topics, and themes, that are highly relevant on a year on year basis.
- 6.There is good coverage of core specialist themes, including from native Russian scholars.
- 7.The study programme benefits from an extensive and well-maintained library with a vast collection of academic materials. This strength ensures that students have access to a wide range of books, journals, and digital resources, enabling comprehensive research and supporting their coursework effectively.
- 8.The study programme enjoys modern technical support, including up-to-date equipment and software. This strength equips students with the tools they need for practical applications and hands-on experiences in their studies, fostering technological competence and innovation.
- 9.The RSU provides a modern study environment that is attractive to students.

Risks identified:

- 1.Logic and sequence of course teaching: The logic and sequence of teaching within the study courses can be improved to ensure a more coherent and progressive learning path, enabling students to build their knowledge and skills systematically.
- 2.Coverage of core skills and knowledge: The study course lacks sufficient provision of basic knowledge in the fields of political science and international relations studies. A solid foundation in these subjects is essential for students to grasp more advanced concepts and theories effectively.

3.Coverage of research methods: The programme provides an insufficient scope of learning research methods, which are vital for academic education. Research methods are critical for students to conduct meaningful academic research and analysis.

4.Risk of content delivery: In practice, there is a risk that students may not receive the content promised by the programme. This could potentially undermine the effectiveness of the programme and hinder students' ability to meet their learning objectives.

5.Risk of student numbers not reaching the threshold. Given that in its first year the programme recruited 10 students the threshold of 15 may not be immediately reached.

6.Risk that potential breadth of themes not fully covered. There is scope to develop the programme to cover more issues, both specialised and core.

7.Structure could be tightened up to allow (as per 6) the development of more content, both specific and general.

8.The study programme lacks adequate financial backing. The program's financial base does not appear robust. It does not contribute to the maintenance of the sustainability of the programme and its relevance to the submitted content.

II. Description of the study programme

1. Indicators describing the Study Programme

1.	Name of the higher education institution/college	Rīga Stradiņš University
2.	Name of the study field corresponding to the study programme	Sociology, Politics and Anthropology
3.	Name of the study programme	Academic Master's study programme "Russia and Eurasia Studies"
4.	Code of the study programme in accordance with the Latvian Education Classification	45312
5.	Language of study programme implementation	Latvian, English
6.	Amount, duration, form and type of the study programme (also distance-learning)	80 CP, 120 ECTS Full-time, intramural form, 2y Part-time, intramural form, 2 y 6 m Part-time, distance learning, 2 y 6 m
7.	Admission requirements	Academic or professional Bachelor's degree in an accredited study programme in the following social sciences or humanities: political science, economics and business,

		sociology and social work, law, social and economic geography, mass media and communication, military science, history and philosophy, ethics and religion. Students need an English level of at least B2
8.	Address of the study programme implementation, indicating whether the study programme is implemented in the branches of the higher education institution / college	Rīga Stradiņš University, Dzirciema iela 16, Riga
9.	Degree, professional qualification or degree and professional qualification to be awarded	Master of Social Sciences in Political Science
10.	Date of study programme licensing	19.05.2021
11.	Date of starting the implementation of the study programme	01.09.2022
12.	Accreditation term of the study field	31.12.2024

Analysis

1.1.Compliance of the study programme with the study field

The study content of the study programme 'Russia and Eurasia Studies' (study programme) corresponds to the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology (study field). It specifically focuses on the discipline of international relations and aligns well with the study field (description of the study programme p. 4). This study field is important considering the specifics of the geopolitical situation and the expertise held by the experts and academics in this region. The study programme largely ensures compliance with legal requirements and demonstrates good management and quality assurance practices. The knowledge, skills, and competences listed in the Description of the Study Programme (p.8) meet the standards of the master's study programme and fulfil the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Latvia (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/37967-augstskolu-likums>).

The analysis of Annex 17.1 also demonstrates the compliance of the study programme with the educational standard (*Ministru kabineta 2014. gada 13. maija noteikumi Nr. 240 "Noteikumi par valsts akadēmiskās izglītības standartu"* <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=266187>). The courses offered in the study programme align with the study field, although it would be beneficial to provide a general overview of the analyzed region as a whole, followed by specific courses on gender, biopolitics, etc. Future study courses are relevant, and their descriptions ensure quality standards. However, an exception is a course that combines the theory and methods of international politics. Teaching such a course shortly before writing a master's thesis is untimely, and the rationale for such a combination is unclear (based on assessment visit). This shortcoming was also brought to the attention of the creators of the study programme during the licensing process, but

the recommendations were minimally considered. Perhaps replacing less important courses, which have a broad offering and are unlikely to be implemented, with the provision of basic knowledge would be a solution that better reflects the study field in which the study programme is implemented.

1.2. Compliance between the title of the study programme, the degree to be awarded

The content of the study programme corresponds to the requirements of the awarded degree and meets the latest trends in modern regional studies. These trends include such aspects as reflections on the evolving nature of global politics, emphasizing both traditional and emerging issues, as well as integration of multidisciplinary approaches, cultural and identity studies, history, gender and intersectionality, postcolonial perspectives.

