

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Rīga Stradiņš University

Study field: Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology

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

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This report presents the evaluation of the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology" (study field) at the Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU), containing four programmes, covering two levels of academic education, BA and MA level.

These four programmes are:

Academic Master's (second cycle) Study Programme "Social Anthropology" (45314)

Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International Relations and Diplomacy" 45312

Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International System Transformation Studies" 45312

Academic Bachelor's (first cycle) study programme "International Relations - European Studies" 43312

The evaluation was conducted by a panel of five experts, accompanied by a coordinator from the Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA), who visited RSU on July 16-17, 2024, with four experts and the coordinator present in person and one expert present online for the duration of the assessment visit agenda. In addition to the assessment visit, the experts thoroughly analysed the self-assessment reports (SAR) of the study field and study programmes, as well as multiple annexes furnished by AIKA E-platform administration. The experts also requested and received additional information from the RSU after the assessment visit to ensure a comprehensive analysis leading to conclusive findings and recommendations (annex: Answers_23.07.2024.docx), which included:

- (i) information on the breakdown of teaching load per academic staff member,
- (ii) a list differentiating between PhD holders and non-PhD holders among the academic staff,
- (iii) a calculation of the student-to-staff ratio on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis for each program (including and excluding visiting scholars), and a list of theses with both official mentors and consultants (excluding non-PhD holders).

Overall, experts can identify several strengths of the study field, as well as programmes under evaluation.

First, during assessment visit in interviews with students and graduates experts have observed a very high satisfaction with the programmes which they have enrolled or completed. In total, experts have interviewed 8 students and 7 graduates. On a scale from 0 (extremely unsatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied), all students placed their satisfaction level within the 8 - 9.5 range. Students highlighted academic support by their professors, were quite enthusiastic when talking about their studies and they pointed to overall teaching quality and solid IT and library infrastructure.

Second, well-organised and modern IT infrastructure fulfils multiple goals pertained to digitalization, which is quite advanced. During the study visit to the IT Service Centre Technical Provision and Execution convinced us that professors enjoy high levels of support in organising online classes and filming them by integration of Panopto software and available hardware. There is a general trend of a rising number of online lectures available on the Moodle platform. The valuable contribution of the Centre for Educational Growth should be also mentioned, especially in organising workshops with the goal to improve academic staff skills across the board. The library is filled with an impressive number of bibliographic units appropriate for the study field.

Third, research and teaching staff has made improvements over the last couple of years, with rising research output of high-quality. All four programmes boast a majority of very qualified academic staff with experience in research and teaching, as well as excellent English language skills, which is well suited to the planned internationalisation and enrolment of a bigger number of foreign students. Fourth, RSU Research Portal represents a great tool to map out existing research networks and projects. Furthermore, every single member of the teaching staff has a profile which collects data pertaining to ongoing projects, research output, databases, obtained awards, etc. Additionally, every

researcher has a “fingerprint” which derives key research words from their published works in the research portfolio. In this way, researchers enjoy the benefit of greater visibility, which increases the chance of being cited or enlisted in international research consortia.

Fifth, the newly formed Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) has a remuneration structure which incentivises researchers to participate in life-long learning programmes and international research consortia, as well as to place their research in academic journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, especially Q1 and Q2 journals. For every single activity members of the academic staff collect credit points which are then translated into financial remuneration.

Sixth, RSU has established clear principles of academic integrity, which are accessible to all stakeholders. The management structure offers balanced support, combining centralised assistance with course staff autonomy, ensuring a broad range of expertise and innovation. The decision-making processes are clear, detailed, and evidence-based. Annual reviews are comprehensive, involving various stakeholders and diverse information. Effective implementation faces only minor challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the institution fully meets its educational goals and maintains high standards of quality and integrity.

Experts however, also identified the following weaknesses:

First, only 31 out of 77 members of the teaching staff have published articles in journals indexed in WoS, Scopus or ERIH databases in the 2007- 22.02.2024 period. Furthermore, the distribution of publications per member of the teaching staff is quite skewed. In total, 148 WoS/Scopus/ERIH papers have been published since 2017 but 59 of them represent research output of only three researchers. In all programmes there is on average 20% of lecturers who have not published in peer-reviewed journals or books on the moment of submitting current study field evaluation documents. This is mostly due to the large involvement of non-PhD holders in lecturing. In some programmes, one-third of lecturers do not possess PhD., for example, based on annex: 6.2_Anex_Teaching_staff_CV.pdf and 06.1_Anex_Academic_staff_list_Soc_Pol_Ant_ENG_new.xlsx for the Academic Master’s (second cycle) study programme “International System Transformation Studies” 45312 non- PhD holders in the respective field of science and/or related scientific activity are at least 9 teaching staff (3 of them elected others invited)

Academic Master’s (second cycle) study programme “International Relations and Diplomacy” 45312 are at least 6 teaching staff members (4 elected and others invited). This lack of output on behalf of early career lecturers could be tackled by better integration and improved mentoring activities between supervisors and PhD candidates. Furthermore, despite possessing RSU profiles, we have noticed that almost half of the researchers do not have current Google Scholar profiles, which are also very useful in increasing research visibility and citation. The same can be said of Scopus and ORCID profiles. Because creating a Google Scholar profile is a very transparent way of assessing someone’s research impact, especially on behalf of a broader society that is not familiar with ORCID, ResearchGate, Scopus, as well as other tools not widely familiar outside of a narrow academic community. It is very expedient, convenient and gives an easy view into a researcher's recent activities and research focus. It also captures quotations in BA and MA theses, policy briefs, research publication, which also carry some weight and constitute valuable contributions.

This requirement is not overly onerous or burdensome to implement. Experts are not requiring an additional layer of compliance, the implementation of which would take weeks or months of dedicated work. This is something that every researcher can do on their own to improve their research impact.

Second, although strategic documents at RSU and programme direction provide clear vision, indicators for evaluating and assessing quality could be more specific to enable their use in benchmarking ongoing review and setting future goals. Despite the clear and logical strategic objectives that the restructuring process addresses, it appears that there is insufficient attention to the potential shortcomings of the restructuring, and particularly the impact of centralising the

programme director role and shifting its emphasis from academic content to managerial administration.

The fact that all four study programmes are led by one person, who is also pursuing a doctorate, raises serious concerns among experts regarding the viability of this management approach. These concerns include workload and the capacity to effectively manage multiple programmes simultaneously. The position of programme director should adequately encompass both management and scholarly expertise in the specific areas of the programmes being managed, along with more research experience and accomplishments.

In a similar vein, experts identified situations where PhD candidates are tasked with large workloads, which potentially impede their completion of the doctoral programme.

It should also be noted that in the Latvian higher education system, it is considered good academic practice for master's programmes to be taught by lecturers with doctorate degree. In this case, this principle is not respected at RSU. From the perspective of transparency and accountability in the educational process, it cannot be considered good practice for both the bachelor's programmes and the successive master's programmes to be led by the same person. The fact that the same person also conducts lectures and develops a doctoral dissertation is considered an additional burden for objective reasons.

Third, poor turnout in questionnaires (student responses) appears to be a diachronic problem that requires adequate solutions (see more in expert report section "Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System"). Similarly, more emphasis has to be put on information collection as the experts team (ET) deems that the process is skewed towards student recruitment and less on student experience. An actionable plan is currently missing.

Fourth, experts have identified that the proposed name of the Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme under evaluation, titled "International System Transformation Studies", does not correspond to the existing curriculum and study courses of the programme currently titled "Russia and Eurasia Studies". There is no clear academic justification for the proposed change and the ET cannot therefore endorse it. Experts have heard that the reason for the proposed change was to dispense with the word "Russian" but have not heard why more representative alternatives of the content, such as "Eurasian Studies", have not been considered. Experts also note that such consideration would also require updating the course list and expanding it to include courses covering the economy of Russian Federation, and the economies of the neighbouring states. The programme content is, at present, a regional studies programme but not modelled as such in order to offer a unique specialisation in politics, security, economics and law as four distinct pillars.