The content (annex 19- *Academic Master's Study Programme "Russia and Eurasia Studies" Plans*) of the study programme provides compliance between the title of the study programme "Russia and Eurasia Studies" and the degrees to be awarded- Master of Social Sciences in Political Science, because the study programme title: "Russia and Eurasia Studies," aptly reflects its focus on the region of Russia and Eurasia, encompassing a broad range of subjects and disciplines that are interconnected (description of the study programme p. 11-13). Thus, the programme meets the standard given by the "Regulation on the national standard of academic education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266187-noteikumi-par-valsts-akademiskas-izglitiba-standartu>), since after completing the master's study programme, the student is awarded a master's degree that corresponds to the study results achieved in the relevant field of study. The name of the study programme corresponding to the Latvian education classification, the content and the name of the degree to be obtained are interrelated and result from the study results that can be achieved in the study programme.

This study programme is designed to provide students with an in-depth and multidisciplinary understanding of this significant region's socio-political and cultural dynamics. At the same time, more courses that would really reflect Eurasian studies and not only focus on the specifics of Russia would help to better promote the understanding of the region, separating it from the understanding based on Russian colonialism and thus providing a more modern focus on the dynamics of the region. However, the challenge is that the well-designed programme does not allow the student to go through the study process in a sequential, logical way, because the well-designed, in-depth courses are not taught according to the gradual logic of knowledge accumulation (based on assessment visit). Given the varying background of students' prior knowledge, students would benefit from starting their studies with a foundation in international relations theory, as well as possibly the foundations of political science. Likewise, students would also gain, if, upon starting their studies, they would gain an insight into Russian politics and the general specific characteristics of the Eurasian region, which would be followed by more nuanced and in-depth courses, the content of which is really interesting and relevant not only to the programme, but also to the study field in general.

The small number of students in the study programme and the fragmented number of competing programmes taught at the university (description of the study programme p.5) have created the situation that in reality, regardless of the choice of direction, students learn study courses in a

combined order and not in accordance with the applied programme content. For example, students of this programme learn EU economics, which is related to their addition of existing students of the programme "Russia and Eurasia studies" to another study programme, rather than training the intended content (description of the study programme p.12; and based on assessment visit).

The qualification of the intended lecturers (annex 6.1, 6.3.), the further possibilities of its improvement offered by the university (based on assessment visit), create confidence that the mentioned shortcomings can be eliminated.

1.3. Compliance of the study programme indicators (study programme code, amount, implementation duration) with the learning outcomes defined for it.

All indicators are shown in the description of the study programme (p. 7). The compliance of the study programme indicators, including the study programme code (45312), the amount (80 CP / 120 ECTS), and the implementation duration (Full-time, intramural form - 2y; Part-time, intramural form - 2 y and 6 m; Part-time, distance learning- 2 y and 6 m), with the defined learning outcomes (description of the study programme p. 8), is positively addressed.

Overall, the study programme indicators are in harmony with the learning outcomes defined for it. This alignment between study programme indicators and learning outcomes reflects a well-structured educational programme designed to prepare students for successful careers and further academic pursuits in the fields of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology. The question is whether this intended framework will be realized in real life. The current activities and the small number of students do not provide firm conviction about this. By re-evaluating the curriculum to ensure a more coherent study development logic and finding creative solutions to provide practical experiences even with a smaller number of students, the programme can further enhance its quality and overall impact.

Conclusions:

The compliance of the study programme with the study field is positively addressed, taking into consideration various aspects, including positive legal compliance and structural organization. However, it's crucial to underline certain weaknesses that merit attention.

First and foremost, the positive legal compliance of the study programme is a fundamental aspect that ensures the study program's adherence to regulatory requirements and standards. This compliance is essential for the program's credibility, accreditation, and overall effectiveness. It guarantees that students receive a quality education that meets recognized standards, making their degree widely accepted and respected. In this case, all the needed requirements are met.

However, it is important to acknowledge some weaknesses in the programme. One such weakness is the absence of a coherent study development logic. Ideally, a study program should be designed in a way that each course or module builds upon the knowledge and skills acquired in previous ones, creating a logical and progressive learning path. The lack of a logical study development practice may result in gaps in students' understanding and impede their ability to effectively integrate and apply knowledge.

Additionally, the study programme seems to be facing challenges related to practical implementation due to a limited number of students and the fact that RSU itself has developed many mutually competing study programs. Practical components are crucial for applying theoretical knowledge and gaining real-world experience. The shortage of students may make it difficult to offer certain practical opportunities as promised, potentially impacting the program's ability to deliver on its intended practical learning outcomes.

Despite these noted weaknesses, the overall assessment remains positive. The program's positive legal compliance and well-structured organization provide a solid foundation for effective education. Moreover, the program's strengths can continue to be leveraged to address the identified weaknesses. By re-evaluating the curriculum to ensure a more coherent study development logic and finding creative solutions to provide practical experiences even with a smaller number of students, the programme can further enhance its quality and overall impact.

In conclusion, while acknowledging these areas of improvement, the study programme is positively assessed for its commitment to legal compliance, structural organization, and its potential to provide a valuable educational experience for students. The identified weaknesses, when addressed, can contribute to an even stronger and more effective programme in the future.

Strengths:

- 1.The study content of the study programme fits well into the study field and is developed according to the legal requirements regulated by the legislation of the Republic of Latvia.
- 2.The staff of the study programme, content and potential to decrease the identified weaknesses has the ability to pave the way for an innovative approach to regional studies with a strong interdisciplinary background.
- 3.The study programme formally corresponds to modern regional studies in the discipline of international relations.

Weaknesses

1. The logic and sequence of teaching within the study courses require improvement.
2. The study programme lacks sufficient provision of basic knowledge in the fields of political science and international relations studies.
3. The study programme provides an insufficient scope of learning research methods, which are vital for academic education.
4. Risk of Content Delivery.

2. Topicality of the study programme

Analysis

2.1. The topicality of the study programme and the compliance of the content with the tendencies of the industry (area), the changes made since the licensing of the study programme

The study programme is undoubtedly topical and RSU has a clear advantage regionally and globally in the development of this programme. In assessment visit meetings with academic staff and study programme leaders, it was evident that RSU possesses unique expertise in the study field and is able to utilise connections in the region and further afield to provide a rigorous and focused programme of study.

The study programme specifically aims at developing expertise in the study of Russia and this is of vital interest to politically-oriented careers in both the governmental and non-governmental sectors (see next section of this report). The programme takes account of current events and security dynamics, with the war on Ukraine at centre focus, yet without being the sole focus of concern. This heightens the topicality of the programme both in the short and in the longer term. The description of the study programme (p.9) states that specificity is a competitive advantage vis-à-vis other similar programmes in the region and this is evidenced from the set-up of the curriculum (annex 19). Some restructuring of courses to introduce specialisation earlier in the study cycle would accentuate this (see section 4 of this report).

Overall, the content addresses the aims of the programme well and the staff possesses relevant expertise to deliver it in a way that addresses the way political phenomena develop in the region. Its focus on harder security questions is well addressed, there is awareness of broader issues like biopolitics and gender, and there is scope to broaden thematic coverage even more (see section 4 of this report). It is particularly noteworthy that the concern to cover a breadth of perspectives has enabled critical scholars from Russia to be hosted and deliver expertise. More breadth in the coverage could be addressed in the future, to include soft and human security questions as well as domestic politics, public policy and administration, and varied methodological approaches including quantitative ones. To accommodate all this, which is possible to do, a tighter and leaner structure would be helpful.

Changes in the study programme (description of the study programme p.13) indicate taking student feedback into account while also revising content to abide more fully with governmental regulations (p.12). Content adjustments relating to parts A and B have taken account of overlaps (p.12) and this is positively noted.

2.2. Dynamics of the student number and prospects of employment for graduates.

The programme has successfully recruited 10 students in the first year (description of the study programme p.13) but appears to struggle to meet the threshold of 15 set by authorities in coming years (observed in assessment visit meetings). It would be unfortunate for this failure to result in dramatic impact, as there are clear indications of adaptability, resilience, strategic development, and good career prospects for graduates for the future of the programme. These would merit a

grace period for the programme to become further established, to gain reputation and secure its competitive position regionally and internationally.

It is particularly noteworthy that the programme has been able to accommodate students having to live abroad because of contextual factors (description of the study programme p.13). Equally noteworthy is the successful recruitment of students from the region (observed in assessment visit meetings with programme managers). In attracting both students from the region seeking western perspectives and students from further west seeking regional perspectives, the programme is proving a credible address of expertise on Russia and its neighbourhood (description of the study programme p. 14).

In assessment visit meetings with employers, they have confirmed that employment opportunities for graduates are good on the national level. The government sector is particularly receptive and finds unique value in the expertise provided through the programme. Based on this, and in conjunction with a developing international reputation, there is potential for employment of graduates to expand beyond the national level, both for national and international students.

It is important to note that experts in assessment have found out that the lecturer for two study courses was appointed by the employer. The RSU informed the experts that it has not yet made a decision, and there is currently no contract between the faculty and the lecturer. Another employer involved is from the ministry, which makes it difficult to assess the views of employers because of one person. However, this does not affect the assessment of the study programme, but the experts want to ensure that RSU does not make this kind of mistake in the future.

Conclusions:

The topicality of the study programme is evidenced well, primarily through the quality of expertise, the incorporation of perspectives that are current, and the coverage of themes, primarily in security studies. The first makes the programme competitive, nationally and internationally. The second allows it the flexibility to address new themes and areas in a rapidly developing political context. The third ensures that graduates have solid career prospects and that these are flexible enough to allow development within and outside of government.