Fifth, in spite of a very favourable teacher-to-student ratio, which brings many benefits in terms of individualisation of teaching and grading, the relatively small number of students in the study programmes, in the context of uncertain external funding, limits the possibilities of attracting permanent full-time teaching staff with the highest academic qualification. While student incoming and outgoing mobility is solid, the teaching staff's incoming mobility is modest. The issue of teacher-to-student ratio definitely merits an actionable plan to future-proof all study programmes in the face of demographic and other challenges.

Overall, while addressing the identified challenges is of crucial importance to enhance the quality of education, promote faculty and student well-being, improve research outputs, and ensure effective quality assurance practices, experts have found notable strengths in the RSU study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology" and its programmes. Those strengths more than offset some of the identified weaknesses which are to be addressed in the coming period. Hence, there is no question as to the compliance of the study field and the assessed programmes with the requirements for accreditation. All recommendations issued in this report have to be fulfilled in a consistent and gradual manner before the next evaluation cycle, except for the proposed title

programme "International System Transformation Studies", currently titled "Russian and Euroasia Studies". The expert team (ET) cannot assess this proposal as adequately meeting standards, given the misrepresentation of content, which does not ensure the alignment with the programme's content and orientation. The expert team also emphasizes the reassessment of the administrative roles assigned to lecturers, particularly the requirements for the programme director role, to ensure the effective management of the programmes. During the assessment visit, the teaching staff stated in the interview that it takes a lot of time to fill out various reports, and the director of study programmes acknowledged that the administrative burden is high. Therefore, it is recommended to review and discuss the amount of administrative burden with the teaching staff and programme administration.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1.

Based on the expanded details from the RSU's mission (SAR p. 5), the RSU development strategy (available at: <https://www.rsu.lv/par-rsu/strategija-dokumenti>;), and associated plans (<https://www.rsu.lv/socialo-zinatnu-fakultate>), as well as SAR, the criterion regarding the clarity and attainability of the aims of the study field is met. RSU's development strategy articulates clear and attainable goals, focusing on innovative studies in a modern environment and research across various fields including health, living nature, and social sciences. This aligns well with the educational objectives and the advancement of knowledge in relevant areas (SAR, pp.5-7).

Particular goals of the study field are as follows:

- (i) to equip students with comprehensive and detailed knowledge of social and political processes globally and in Latvia, highlighting the role and significance of disciplines such as history, economics, philosophy, communications, anthropology, law, sociology, cultural studies, and other sciences in shaping social and political theory.
- (ii) to enhance students' understanding of the structures, functions, and development of society, including Latvian society.
- (iii) to develop knowledge and essential specialised skills in the methodologies and methods of sociology, politics, anthropology, information gathering, data processing, and scientific analysis, preparing students for ongoing scientific research activities.
- (iv) to provide students with comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge of the social sciences and their applications.
- (v) to offer students the opportunity to specialise and pursue in-depth studies in sociology, political science, or anthropology.
- (vi) to cultivate the ability to analyse social and political processes and trends analytically and contemporarily, applying theoretical knowledge and research skills to address specific societal and administrative challenges.
- (vii) to foster students' understanding and skills in selecting appropriate research methods for each social, political, and anthropological process and phenomenon.
- (viii) to instruct students in conducting independent research and collaborative work, including preparing research plans, developing research designs, implementing them in practice, writing research reports, and composing articles about research findings for publication.
- (ix) to encourage and enhance students' motivation to conduct independent research with either a practical-concrete or theoretical-fundamental focus and to apply the research findings in practice.
- (x) to prepare students for professional roles by arranging internships in state administration

bodies—legislative and executive branches—as well as in other political institutions such as parties, municipalities, the media, research firms, foundations, and non-governmental organisations.

It is demonstrated well that the declared study programmes of the study field are aligned with RSU's strategic goals, such as producing domestic and international scientific results and implementing education that meets societal and individual needs. This suggests that the study fields and programmes are designed to support the strategic development of the institution and contribute to its mission of fostering sustainability.

RSU prioritises the development of human capital and integrates cooperation with the labour market, which indicates a strong link between the study programmes and the needs of society and the national economy. This alignment ensures that graduates are prepared for the modern and future labour markets, fulfilling both current and emerging societal needs. It should also be noted that there are concerns regarding the RSU ability to deliver all the promised specialisations tailored to the labour market, socioeconomic, and governance needs. Historical experience at the RSU indicates challenges in fulfilling all declared specialisations due to several reasons, chief among them the number of students.

An issue that emerges from the stated goals and their alignment with socioeconomic needs is the dual focus on attracting foreign students, cited as a strength and objective of the programmes, while extensively covering Latvia's unique political situation and local governance. This raises two questions: first, whether this approach can genuinely appeal to foreign students who do not intend to stay in Latvia. Second, whether these foreign students, who study in English, are of interest to public administration institutions in Latvia.

The strategic documents outline how different study programmes within a field are interconnected logically through a common focus on innovation, digital transformation, and interdisciplinary cooperation. Such integration enhances the coherence of educational offerings and supports comprehensive learning outcomes. At the same time, the previous accreditation recommendation of the sociology programme stated: "Sociology programmes could be more related with the basic profile of Rīga Stradiņš University – medicine (esp. anthropology)., although the sociology study programme is closed, the Academic Master's (second cycle) Study Programme "Social Anthropology" (45314) could also use cooperation with the basic profile of RSU to develop study courses and research in this field, as the benefits from this cooperation could be mutual, certain progress has been made since the last accreditation.

In terms of sustainability and internationalisation, RSU's emphasis on sustainable development goals and international recognition (<https://www.rsu.lv/en/sustainable-development-goals>) highlights a forward-thinking approach that not only addresses local but also global challenges. The strategy to promote the exportability of higher education and science suggests a clear understanding of the global educational landscape and RSU's role within it. It goes hand in hand with global trends in higher education.

The development plan includes mechanisms for monitoring study quality and implementing targeted improvements. This systematic approach to quality assurance supports the clarity and logical declared interconnection of study programmes, ensuring that they remain aligned with strategic goals and adapt to changing requirements.

From a formalised approach, the declared goals and their implementation monitoring system look great and promising in this aspect, but in reality, the possibilities to identify individual challenges, are just being assessed. For example, the development plan refers to a balanced study process based on theory and practice. In policy programmes, the emphasis on the theoretical part is insufficient. Therefore, achieving the formal goals seems possible only to a limited extent. The same goes for development of skills for qualitative, academically-based knowledge research.

By fostering cooperation with local and foreign institutions and encouraging resource sharing, RSU ensures that its study programmes benefit from a wider range of expertise and innovations, which

supports the educational objectives and enhances the quality and relevance of the programmes offered. Although the strategic documents outline the formal aspects of this, during the assessment visit it became clear from the responses provided by academic staff and students that the actual presence of foreign teachers is less frequent than it appears. They admitted that the lecturers registered as teaching staff in the programme do not participate in the teaching process. Fragmentary guest lectures, which are indeed a common practice and enrich the study content, cannot be considered included in the programme description because RSU does not plan them systematically and strictly according to the study course descriptions. At least, RSU has not provided such data in the SAR, and this data cannot be found on the RSU website or in other relevant sources of information.

1.1.2.

Based on the provided information, the criterion is fulfilled. The SWOT analysis in the SAR is clear, detailed, and candid. It highlights strengths such as high-quality staff with an orientation of professionals of the field, a student- centred approach, and a modules- system in the curriculum (SAR, p.23). Weaknesses identified include the workload of faculty members teaching in various study programs and engaging in extracurricular activities; low faculty salaries; small number of experts in the Latvian Science Council, leading to a limited pool of potential doctoral thesis supervisors; difficulty in involving foreign faculty due to limited financial resources (SAR, p.23). The identified threats include such aspects as demographics, low interest of professionals in PhD studies, financial limitations (SAR, p. 24).