In terms of content, the coverage could be expanded even further and this would be enabled by some, although not major, restructuring. The biggest weakness lies outside the programme in the prospect of implementing the target threshold of 15 in student recruitment numbers, which would have detrimental effects on a programme that might otherwise flourish in the next few years.

Strengths:

1. Quality of expertise Competitiveness of approach in specificity of coverage.
2. Incorporation of current perspectives.
3. Good coverage of core specialist themes, including from native Russian scholars.

Weaknesses

1. Student numbers not reaching the threshold of 15.

2. Potential breadth of themes not fully covered.
3. Structure could be tightened up to allow the development of more content, both specific and general.

3. Resources and provision

Requirement [R1]: Compliance of the study base, science base (if applicable), information base (including library), material and technical base and financial base with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and for ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes.

Analysis

The RSU meets high level compliance of the study base, science base, information base (including the library), material and technical base, and financial base with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and for ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes is exemplary and pivotal to the program's success (description of the study programme p. 14-17).

The study base, including classrooms, lecture halls, and study spaces, is well-suited to facilitate effective learning. The facilities provide a conducive environment for both theoretical and practical education. Their accessibility and functionality contribute to a positive learning experience. Modern facilities are provided to make the student feel welcome and respected. Additional modern facilities are provided, such as a podcast studio and other highly rated modern facilities. The presence of a robust science base, including specialized equipment, enhances the program's capacity to provide hands-on learning experiences. The program's information base, notably the library, plays a crucial role in supporting academic endeavours.

The library's resources, both in print and digital formats, offer students access to a wide range of academic materials. This not only aids their coursework but also empowers independent research and critical thinking. The material and technical base, encompassing tools, software, and equipment, aligns well with the demands of the study programme. Students have access to modern technology and resources, including a modern e-learning environment (Moodle) which is essential for enhancing their learning experiences and staying current with the latest advancements in the field (based on assessment visit).

Adequate financial support is integral to the smooth implementation of the study programme. It ensures the availability of resources, staff, and infrastructure to maintain and improve the quality of education. Unfortunately, this program's financial base does not appear to be robust and committed to maintaining a high standard of education. The fact that the study programme in its development stage is based on the principle of self-survival and self-covering cannot be considered as a principle of sustainable development in the framework of academic development (information gathered during the assessment visit). However, if the RSU operates solely on the observance of the principle of free trade, then such logic rather leads to the conclusion that without expanding the advertisement of the study programme outside of Latvia in the near future (now), it will not

survive. This approach also has the potential to exist, but then perhaps the studios should not be opened until a threshold of 15 students is reached that can deliver the promised programme content.

Conclusions:

The compliance of the study base, science base (if applicable), information base (including the library), material and technical base, and financial base with the conditions for implementing the study programme is partly commendable. The facilities and provided resources are all well-aligned with the program's goals and are instrumental in ensuring that students have the tools and environment necessary for achieving their learning outcomes effectively. This strong financial foundation is missing to provide strong overall quality and success of the study programme.

Strengths:

1. The study programme benefits from an extensive and well-maintained library with a vast collection of academic materials. This strength ensures that students have access to a wide range of books, journals, and digital resources, enabling comprehensive research and supporting their coursework effectively.
2. The study programme enjoys modern technical support, including up-to-date equipment and software. This strength equips students with the tools they need for practical applications and hands-on experiences in their studies, fostering technological competence and innovation.
3. The RSU provides a modern study environment that is attractive to students.

Weaknesses

1. The study programme lacks Adequate Financial Backing. The program's financial base does not appear robust. It does not contribute to the maintenance of the sustainability of the programme and its relevance to the submitted content.

Evaluation of the requirement [R1]:

Requirement	Compliance			Justification
Compliance of the study provision, science provision (if applicable), information provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and for ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes.	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	<i>Material resources are compliant with the profile of the study programme and provide possibilities to elaborate high quality master studies. However,</i>
	X			

				<i>financial provision does not provide sustainable development for the programme and needs improvement, but it does not affect the evaluation of this requirement.</i>
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Requirement [R2]: 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 of the laws and regulations.

Analysis

There is a high-level compliance of the qualifications of the academic staff, including 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 of laws and regulations has been followed in the documentation provided by the RSU (description of the study programme and annex 6.1, 6.3.).

The academic staff members, including both full-time and visiting faculty, demonstrate high qualifications and expertise in their respective fields. They hold advanced degrees, relevant research experience, and a track record of scholarly contributions. This ensures that students are learning from the best in the field and benefit from their in-depth knowledge. However, there are several risks identified. For example, several lecturers mentioned as potential academic staff in reality are in active politics, which questions their neutral approach (based on assessment visit), as well as availability for consequent availability for lecturing. Besides, the list of proposed lecturers demonstrates a deficit in the availability of lecturers from the Eurasia region (annex 6.3.). While local lecturers contribute significantly to academic programmes, there is a notable deficiency in the infusion of expertise from Eurasian experts. This gap raises concerns about the holistic and comprehensive education that students receive. There is a need for a balanced approach that harnesses the potential of both local and international lecturers to ensure a well-rounded and globally relevant education for students in the Eurasia region.