RSU has a well-defined process for developing, approving, monitoring, and periodically reviewing its study programmes. This process is outlined in internal regulations and detailed in procedural documents, ensuring alignment with external regulatory requirements. New study programme proposals undergo rigorous evaluation by various committees and departments within RSU, including the Study Quality Council, Faculty Council, Deans' Council, Rectorate, and Senate.

The implementation and quality monitoring of study programmes are overseen by the programmes directors, who evaluate the study process, outcomes, and feedback from student surveys, as well as changes in labour market trends and industry developments. Several administrative units, including the Study Quality and Development Department, Study Department, Human Resources Department, and Quality Management and Internal Audit Department, are involved in maintaining and improving study quality.

RSU conducts annual reviews of study programmes and study field to summarise the quality monitoring of the study process. These reviews involve programmes directors and members of the Quality Council of the respective study direction and include analyses of key performance indicators, development plans, and implementation of recommendations from external evaluations and the Higher Education Quality Agency's Study Quality Commission. At the same time, gaps in the implementation of recommendations raise concerns about the effectiveness of the work being carried out, despite the complex and heavy-loaded monitoring process.

The reviews utilise various information sources, such as student enrollment trends, course evaluations, feedback from students, graduates, and employers, and lecturer feedback on improvements. These sources help identify areas for enhancement and assess the impact of previous changes. While student feedback is collected at multiple points, the effectiveness of integrating this feedback into tangible improvements in the study process varies. Ensuring that feedback leads to actionable changes is crucial for maintaining high-quality education. It is noteworthy that although students generally express a positive attitude towards the study content and process, feedback during the assessment visit revealed discrepancies. Several involved parties, including students, indicated that the actual content of the study programmes did not fully align

with what was initially declared, since during the assessment visit, the students of both directions - international relations and social anthropology- clearly stated that the content differs from what was in the programme description.

This raises questions about the objectivity of the assessment, particularly concerning the declared versus the implemented programmes.

The consolidation process within RSU emphasises digital transformation, interdisciplinary cooperation, and the integration of artificial intelligence solutions in the study process. Continuous monitoring and adaptation are needed to ensure that the planned strategic goals are being met. This requires a robust system for ongoing assessment and the flexibility to make necessary adjustments based on real-time feedback and changing circumstances.

The ongoing consolidation of faculties and the transition period into their fully-fledged operation in 2024 could lead to temporary disruptions and uncertainties. Managing this transition smoothly is critical to maintaining educational quality and stakeholder confidence.

The ambitious plans for digital transformation and AI integration in study processes might face practical challenges in execution. Ensuring that faculty and students are adequately trained and equipped to use these technologies effectively is essential. Currently, it is uncertain whether the content of the study courses will fully achieve the stated goals, particularly regarding the application of AI or digitization.

Additionally, RSU has specific plans, such as the Study Quality and Study Program Development Plan and the Science Development Plan, which align with the university's mission, vision, and strategic goals for 2022-2027. These plans emphasise research-based studies, strategic specialisation, international collaboration, and operational efficiency, contributing to a unified ecosystem of study environment and scientific activity.

The continuous updating and modernization of study programmes are guided by feedback from students, graduates, and industry stakeholders, ensuring that programmes remain relevant and effective in meeting the needs of the labour market and society. The inclusion of new study programmes, like the "International System Transformation Studies," demonstrates RSU's commitment to adapting to geopolitical changes and providing unique educational offerings.

1.1.3.

The management structure is in accordance with regulations, in accordance with Process Description No. 35, "Study Process Planning and Administration." (SAR, p.26). On the academic side, the roles of each position or institution are defined clearly- both in the strategic documents and in SAR (pp. 9-18). The management structure demonstrates strong centralised support while allowing course staff the autonomy to develop their respective courses. The responses of involved parties during the visit of the expert team demonstrate that there is a space for improvement. Even more significant issues were identified within the anthropology field, where teaching staff felt that their opinions are not adequately valued (results of the expert team visit).

Another aspect related to management is the fact that all four study programmes are led by one person, who is also pursuing a doctorate, raises serious concerns among experts regarding the viability of this management approach. These concerns include workload and the capacity to effectively manage multiple programmes simultaneously. The position of programme director should adequately encompass both management and scholarly expertise in the specific areas of the programmes being managed, along with more research experience and accomplishments.

In a similar vein, experts identified situations where PhD candidates are tasked with large workloads, which potentially impede their completion of the doctoral programme.

It should also be noted that in the Latvian higher education system, it is considered good academic practice for master's programmes to be taught by lecturers with doctorate degree. In this case, this principle is not respected at RSU. From the perspective of transparency and accountability in the

educational process, it cannot be considered good practice for both the bachelor's programmes and the successive master's programmes to be led by the same person. The fact that the same person also conducts lectures and develops a doctoral dissertation is considered an additional burden for objective reasons.

There is relatively high satisfaction with the implemented study programmes, expressed both by students in the opinion polls cited in the SAR, as well as collected opinions during the expert team visit. However, despite the formally clear documentation outlining student involvement and feedback in evaluating content and processes, as well as the procedures for appeals and changes in the study process, it was evident during the assessment visit that there is still room for improvement based on the actual awareness and understanding of the students.

Decision-making processes are detailed, clear, and evidence-based. However, there are two areas where the management structure could improve: the management of teaching at the lower level and the content of student-facing roles.

In terms of the first, processes for clear teaching plans and their implementation according to set frameworks could be enhanced to ensure consistency across declared content, execution and evaluation.

In terms of the second, responsibilities and activities associated with student-facing roles should be clearly specified. This would address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), ensure clear processes for complaints and reviews, and enable realistic workloads for staff not only in documents, but also implemented in practice.

According to the information provided by students and lecturers during the assessment visit and additional information provided by the RSU after assessment visit, explaining annex 06.1_Anex_Academic_staff_list_Soc_Pol_Ant_ENG_new.xlsx data about the workload of lecturers, still there is unclear information about who is in charge of the tutoring of student's final paper development. There were several cases, when you see both- PhD holders and non PhD holders involved in students' thesis lists, while in the lists of workloads it was not so easy to track these engagements.

For example, formally, the SAR and the RSU additional information on teaching staff workload appear to be detailed. However, interviews conducted during the assessment visit reveal that the situation is more complex and ambiguous. Additionally, the format in which information about lecturers' workload was presented did not confirm that the roles of lecturers are realised according to best practices and legal requirements, both formally and in practice.

1.1.4.

RSU has established a comprehensive and systematic approach to student admissions, recognition of prior learning, and the assessment of student achievements. This is evidenced by their internal regulatory framework, which outlines clear procedures and requirements for each aspect of the student lifecycle.

RSU conducts admissions based on Senate-approved regulations specific to each academic year and study level. These regulations are publicly available on the RSU website in both Latvian and English (<https://www.rsu.lv/en/study-here/admissions>). Admission requirements are tailored for each study level. For instance, the Bachelor's programme in "International Relations – European Studies" requires a secondary education certificate and centralised exam results in Latvian, mathematics, and a foreign language. RSU communicates the current admission procedure in various ways while reflecting the existing environment. For example, under new circumstances, when this year for the first time graduates of re-established conscription can use their legal right to state guaranteed study places, RSU provides explanatory work not only on an individual basis but also through media outlets and other channels (see, for example.

<https://www.delfi.lv/video/53950177/spried-ar-delfi/120037543/spried-ar-delfi-par-nosacijumiem-bez-maksas-studijam-valsts-aizsardzibas-dienestu-beigusajiem-pilns-ieraksts> - only in Latvian).

Admission to Master's programmes involves additional requirements such as motivational letters, research essays, and interviews, ensuring a thorough evaluation of candidates.

The RSU implements a transparent and equal competition process, ensuring that all candidates are subject to the same criteria and procedures, thus maintaining fairness and openness.

RSU has a well-defined procedure for recognizing prior formal and non-formal education, professional experience, and study periods. This process is aligned with national and international standards. The recognition process is overseen by a dedicated recognition commission that ensures consistent application of policies across all educational fields within the university. This commission includes a student representative, guaranteeing student participation in the decision-making process.

The assessment procedures at RSU are designed to be logical and effective, with regular reviews and updates to ensure alignment with educational objectives and industry standards. Various sources of information, including student feedback, performance data, and employer input, are used to continuously improve study programmes and assessment methods. This ensures that the evaluation of student achievements is comprehensive and reflective of both academic and professional requirements.

Based on the provided information, RSU has implemented a robust and transparent system for student admissions, recognition of prior learning, and assessment of achievements. The detailed regulations and consistent application of procedures ensure that the system is logical and effective, meeting the criterion requirements. The involvement of stakeholders, including students and external partners, further strengthens the system's credibility and responsiveness to both educational and societal needs. Therefore, the criterion is met.

1.1.5.

RSU provides detailed documentation on student assessment criteria, conditions, and procedures through the RSU Study Regulations I, accessible on the RSU website in both Latvian and English (https://www.rsu.lv/sites/default/files/imce/Documents/academic-regulations_i_01032023.pdf). The requirements for determining and evaluating study results are clearly outlined in Process Description No. 6 "Evaluation and Submission of Study Results", which can be found in the appendices of RSU documentation.

Each course at RSU has a unique description, or "contract," between the lecturer and the student, detailing all requirements, tasks, evaluation criteria, and other relevant information. This ensures that students are fully informed about the course's conduct and outcomes from the beginning.

The student assessment process is guided by the specific requirements set by lecturers and is aligned with the topics covered and the ECTS credits assigned to the course. Final assessments of students' knowledge and skills are conducted using a ten-point grading system that is objective, precise, and understandable for students. Mid-term assessments can be graded on a pass/fail basis, with clear information provided on the assessment methodology (SAR, pp. 35-36).

To ensure transparency and prevent plagiarism, students must submit written and practical works through the RSU E-study System, where all submissions are evaluated and checked for plagiarism. The overall course assessment typically includes multiple parameters such as participation in lectures, engagement and quality of responses in seminars, performance in practical classes, quality of written assignments, essays, and other written works, and exam results. This system encourages continuous learning throughout the module, ensuring long-lasting and robust knowledge acquisition. RSU upholds academic freedom in the design and implementation of teaching and assessment methods while ensuring that these methods are aligned with the learning outcomes of each study course. Regular monitoring of course quality involves course lecturers, study programme managers, and RSU's support units such as the RSU Centre for Educational Growth and Study Department (data

gathered during the expert team visit). These entities review and approve course descriptions and ensure that teaching and assessment methods meet the objectives of the study programmes and the needs of students.

Student performance evaluation methods are discussed and reviewed by lecturers and students to ensure their relevance to the study programme goals. According to the SAR, the best practices are adopted during the annual course updates, and assessment methods are reviewed based on student feedback, gathered through course evaluation surveys. At the same time, responses gathered during the expert team visit demonstrated that this has not always been followed in practice.

To enhance student performance and assess the level of achieved learning outcomes, both summative and formative assessments are used. Additionally, the active participation and initiative of students are evaluated. Individual interim and final assessments are accessible to each student through their profile on the RSU e-study platform.

Creative, research, practical, and self-reflection works are evaluated according to the specific goals and assessment criteria of each study course. Research work criteria are detailed in the RSU Methodical Guidelines for Research Work, updated in 2023 for bachelor's and master's students.

In some instances, students reported that evaluations were not provided promptly or lacked sufficient explanation (results of the accreditation commission visit). However, these issues appear to be isolated and are more likely related to individual instructors rather than being systemic problems.

Thus, it might be concluded that the methods, principles, and procedures for assessing student achievements at RSU are well-developed, clearly defined, and regularly analysed to ensure they meet the study programme aims and student needs. This comprehensive approach supports the effective monitoring and continuous improvement of the study process.

1.1.6.

RSU has well-defined principles of academic integrity, which are crucial for maintaining high academic standards and credibility. These principles are clearly outlined in the university's internal regulations and are accessible to all stakeholders, ensuring transparency and clarity. The principles typically cover honesty in research, fair assessment practices, respect for intellectual property, and adherence to ethical standards.

To ensure that these principles are upheld, RSU has implemented several mechanisms: Code of Ethics- a comprehensive code of conduct that all students and staff are required to adhere to (https://www.rsu.lv/sites/default/files/imce/Documents/rsu_codeofethics_eng_16042024.pdf);

Establishment of bodies or committees tasked with monitoring and enforcing academic integrity policies; Ongoing training and workshops for both staff and students on the importance of academic integrity and how to avoid breaches. The learning centre for academic staff is particularly commendable as it addresses all the needs of teachers, especially in responding to new challenges, such as the ethical and legal application of AI.

RSU utilises advanced anti-plagiarism tools to detect and prevent academic dishonesty. These tools are integrated into the university's e-learning platform, where students submit their assignments. Commonly used tools include Turnitin and other plagiarism detection software. The effectiveness of these tools is enhanced by their widespread use across all departments and levels of study.

Based on the information provided, it appears that RSU meets the criterion 1.1.6. effectively. The RSU has established clear principles of academic integrity, implemented robust mechanisms for their observance, and uses effective anti-plagiarism tools. Additionally, RSU actively promotes an internal culture of integrity and ensures that all stakeholders are well-informed about these practices. Any minor issues, such as occasional delays in providing evaluations, do not detract from the overall effectiveness and comprehensive nature of these systems.

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

The aims of the study field at RSU align well with the RSU strategic goals, focusing on innovative studies and research that supports societal and individual needs. The programmes provide comprehensive knowledge of social and political processes, preparing students for practical applications. Additionally, the logical integration of study programmes enhances learning outcomes and supports interdisciplinary cooperation and innovation.

RSU has a systematic evaluation process that involves well-defined procedures for developing, monitoring, and reviewing study programmes. Annual reviews are comprehensive, involving various stakeholders and diverse information sources for thorough analysis.

The management structure offers balanced support, combining centralised assistance with staff autonomy, ensuring a broad range of expertise and innovation. The decision-making processes are clear, detailed, and evidence-based, supporting efficient management. Assistance is provided for both academic personnel and students.

Based on the fact that in the higher education system in Latvia, it is considered good academic practice for master's programs to be taught by lecturers with a doctoral degree, this principle is not respected at RSU. From the perspective of transparency and accountability in the educational process, it cannot be considered good practice for both the bachelor's programs and the subsequent master's programs to be led by the same person. The fact that the same individual also conducts lectures and develops a doctoral dissertation is seen as an additional burden for objective reasons.

Admission and recognition procedures at RSU are transparent, with fair and open competition processes. Specific procedures for recognizing prior education and experience are in place, and the assessment methods are logical, regularly reviewed, and aligned with educational objectives and industry standards.

Student assessment methods are comprehensively documented, with detailed course descriptions outlining all requirements and evaluation criteria. The use of both summative and formative assessments, regularly reviewed based on feedback, ensures robust evaluation practices.

RSU has established clear principles of academic integrity, which are accessible to all stakeholders. Effective anti-plagiarism tools are integrated into e-learning platforms, promoting a culture of integrity. Additionally, ongoing training for staff and students on academic integrity and ethical AI application further supports these principles.

Despite the comprehensive and well-documented procedures, there are some gaps in the practical implementation of these policies. For instance, the fact that four study programmes are led by one person. This raises concerns about workload and the capacity to effectively manage multiple programmes simultaneously.

There are instances where students have reported not receiving timely evaluations or adequate explanations for their assessments. While these issues are not systematic, they highlight inconsistencies in the application of evaluation procedures.