During an assessment visit, it was noted that the current geopolitical and security situation has posed significant challenges in fostering cooperation with Central Asian countries. These challenges have given rise to certain risks related to academic exchange and mobility programmes. Specifically, it was observed that there was one Latvian lecturer, who's security was endangered in Kyrgyzstan during his academic mobility. Besides, the security situation in the Caucasus might be unstable due to factors such as potential internal or international conflicts, making it risky for academic exchange programmes and mobility. Thus, it is recommended to carefully assess the

risks and consider strategies to mitigate them, such as adapting exchange programmes or developing alternative collaboration mechanisms in response to the changing geopolitical and security environment.

The qualifications of the academic staff align seamlessly with the educational standards and requirements set forth by regulatory bodies and laws. They meet or exceed the minimum criteria necessary for teaching, advising, and contributing to the academic development of students, ensuring that the program's offerings are in line with recognized educational benchmarks. However, it would be necessary to review their participation in more academic conferences and other related academic activities, distinguishing them more from the activity of think tanks that do not meet high-level academic activity standards (annex 6.3).

The composition of the academic staff, including visiting faculty, provides a diverse and multidisciplinary approach to education. This diversity enriches the learning experience, exposing students to a wide array of perspectives and insights. The depth of expertise in various subfields within the programme broadens students' horizons and offers opportunities for specialization.

Conclusions:

In summary, the qualifications of the academic staff and visiting faculty members mostly align effectively with the conditions for implementing the study programme and comply with the requirements of laws and regulations. This alignment guarantees that students receive a high-quality education from experts in the field and that the programme operates in accordance with established educational standards.

Strengths:

- 1.The academic staff and visiting faculty members demonstrate a high level of expertise in their respective fields, ensuring that students receive top-notch instruction and guidance.
- 2.The qualifications of the faculty align with educational standards and legal requirements, assuring the program's compliance with recognized benchmarks and regulations.
- 3.The academic staff's diversity and depth of expertise offer a rich and multidisciplinary learning experience for students. This diversity provides a well-rounded education and exposure to various perspectives within the field.

Weaknesses

1. Insufficient representation of Eurasian Lecturers and limited possibilities of cooperation with regional academic institutions.
2. Potential risks that suggested local visiting lecturers will be able to provide lecturing.
3. Intensive integration with think tank work, potentially blurring the line between academic study, research, and academic interactions with think tank work, is different.

Evaluation of the requirement [R2]:

Requirement	Compliance			Justification
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 of the laws and regulations.	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	<i>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 of the laws and regulations is almost fulfilled. Some risks are identified: availability of lecturers from Latvia and lack of sufficient cooperation with Eurasian regional academic institutions and lecturers.</i>
		x		

Requirement [R3]: 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 artistic creation (if applicable).

Analysis

The study programme emphasises academic rigour and excellence, requiring students to engage with the latest research, developments, and findings in the field of Russia and Eurasia studies. This commitment to academic excellence ensures that graduates are well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to the field. It involves an interdisciplinary approach, allowing students to draw from various fields such as history, political science, cultural studies, and economics. This holistic perspective equips students with a well-rounded understanding of the region. The programme promotes original research, fostering innovative thinking and scholarly contributions. Students have the opportunity to conduct research, publish their findings, and contribute to the body of knowledge in the field via additional, non-typical academic environments to contribute in the think tank work.

The RSU provides a solid foundation for the continued development of its lecturers, offering a range of opportunities for further education and growth in their academic careers. The RSU offers a diverse set of further education courses that empower lecturers to expand their knowledge and teaching skills. These courses can cover a wide array of subjects, teaching methodologies, and educational technologies, ensuring that lecturers remain up-to-date with the latest advancements in their respective fields. Recognizing the importance of effective academic writing, the RSU has established a support system to aid lecturers in enhancing their academic writing skills, including financial mechanisms for those who are keen in developing academic articles. The RSU emphasis on project-based research encourages lecturers to engage in innovative and impactful research endeavours. This approach enables lecturers to develop their research skills and actively contribute to the RSU academic community. The RSU demonstrates its commitment to fostering research by providing lecturers with the necessary administrative support and resources for developing and submitting project applications. This streamlines the process and eases the administrative burden on lecturers, allowing them to focus on their research (based on assessment visit and description of the study programme p. 14-16).

The academic staff has extensive academic and practical experience, which contributes not only to the development of academic knowledge, but also to the integration of the practical, applied aspect in the study process, including additional opportunities offered to students outside the traditional framework. This is confirmed by the academic experience of academic forces, as well as experience in practical politics, think tanks and equivalent activities (annex 6.3 and annex 12; based on assessment visit). This creates an opportunity not only to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical scientific research, but also to develop necessary practical skills in students, which will be useful in future careers.