Student feedback during the assessment visit indicated discrepancies between the declared content of study programmes and the actual content delivered, since during the assessment visit, the students of both directions - international relations and social anthropology- clearly stated that the content differs from what was in the programme description. This raises questions about the consistency and transparency of programme delivery and the fulfilment of promised educational outcomes.

The involvement of foreign teachers, which is highlighted as a strength in strategic documents, was found to be less than what it appeared. The point that the involvement of foreign teachers, which is highlighted as a strength in strategic documents, was found to be less than what it appeared, is

based on the fact that such invited lecturers have not appeared as teaching staff. Similar risks, which potentially might appear, are related to other international lecturers.

This discrepancy between documented intentions and actual practice can impact the internationalisation goals and the quality of education provided.

Overall, the policies and strategies at RSU are robust. Their effective implementation faces minor challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the institution fully meets its educational goals and maintains high standards of quality and integrity.

Strengths:

1. Compliance with both internal and external regulations and RSU strategic vision;
2. Student-focused approach with a vision for the future;
3. Complementarity of programmes;
4. Relatively high satisfaction of students with the implemented study programmes.

Weaknesses:

1. Planning of the workloads and involvement of non-PhD holder in management and teaching in Masters programmes, is not in compliance with good academic teaching practice, and can lead to non-fulfillment of the set targets;
2. There are shortcomings in communication and interaction with students and teachers, particularly in explaining strategic visions and collaborating on their development;
3. Confusion stemming from the simultaneous focus on both Latvia's national focuses and internationalisation.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1. RSU established its current quality policy strategy which is publicly available in Latvian and English on the web (https://www.rsu.lv/sites/default/files/documents/rsu_quality_policy-2023.docx for English) in 2023. RSU's Quality Policy is a succinct 1-page document. Although short, the policy emphasizes staff professional development, interdisciplinarity and internationalisation, student involvement and interactive teaching, and research-based teaching. The quality policy is meant to be read together with the RSU development strategy (<https://www.rsu.lv/en/about-us/strategy>) as it is through this that it is to be implemented. The values guiding the quality policy are "human, team, results, and loyalty" (SAR p1). Read together with the development strategy, the quality policy of RSU demonstrates the university's commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in its academic endeavours. There is also a Quality Handbook, which is an internal document, published in Latvian and abstracted in English.

Quality Assurance is further fleshed out in Annex 23.1 (Compliance of RSU Study Programmes with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) Part 1), which provides detail on the processes addressing each key point of the Quality Policy. This 23-page document covers principles of equality and inclusion in staff development, student involvement, internal and external collaborations, and ethics and non-discrimination standards. These guide programme development, assessment, student complaints, admission and progression, staff recruitment and support, and resourcing. Quality assurance involves regular monitoring, review, information management and external processes. Annex 23.1 clearly documents compliance with guidelines and shows the ambition of the institution for ongoing improvement on quality teaching and research.

In 2016, the university carried out a Peer Assessment of Student Centred Learning (PASCL) and published a 24-page report on its results, which is publicly available in Latvian and English on the web (https://www.rsu.lv/sites/default/files/imce/Documents/pascl_report_rsu_2016.pdf for English). This report has served to provide “guiding principles in the work planning of the Board of Studies” (Application document, p14). While the report commended the involvement of students in quality assurance processes, it also noted low response rates in questionnaire assessments.

Furthermore, RSU has two certifications in quality management, one under the international standard ISO 9001 received in 2002, and an international ISO 50001 certificate on energy management in 2017.

While RSU has the required quality policy documents in place, there remains some uncertainty regarding the extent to which the quality management system ensures that the intention to continuously improve, develop, and perform efficiently in the study field and relevant study programmes. In specific, missing from the various documents studied are clear indicators for evaluating and assessing quality against the general goals being set. Some indicators of quality set out in Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems” (SAR pp.39-41, also below) represent a good starting point to self-assessing “quality” and could be used in benchmarking ongoing review and setting future goals (see also next section of this expert report 1.2.2).

In regard to equality and non-discrimination, improvements could be made to adopt a more gender-neutral language by using the plural in the English versions at least. The collection of disaggregated gender statistics would also be key in assessing equality compliance. Expert team agrees that the documents conform in this regard to mandatory standards, and hence to the removal of the point if this is the strict remit of the evaluation. However, in as far as recommendations invite us to consider continuous improvement and best practice standards, this point speaks to this aim.

At programme level, quality assurance is at present achieved through a newly-restructured framework that has established the RSU FSS in February 2024 (SAR, p.11). During assessment visit meetings with staff, directors, and administrators, it became apparent that this restructure is part of a wider expansion of RSU emphasis on fields beyond medicine and natural sciences and this speaks very promisingly of the future development of the social sciences and the programme directions in particular. However, in the new structure, “the study programme director is replaced by the Director of the study programme group, who most often supervises more than one study programme, but has similar responsibilities as the study programme directors before” (SAR, p13). This maintains a clear hierarchy with defined responsibilities in quality assurance, but potentially places overdue responsibility on specific directors. During the assessment visit meetings (programme directors and management) it appeared that the shift in director’s roles has rendered the posts more administrative than academic, which creates impact not only on workload but potentially on the overall quality management of the programmes.

1.2.2.

The procedures for the development and consolidation of the study programmes were approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2019 (SAR, p. 6). These procedures regarding development followed the logic of reducing programme fragmentation and internationalisation, which consolidated 6 programmes in the study field by the end of 2023 and initiated others, specifically in the study field, the Russia and Eurasia Studies Masters, the title of which is due to change on accreditation (SAR, p.6).

The procedures for development and review are horizontal and vertical. The organisational structure is clear, the study direction is represented by an Assistant Professor, and decision making includes external partners, including alumni and external specialists (SAR, p.9-10). The specific procedures

guiding different aspects of the programmes were presented in an impressive 222-page appendix (Annex 1.3, “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”) collating all internal regulations. Overall, these clarify the horizontal decision-making structures, as well as vertical coordination among different academic and administrative departments, and assign responsibilities for different actions in an impressively detailed way. It is clear from the regulations that individuals and bodies take action and responsibility both individually and collectively. Processes relate to initiation, development and ongoing review of programmes and define ways of coordination, carrying out surveys as well as providing guidelines to study process (Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”, pp.88-90) and defining how strategy is to be planned and delivered (Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”, pp.92-103). They also detail extensively the process for carrying out surveys (Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”, pp 135-156) and of managing complaints (Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”, pp. 157-167), both in place since 2018.

Provided documents make clear that necessary procedures and feedback mechanisms are well defined and logically structured. However, there is scope for improvement in the implementation of these procedures, especially relating to feedback, as evidenced in the PASCL report (see previous section of this expert report 1.2.1) on low survey returns. In meetings with students and employers, it was not clear that feedback procedures are used consistently and regularly with both groups. Given the recent restructuring of programmes, more attention could be paid to the implementation of such procedures in the future and on the reporting of such implementation through, for example, regular self-reporting.

1.2.3. From a procedural standpoint, the RSU has established clear protocols to handle student complaints and suggestions. Internal documents set out “The Management of Complaints, Appeals, Irregularities, and Proposals” (Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”, pp. 157-167). This provides the opportunity for members of the “student, employee or interested party” communities (Annex 1.3, pp.160) to lodge proposals, complaints, or irregularities. The process is well explained and relevant bodies are appropriately involved.

However, despite these mechanisms being in place, there is no clear indication of what they may amount to. There is reference to “remedial action” (Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”, pp. 60, 62) embedded in the process, but there is no categorisation of the various complaints that may be received and no indicative penalties of examples of what “remedial action” may involve.

It is also unclear how these mechanisms are in fact put into practice. The statistical evidence provided (SAR, p.39) shows that within the entire student body (7,000 to 10,000 between 2018 and 2023) complaints, appeals, and proposals have dropped from about 3% to 1.5% in the last 5 years and that the vast majority of these are appeals; it would have been useful for the regulations to specify what appeals entail in contrast to complaints. Qualitative analysis also indicates that most complaints relate to the study process, and that recently complaints between students have also been lodged (SAR, p. 40). It would have been useful to know what parts of the study process are subject to such complaints.