There is a risk that the declared content and the applied teaching staff, who are highly competent, would not be involved in the implementation of the programme. For example, at least two potential lecturers, which were intended initially, at the moment hold highest level political and administrative positions. The first currently is the Minister of defence and another is the Head of the President's Chancery of the Republic of Latvia (based on assessment visit). In this scenario, if individuals holding such positions are also expected to be lecturers, there could be conflicts of interest or scheduling issues due to the demands of their primary roles in government or administration. Also, it might be questioned their opportunity to do lecturing while balancing the workload they have. It might be necessary to carefully manage their teaching commitments to ensure they can balance their responsibilities effectively.

Conclusions:

The study programme for obtaining a master's degree is a commendable choice for those interested in gaining a comprehensive understanding of a region. The program's commitment to academic excellence, interdisciplinary approach, and encouragement of original research make it an excellent choice for individuals seeking to make a significant impact in the field and beyond. The expertise of lecturers and their intense interactions with decision-makers and policy practitioners,

as well as think tank world empowers to provide additional competences to students. At the same time, there are some risks in this regard mentioned above.

Strengths:

1. The academic staff has extensive academic and practical experience, which contributes not only to the development of academic knowledge, but also to the integration of the practical, applied aspect in the study process, including additional opportunities offered to students outside the traditional framework.

2. RSU provides strong support for the development of research and upgrading skills of the lecturing staff.

Weaknesses

1. There is a risk that the declared content and the applied teaching staff, who are highly competent, would not be involved in the implementation of the study programme.

Evaluation of the requirement [R3]:

Requirement	Compliance			Justification
	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	
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 artistic creation (if applicable).	X			<i>The study programme emphasises academic rigour and excellence, requiring students to engage with the latest research, developments, and findings in the field of Russia and Eurasia studies. This commitment to academic excellence ensures that graduates are well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to the field. It involves an interdisciplinary approach, allowing students to draw from various fields such as history, political science, cultural</i>

				<i>studies, and economics. This holistic perspective equips students with a well-rounded understanding of the region. One risk is identified, but it does not affect the evaluation of this requirement.</i>
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Requirement [R4]: Compliance of the study programme with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other laws and regulations.

No.	Requirement	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	Justification
1.	<p>The study programme complies with the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard, including the minimum requirements for the content of the compulsory civil protection course and the content of civil protection training for employees specified for the implementation of the study programme.</p> <p>The study courses of the <i>professional</i></p>	X			<p><i>According to the document “Compliance of Academic Master’s Study Programme “Russia and Eurasia Studies” with the National Educational Standard” provided by RSU study programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 240 “Regulations on the National Standard of Academic Education” of 13 May 2014 / https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=266187.</i></p>

	<p><i>study programmes</i> include a module for the development of professional competence of entrepreneurship in the amount of at least 6 CP, if it has not been acquired in the previous professional study programme or is not included in the theoretical basic courses of the study programme branch (field of professional activity).</p>				<p><i>In addition to the study programme, students who have not studied the requirements of the Environmental Protection Law and the Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law take the course Civil Defence and Environmental Protection (KPUMTK_012) for 2 CP / 3 ECTS.</i></p>
2.	<p>The study programme complies with a valid professional (occupational) standard, or with the requirements of professional qualification (if it is not necessary to develop a professional standard for the profession), if a professional qualification is awarded after acquisition of the study programme</p>				<p><i>Not applicable</i></p>
3.	<p>The code of the study programme complies with the Cabinet regulations on the Latvian Education Classification</p>	X			<p><i>The code (45312) of the study programme corresponds to Cabinet Regulation No. 322. (13.06.2017) on the Latvian Education Classification.</i></p>

4.	The qualification of the teaching staff ¹ complies with the conditions and requirements set for the implementation of the study programme, which are specified in the regulatory enactments in the field of education including the participation in the implementation of an <i>academic study programme</i> of at least five professors and associate professors together who have been elected to academic positions in the respective higher education institution, except in the cases provided for in Section 55, Part two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.	X			<i>The existing information has not changed since the decision on the licensing of the Study Programme was made</i>
5.	Confirmation of the higher education institution/college that the teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign	X			<i>The existing information has not changed since the decision on the licensing of the Study Programme was made</i>

¹ As used in this document, the term “teaching staff” refers to the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting lecturers, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants of the corresponding higher education institution / college.