As these statistics relate to the whole of the student body, it is even more difficult to assess the efficacy of the process in regard to the study programme being evaluated. Meetings with students during the site visit mentioned complaints about late grades but no other instance. The report mentions internal and informal processes of monitoring and prevention in the study field (SAR, p. 40). In meetings with students, there was praise for the faculty involved in programmes, which indicates good communication that makes these less formal processes possibly effective. But no specific examples of changes that came through such communication were provided.

More worryingly, regarding the ways in which such processes may feed upwards and laterally, there was mention in meetings with staff that communication prior to the restructuring was more sustained and informative than is currently the case. This could have an impact on the ways in which student views, complaints, and proposals are communicated across the various study programme structures. At the same time, informal processes provide a mechanism for effectively monitoring the ongoing review through feedback when the required effort is provided by staff members. One commendable example is the set-up of “the Social Anthropology collective” by staff in the relevant study field, which was mentioned during the meeting with staff members.

Across a number of meetings during the assessment visit (e.g. programmes directors, staff) the poor turnout in surveys and questionnaires was mentioned. The PASCL report, although dated, also notes this as a problem, and indicates further problems in the collection of these responses. After the assessment visit, it remains unclear what action RSU intends to take to remedy the situation, although the fact that various relevant authorities are aware of this and thinking about it is a positive first step.

In conclusion, while the procedures for handling complaints and proposals are in place, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is inconsistent across study programmes and is hampered by low student engagement in reporting, monitoring, and evaluation.

1.2.4. Based on the information provided, RSU has established an extensive and comprehensive system for collecting various types of data pertinent to the operation and assessment of its study programmes (SAR, p.41-44). It also organises several surveys that cover different aspects and stages of the student and graduate experience, as well as of employers, which should ideally form a strong foundation for continuous improvement of the study programmes. These collections of statistical data take place throughout the year, and some more than once a year. There is extensive focus on understanding the student body, which helps to target recruitment activities. As stated in Annex 23.1 Compliance of RSU study programmes with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) Part 1 (p.2), a major indicator of quality at RSU is the “popularity” of the university. Therefore, it makes sense that these surveys are focused on recruitment, and indeed appear to do so successfully.

However, there is little information in this section of the report (SAR, pp. 41-44) that addresses student experience extensively and as such no indication of how this may feed into programme improvement. Given the poor return of student surveys and questionnaires addressed in the previous section of this expert report (1.2.3) it would have been useful to include here detail over the content of the surveys and questionnaires and their results. This lack sits in stark contrast to the lengthy description of the process (Annex 1.3 “University internal regulations that are not available online outside RSU systems”, pp 135-156) for obtaining this statistical evidence.

In conclusion, while RSU has implemented an extensive data collection mechanism and instituted various feedback procedures, the emphasis on collection in practice seems to be skewed towards student recruitment and less on student experience. In order to fully capitalise on these mechanisms and ensure continuous improvement of the study field, RSU needs to improve its responsiveness to feedback from all stakeholders, especially students, and ensure they are informed about how their feedback is being used to shape study programmes.

1.2.5. The RSU has taken significant steps to ensure that information about its study programmes, key documents, and processes is available to prospective students, current students, and the public through its website, <https://www.rsu.lv/en>. The study field information is hosted within the FSS faculty website and is available in both Latvian and English, and they contain valuable information about their respective programmes. The four programmes under evaluation all maintain web pages in both Latvian and English, which contain information on the programme overview and faculty members. Although this information is rather minimal in English for three of the four programmes,

this is understandable given that they are in practice delivered in Latvian. In specific, the “International Relations and Diplomacy” StP is offered in both languages but the implementation in English is noted as a plan to supplement the implementation in Latvian (SAR p. 92); the “Social Anthropology” StP is offered in both languages, but the implementation in English is noted as “plan for the future” (SAR p.118); the “International Relations - European Studies” StP is provided in Latvian with plans noted for “the implementation in Latvian [to] be supplemented with the implementation in English” (SAR p.150). The programme that is currently delivered in both Latvian and English “Russia and Eurasia Studies” is adequately explained and described on the website, however, the new proposed title Academic Master’s (second cycle) study programme “International System Transformation Studies” 45312, does not adequately represent its content. Therefore, the RSU's online presence is generally well structured and informative, as currently stands, but reservations exist for the proposed change of the title of the one MSc programme.

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

RSU has implemented comprehensive quality management guidelines and an ambitious University Strategy, both aiming to elevate the quality and standards of the university and the study fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. The adoption of gender neutral language across all documents, public and internal, can be improved.

The Study Direction Development Plan for "Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology" at RSU is a commendable attempt to create structures for continuous improvement of the study field, which is still nascent in terms of institutional set up, following the restructure within the Faculty and across RSU, which is overall logical and promising in envisioning further development in the study field.

Although strategic documents at RSU and programme direction provide clear visions, indicators for evaluating and assessing quality could be more specific to enable their use in benchmarking ongoing review and setting future goals.

Despite the clear and logical strategic objectives that the restructure addresses, it appears that there is insufficient attention to the potential shortcomings of the restructure, and particularly the impact of centralising the programme director role and shifting its emphasis from academic content to managerial administration. Informal communication, monitoring, review and evaluation procedures can be effective, and a commendable example was provided in the “Social Anthropology Collective”.

In student experience and evaluation, the presence of structures and mechanisms is well noted and commended.

However, poor turnout in student response (regarding questionnaire responses) appears to be diachronic problem that requires adequate solutions.

Similarly, while the procedures for handling complaints and proposals are in place, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is inconsistent across study programmes and is hampered by low student engagement in reporting, monitoring, and evaluation.

The RSU has implemented an extensive data collection mechanism and instituted various feedback procedures. However, the emphasis on collection in practice seems to be skewed towards student recruitment and less on student experience.

The study field has been successful in providing key information about its study programmes, relevant documents, and procedures through its main and faculty-specific websites.

Strengths:

1. RSU has implemented comprehensive quality management guidelines and an ambitious University Strategy, both aiming to elevate the quality and standards of the university and the study

fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. It has also developed a comprehensive system for data collection and survey organisation related to its study programmes.

2. The overall restructure of the Faculty and programme directions is sensible, logical, and commendable in the way it envisions the development of the study fields within RSU.

3. Informal communication, monitoring, review and evaluation procedures can be effective, and a commendable example was provided in the "Social Anthropology Collective".

4. RSU has comprehensive systems for student evaluations and feedback in place.

5. RSU has extensive information collection mechanisms on the student body makeup that help to expand recruitment.

6. The FSS and programmes have well maintained websites with adequate information regarding course content and staff, catering to both Latvian and English speaking audiences.

Weaknesses:

1. Across the various documents submitted disaggregated gender statistics are not consistently provided and gender neutrality is not clearly signalled (e.g. through plural pronouns).

2. Indicators for evaluating and assessing quality are not specific in ways that makes them useful in benchmarking ongoing review and setting future goals.

3. Insufficient attention has been paid to the potential shortcomings of the restructure, and particularly the impact of centralising the programme director role and shifting its emphasis from academic content to managerial administration.

4. Poor turnout in student response appears to be a diachronic problem that requires adequate solutions.

5. The effectiveness of complaints and monitoring mechanisms is inconsistent across study programmes and is hampered by low student engagement in reporting, monitoring, and evaluation.

6. The emphasis on information collection in practice seems to be skewed towards student recruitment and less on student experience.

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

RSU is largely compliant with the requirements of Section 5, Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, taking into account its quality management guidelines, University Strategy and Development Plan for the Study Direction Development Plan for "Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology".