	<p>language, according to the European Language Proficiency Assessment levels (the division of levels is available on the website www.europass.lv), if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language</p> <p>or proficiency of the Latvian language at least on the C1 level, if the study programme or a part thereof is intended to be implemented in the Latvian language and the lecturer has not acquired secondary or higher education in the Latvian language.</p>				
6.	<p>The study programme, which is intended to be implemented in a foreign language, complies with the requirements of Section 56, Part four of the Law on Higher Education Institutions</p>	X			<p><i>Taking into account study field in which the Study Programme is planned to be included, the evaluation of the Study Programme (which is Good) as well as its goals, the expert panel strongly believes that the Study Programme must be implemented in English and complies with the requirements of Section 56, Part four of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.</i></p>

					<i>This is especially true since it meets the requirements of Section 7 of Article 56 of the Higher Education Law, which mandates Latvian language study courses for foreign students (Annex 19 Study Plans).</i>
7.	The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement (if applicable).	X			<i>The existing information has not changed since the decision on the licensing of the Study Programme was made.</i>
8.	The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure by which state recognised documents of higher education are issued (if applicable).	X			<i>The diploma and its supplement (annex 24.1.) meet the requirements set out in the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers</i>
9.	The higher education institution/ college has confirmed that it will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of	X			<i>The existing information has not changed since the decision on the licensing of the Study Programme was made.</i>

	the study programme is discontinued (if applicable).				
10.	The higher education institution/ college has confirmed that it guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or omissions) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme (if applicable).	X			<i>The existing information has not changed since the decision on the licensing of the Study Programme was made.</i>
11.	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).				Not applicable.

12.	The scientific and pedagogical qualification of doctors of science complies with the criteria specified in the regulatory enactments regarding the evaluation of the scientific and pedagogical qualification of a candidate for the position of a professor and an associate professor (if applicable).				Not applicable.
13.	The joint study programme complies with the requirements prescribed in Section 55 ¹ , of the Law on the Higher Education Institutions (if applicable).				Not applicable.

Evaluation of the requirement [R4]:

Requirement	Compliance			Justification
Compliance of the study programme with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other laws and regulations.	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	<i>The study programme complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments. No signs were found during the accreditation process that would indicate that any of the considered legal requirements would not be respected.</i>
	X			

4. Implementation of the recommendations received during the licensing of the study programme

Assessment of the implementation of the recommendations provided by the licensing experts of the study programme.

Analysis

The licensing committee had made 10 recommendations at the start of the programme (annex 11 - Plan for the Implementation of Recommendations Provided by Licensing Experts Academic Master's Study Programme "Russia and Eurasia Studies"). Four of these were short-term, 4 were long-term, and 2 were by the QAHE Study Quality Commission. The main report (description of the study programme p.17-18) also highlights advertising activities as having been particularly successful and also mentions the creation of complementary content. It notes continuing work library resources and staff publications. It also specifies improvement in content structure, particularly helped by closer connections to the Department of Political Science and more comprehensive coverage of methods and theories. In this regard, it additionally notes restructuring aiming at addressing overlaps that have included closer communication among staff with the head of the study programme.

These improvements have been well noted and efforts taken in all directions are commendable. It is evident that taking on the recommendations has resulted in a more robust structure and a strong, competitive programme. However, the expert committee has noted room for continuing improvement in particular regarding the restructuring of the course content towards an even leaner programme that allows room for diversification within the field of study.

In specific, the first recommendation on the promotion of the programme has clearly been implemented, with substantial efforts being undertaken through specific events and longer-term campaigns.

Recommendations 2 and 3 refer to content and recommend the introduction of a methods course and the elimination of overlaps in economy courses. These have been implemented quite well, but with room for improvement as detailed further below, in conjunction with recommendations 5 and 8. At the same time, in practice, the intended study courses have been replaced by other economic courses- for example, EU economy (step has taken due to the limited number of students in a programme, which has resulted in uniting student groups with other master programme student groups for studying their study courses).

Recommendation 4 refers to greater communication among staff about their course content to eliminate overlaps in other courses. This has been implemented through processes to enable this communication.

Recommendation 5 has proposed to draw on experienced staff in other departments to enrich the offering of the programme. This has been implemented to a fair extent and with positive results, as evidenced by the on-site meeting (meeting with staff). However, the experts note that considerable scope for further improvement here. Specifically, within the field of politics, content

can be enriched by addressing themes beyond hard security, such as public policy questions and other domestic politics topics. In conjunction with recommendation 2, the programme seems to be lacking a quantitative methodology component, while more critical security approaches could also be improved. It is lacking a well-grounded International relations theory course as well. In interdisciplinary terms, the programme can draw in expertise from staff in anthropology, law and sociology to enrich its social and cultural exploration of the region, alongside history.

Recommendation 6 has sought an increase in staff publications in numbers and quality. This has been taken on board. The staff list supplied does not detail publications but the annex recognises that this is a question of continuous improvement. A list of staff publications could be supplied as attachments to future reports.

Recommendation 7 has asked for continuous improvement of library holdings and while in continuous development, this has been implemented. The onsite visit (tour of facilities) has shown a good range of resources and evidenced proactive initiatives in securing up to date research and study materials, in both hard copy and digital forms.

Recommendation 8 has urged the exploration of synergies with other study programmes with a view to common offerings in courses. Although this has been implemented for the case of another programme, further improvement could be achieved by looking across programmes that can help with synergies on methods and methodology, domestic politics, human security and critical security topics, and interdisciplinary topics (see also recommendation 5 comments).