To ensure full compliance on all fronts in this regard assessment and evaluation indicators can be better specified; student response rates can be improved and used to improve the complaints and proposals management procedures; more data can be collected on student experience; and disaggregated gender statistics provided. Additionally, the centralisation of the programme director role raises concerns over compliance.

- 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

These policies have been established and thus the HEI is fully compliant.

- 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

Mechanisms exist and are well defined in the documents studied to merit an assessment of full compliance.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Various mechanisms ensure the achievement of intended learning outcomes and the criteria, conditions, and procedures for the evaluation of students' results are well defined to merit full compliance.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The assurance of work quality would require disciplinary expertise in the programme fields and this is not currently ensured in the centralisation of management of all programmes under this assessment in the role of the programme director. For this reason, the RSU is only partially compliant in this regard.

- 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

Various procedures are in place to allow information collection and analysis. Poor student feedback in evaluation questionnaires raises doubts of full compliance however. Better information on student experience would also be helpful in ensuring full compliance on this criterion.

- 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 recently implemented restructuring of programmes that placed them under a single programme director do not evidence full compliance with the aim of continuous improvement, as it means less content-specific oversight of these programmes.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1. SAR p.45-47 describes in detail the system developed by the RSU for determining and redistribution of the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the relevant study programmes, describes the structure of revenues and expenses for financing studies and funding of scientific research. On pages 45-46 of the SAR it is stated that "Income of study programmes of the study direction is used for staff remuneration, taxes, maintenance of IT infrastructure, purchase of equipment and devices, and placement expenses. In addition to the direct costs of the implementation of lectures and classes, the study programme must cover the infrastructure maintenance costs (premises, IT solutions) and other RSU common resources used in

the study programme (Student Services, Library, organisation of the study process, grant for the Student Union and other support and administrative functions). Funding for the implementation of the study direction is provided by: State budget grants for studies and social payments; Tuition fees and fees for courses; Funding for science (state budget and EU structural funds, international project funding, revenues from contract work, etc.); Income from other services, such as student dormitories, room and equipment rental, etc.”

During assessment visit interviews with the teaching staff, it was confirmed that incentive schemes and practices created to stimulate research and help researchers in the early stages of their career to start working in the profession are effective and are intensively used to attend conferences, prepare research proposals and scientific articles.

It can be concluded that RSU has created an effective system for determining and redistributing the financial support required for the implementation of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology and the corresponding study programmes.

1.3.2. The SAR contains a well-structured and comprehensive description of the infrastructural resources and material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study field. Students and teaching staff have access to all the necessary resources - all RSU resources are fully at the disposal of the study field. The infrastructure and material and technical support created by RSU are equally accessible to all RSU study programmes. A unified system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of material-technical, methodical, informational and other provisions have been established at the RSU.

Multimedia projectors are available in 193 training rooms for use of audiovisual materials for studies and a centralised management system of the multimedia equipment of auditoriums has also been developed (SAR, pp.47-48). In addition to the needs of the study field, a recording room for recording high-quality audio and video content for lectures and live events, as well as for recording podcasts or audio tracks and a specially equipped studio for creating interactive content are available for the needs of the study field. During the assessment visit, the experts were presented with various technological solutions available in the studio – green screen, interactive display and the first transparent board in the Baltics (learning glass), with the help of which it is possible to prepare even more engaging, even more enjoyable video lectures and classes. RSU lecturers and employees have the opportunity to use the Booker room reservation system, which is linked to the Timetable lecture and class planning system. In the Booker room reservation system, it is possible to find all the rooms intended for the study process at RSU, view the occupancy of the rooms, incl. seeing also lectures and classes, as well as make room and table reservations (SAR, p.48).

RSU has at its disposal all infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary for the implementation of this study field and the corresponding study programmes.

1.3.3. The total area of library premises is 2044 m², including premises to serve readers – 1318 m² (290 places for readers, 33 computer places, wireless internet), providing excellent opportunities for both students and teaching staff to use library services. Students can communicate with the Library remotely on different matters by phone or on help.rsu.lv. Information resources, which are not available in the collection of the RSU library, can be ordered from other libraries using the Interlibrary Loan (ILL) or International Interlibrary Loan (IILL). The collection includes 536,200 physical units, incl. 248,200 books. The subscribed databases provide access to about ~534,000 subscribed electronic resource units (about 90% of these are e-books). The funding for resources is growing. It was EUR 44 per library user in 2023. Approximately 91% of the budget spent on assembly of the collection are used for subscription to electronic resources/purchasing of e-books (SAR, p.50).

The open access loan includes well equipped premises, the possibility to loan books for home use, the use of self-service equipment, a place for reading clubs and individual work. To provide access

to facilities for visitors with reduced mobility, there is a lift in the Library in the central building allowing the library users to move from floor to floor (SAR, p. 50). RSU Library is an accredited library of national importance.

Library resources and databases are available to students and meet the needs of the study field. E-book databases have very high utilisation rates. For example, the information units of the Ebook Academic Collection (EBSCO) were viewed 49365 times in 2023. Proquest Ebook Central Academic Complete is the most used e-book database, with 141,310 information items viewed in 2023. Such data show the importance of e-books in the study and research process of study programmes of the this study field.

Data on the use of databases (EBSCO, SAGE, Wiley Online Library e-journal database) show that they are used very intensively for the needs of the study programmes of this study field, it can be concluded that library resources and databases are available to students and meet the needs of the study field.

1.3.4. The e-learning environment is used as a tool for the organisation of study process in each study course – for posting various materials, execution of test works and home assignments, checking originality of the content of works, and publication of assessments. Additionally, the e-learning environment provides both the calendar of pending events and latest RSU news and discussion forums, study materials and all latest information on what the lecturer of the student's course wishes to transfer to the students – different assignments, sample tests, useful additional materials, etc. The e-learning environment provides access not only to the courses of the current semester, but also the courses studied in previous semesters, and the content of previous courses as it is for the students of the current semester. RSU e-learning is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from any location with internet access, including from mobile devices. The MyRSU student portal is linked to the e-learning environment (SAR, p. 52). Students have access to the MyRSU student portal, which combines the possibility to view the necessary information about studies and to use the e-services necessary in the study process in one place. MyRSU is available as both a browser and a mobile app, which enables faster and more convenient access to all the necessary university information.

The e-learning environment developed especially rapidly during the global pandemic. Remote lectures and classes are mostly implemented using Zoom, video recordings are available using the Panopto service (relevant licences have been provided to lecturers by RSU). In order to improve the qualifications of teaching staff, the Information Technology Department organises regular thematic training on IT tools, as well as provides the possibility of applying for online individual expert consultations for improving digital literacy of lecturers.

The Safe Exam Browser is integrated with e-learning (Moodle) and has been created to increase safety during tests. When the student uses the Safe Exam Browser, it is not possible to perform actions like copying, visit other internet links or apps, close the test before it is submitted for evaluation, the test cannot be minimised or window size cannot be changed, key combinations and the right-click menu, operating system menu bars are disabled, messaging and screen sharing links are disabled.

RSU students and employees have access to a modern application system (JIRA) on the platform help.rsu.lv to receive necessary IT or other support. While studying at RSU, students have access to all the software necessary for a successful study process. A study programme mapping system has been introduced for more effective study programme management, where the catalogue, descriptions, outcomes and implementation plans of study programmes and directions implemented by RSU are available.

The students and teaching staff of the study programmes of the study field are provided with a developed IT infrastructure and IT services that are continuously developing, taking into account the increasing requirements for IT from students and employees.

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1.3.5. The SAR describes the procedure for attracting qualified teaching staff "When developing a new SP, academic and scientific staff in compliance with provisions of Section 55(1)(3) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (LHEI) and Law on Scientific Activity are involved in its provision. Academic and pedagogical staff with high qualifications, relevant competences and good reputation are involved in the implementation of the study direction and achievement of results" (SAR, p.56).