Finally, documentation requested in recommendations 9 and 10 has been supplied / corrected.

Conclusions:

Most recommendations have been addressed in the most part. Remaining room for improvement exists in considering the structure of the course. More overlap could be weaned out and content could be enriched both within politics and in an interdisciplinary way. The area-specific content, which is rich, could be provided earlier in the study programme.

Strengths:

1. All recommendations have been addressed in large part.

Weaknesses

1. Room for further implementation on recommendations 2, 3, 5 and 8 remains in the sense of eliminating overlaps between courses further, restructuring material, and including more courses on domestic politics / public policy, methodology and methods, and interdisciplinary topics.

III. Assessment of the study programme

	Excellent
X	Good
	Average
	Poor

IV. Recommendations

X	experts recommend that the study programme be included in the accreditation form within this study field
	experts do not recommend including the study programme in the accreditation form within this study field

1. Short-term recommendations:

1.1. During the current academic term, it is recommended to carefully assess the course content to ensure it aligns with the program's objectives. Currently, students have limited access to courses that directly relate to their study programme. Therefore, it is crucial to consider revising the course offerings to provide a more comprehensive and relevant curriculum that effectively meets the educational outcomes of the study programme. This evaluation aims to improve the overall educational experience and align it more closely with the program's goals. Thus, it should be mentioned that to improve the logic and sequence of teaching within a university study program, it is needed to ensure that the course sequence aligns with the overall goals and objectives of the study program. Each course should contribute to the development of competencies required for the specific field.

1.2. It is recommended to evaluate whether the large proportion of lecturers involved in politics is really relevant to such an intensive extent and whether these lecturers will really have the opportunity to give the applied lecture courses.

1.3. In order to address the issue of excessive integration between academic study, research, and think tank work, the developers of the program should establish clear guidelines and boundaries to distinguish between these areas

1.4. It is recommended to ensure that students and faculty understand the distinctions and expectations for each, including relations between students and university; university and think tanks etc., to incorporate discussions on research ethics, academic integrity, and potential conflicts of interest into the curriculum to educate lecturers and students on the ethical aspects of both academic and think tank work; allow students to make informed choices about whether to engage with think tank work, ensuring they understand the potential impact on their academic journey.

2. Long term recommendations:

2.1. Continuing to work with previous recommendations.

2.2. It is recommended for RSU to take a comprehensive approach to evaluate its commitment to the long-term implementation of the programme. To ensure the sustained success and viability of this programme, it is advisable to explore and implement additional strategies to enhance student enrollment and participation. This consideration goes beyond mere intent and encourages the university to proactively seek innovative means of attracting and retaining students in the study programme. Such measures may encompass marketing and recruitment efforts, curricular enhancements, and other student engagement initiatives that foster programme growth and longevity. This broader perspective aims to ensure the program's continued relevance and effectiveness within the university's academic landscape.

2.3. It is recommended to more actively seek and establish partnerships with at least three academic organizations in Central Asia to enhance the development of a more comprehensive and regionally-focused expertise programme. Closely work with the potential partner organizations to define mutual objectives and areas of collaboration and development of the specific courses, research projects, or activities that can be jointly developed to enhance the program's regional expertise will be beneficial for this programme and will empower students from Central Asia.

2.4. It is recommended also to consider implementing faculty and student exchange programmes as part of the partnership. This can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise between institutions, enriching the academic experience for both students and faculty, as well as to attract additional students. By actively pursuing partnerships with academic organisations in Central Asia and maintaining a commitment to these collaborations, the programme can significantly enhance its regional expertise and provide students with a richer and more comprehensive educational experience.

2.5. In order to provide sufficient provision of basic knowledge in the fields of political science and international relations studies, it is recommended to introduce introductory courses that cover the fundamental concepts and theories in international relations. These courses should serve as prerequisites for more advanced topics.

2.6. The research methods course in the field of international relations is fundamental for grasping the essentials of conducting research in this discipline. It is recommended to be offered at the outset of the Master's programme and kept distinct from theory courses. Otherwise, the programme may lean more towards professional training rather than maintaining its academic character.

2.7. To diminish the weakness in a university study programme where the structure could be tightened up to allow the development of more content, both specific and general, it is recommended consider to evaluate the prerequisites for each course to ensure that students have the necessary foundation before moving on to more advanced topics; to remove redundant or overlapping content within the program to create space for the development of new, relevant material.

2.8. To diminish the risk of not reaching the threshold of 15 students in a programme, developers of the programme are invited to consider the following strategies: to consider whether this programme is not competing with other Master programmes realised by the university and to decide about the needed amount of the programmes to be taught. In a case if it is decided to provide this particular programme, to enhance your program's marketing efforts to increase awareness among potential students with highlighting the unique features and benefits of the programme. Another way to promote the program is to offer scholarships, grants, or financial aid packages to attract more students. Financial incentives can make the programme more appealing.