However, analysis of the documents attached in the appendices and interviews during assessment visit with representatives of the teaching staff show that not all the academic staff of the study field have academic qualifications (PhD) corresponding to the level of study programmes. Among the lecturers who deliver study courses in master's study programmes, there are several who have not yet obtained a PhD and describe their qualifications as PhD Candidates in their CVs although they have already completed their doctoral studies several years ago. Perhaps the relatively small number of students in the study programmes limits the possibilities of attracting permanent full-time teaching staff with the highest academic qualifications. Many highly qualified specialists in the field are involved as guest professors, especially in political science master's study programmes; however, they are not employed permanently on a full-time basis. This may cast doubt on the consistently stable quality of study programmes year after year.

1.3.6. RSU has created an effective system to meet the needs of professional and didactic development of the teaching staff. In Annex 23.1 Compliance of RSU Study Programmes with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) Part 1, procedures of recruitment of staff (pp.12-13) and opportunities for promotion the professional development of teaching staff are described. In order to achieve RSU's scientific goals - to motivate the teaching staff to engage in research and to increase support for more active involvement of the teaching staff in research- a motivational remuneration system for staff is developed, whereby financial support is provided for publications in journals included in Web of Science and SCOPUS databases, in particular open access publications.

RSU has created an excellent system for the career development of teaching staff. An RSU Centre for Educational Growth (CEG) was created in 2014 for the improvement of the quality of studies, the modernisation of the study process and competences of university lecturers. In its daily work, CEG mostly performs advisory activities, which, especially during the period of remote and combined studies, has provided significant support for the improvement of the pedagogical digital skills of lecturers and the meaningful implementation of the technology enriched study process (SAR, pp.57-59).

It can be concluded that systematic and regular activities are carried out to strengthen the professional and didactic capacity of teaching staff.

1.3.7. Despite the fact that RSU is constantly planning and implementing activities aimed at motivating the academic staff to engage in high-level scientific and research work, in particular associate professors and professors (aiming to reach 60% of working time spent on research), which encourage new specialists to engage in industry research, and contribute to the overall development of science at national and international level, the new lecturers devote a lot of time to the preparation of new study courses. Although a large part of the teaching staff has obtained a PhD degree, a relatively high number are doctoral candidates who have completed their doctoral studies some time ago. Full-time university lecturers are required to participate in research activities that are regulated by staff job descriptions. The proportion of duties and responsibilities of the employee in scientific and research activities has been determined depending on the type of academic position. Judging by the CV, not all of them are involved in regular research work, as some of them do not have recent academic publications. Some of the research activities in the field of political science are more in line with the practical analysis of political and social processes. During

assessment visit interviews with teaching staff and CV analysis show that, despite the support provided by the administration for professional and teaching development, some of the new teaching staff, especially in the field of political science, have not obtained a doctorate degree, although they are working in master's study programmes. In some cases, this could be related to family circumstances (maternity leave); however, some of the early career scholars are involved in various professional activities outside the RSU - they work as deputy assistants, in political think tanks, etc. , which allows for valuable practical experience but hinders engagement in academic research.

1.3.8. The decisions taken and the working methods used by the lecturers of the programmes included in the study field, and especially by the director of the study programme group, as well as by the support staff, are based on a student-oriented approach and the opportunities provided by the modern study environment. Each student group is approached individually, if necessary, anonymous questionnaires are conducted, and students are encouraged to report immediately if they experience any difficulties both in terms of the content and form of the study process, including dissatisfaction with classrooms, temperature regulation, the IT system or other. Individual approach and individual solutions have been identified as the most effective tool for reducing student drop-offs and motivating students. RSU has identified the necessary support for students and based on the needs of students, has created a functioning support system for RSU students with functional restrictions requiring adaptation of the study environment and process in order to create equal opportunities to receive higher education. International students, who have confirmed their wish to start studies, receive informative support from the RSU International Department (ID) to ensure their successful and fast integration into the university and to Latvia. A mentor programme is supported for the purposes of helping new students to adapt at the university. At the stage of starting the study process, students always have a meeting with the director of study programmes (from 6 February 2024 – the director of the group of programmes), who provides informative and emotional support for integration into the environment of the higher education institution.

The Career Centre is an especially important entity responsible for students' career development. The Study Services provide necessary psychological help necessary for promoting mental health in a demanding environment. There are specific provisions for disabled students which are extremely important.

The most important body for students is the student self-government that has the right to participate in the decision-making bodies of the RSU at all levels.

During the assessment visit discussion with students from various study programmes showed that there is generally plenty of support for students with specific life situations such as sickness, disability, family-related stressful situations, etc. Members of the academic staff are forthcoming and flexible, especially with regard to work-study balance, since a large part of students are working, especially those studying in master's study programmes.

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

RSU possesses necessary resources for implementing the study field. RSU has created an effective system for determining and redistributing the financial support required for the implementation of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology and the corresponding study programmes. Students and teaching staff have access to all the necessary resources - all RSU resources are fully at the disposal of the study direction. The infrastructure and material and technical support created by RSU are equally accessible to all RSU study programmes. A unified system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of material-technical, methodical, informational and other provisions have been established at RSU. Library resources and databases are available to students and meet the needs of the study field. The students and teaching staff of

the study programmes of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology are provided with a developed IT infrastructure and IT services that are continuously improving, taking into account the increasing requirements for IT from students and employees. The procedure for attracting qualified teaching staff is developed in accordance with Article 55, Part 1, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Law on Scientific Activities. RSU has created an excellent system for the career development of teaching staff. RSU supports didactic and scientific development of its personnel via multiple initiatives. However, the relatively small number of students in the study programmes limits the possibilities of attracting permanent full-time teaching staff with the highest academic qualifications. Many highly qualified specialists in the field are involved as guest professors, especially in political science master's study programmes; however, they are not employed permanently on a full-time basis. This may cast doubt on the consistently stable quality of study programmes year after year. Some of the research activities of early career teachers in the field of political science are more in line with the practical analysis of political and social processes. Therefore, the progress of their academic research experience is relatively slow, some do not have a PhD degree, although they teach courses in master's degree programmes. The students studying at the RSU are offered all the necessary academic support, career development support and psychological support.

Strengths:

1. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU.
2. RSU students and employees are provided with a developed IT infrastructure and IT services that are continuously improving, taking into account the increasing requirements for IT.
3. 24/7 library services and plenty of work space.
4. Qualified academic staff with experience in research and teaching, with English language skills.
5. The students studying at the RSU are offered academic support, career development support and psychological support.
6. Members of the academic staff are forthcoming and flexible.

Weaknesses:

1. Although a large number of the teaching staff has obtained a PhD, a relatively high number are doctoral candidates who have completed their doctoral studies some time ago.
2. The relatively small number of students in the study programmes limits the possibilities of attracting permanent full-time teaching staff with the highest academic qualifications. Many highly qualified specialists in the field are involved as guest professors; this may cast doubt on the consistently stable quality of study programmes year after year.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1. The overall direction of scientific and applied research at the RSU is aligned with the "Rīga Stradiņš University Development Strategy for the Period of 2022-2027". The RSU strategy branches out in two key development goals by 2027: (M1) Creation of locally and internationally significant research results; and (M2) Implementation of education corresponding to the needs of the society and individual to enhance overall capacity of human capital. The already identified goals are divided into several sub-goals, aligned with six action lines (RV): Science, Education, Cooperation, Digital Transformation, Governance, Internationality. The stated aims are: to increase internationalisation by publishing high-quality research, to better involve students in research, to keep track of sustainability goals, to digitise additional processes, to achieve greater and more effective involvement of various stakeholders in the pursuit of strategic goals, to cooperate more effectively at both individual and organisational level with multiple stakeholders at providing cutting-edge

teaching and to leave a balanced footprint in terms of internationalisation. After reading the SAR (pp. 64 – 74) for the study field “Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology” one can agree that its overall direction resonates well with the development goals of the RSU.

It is praiseworthy that the RSU has set up quantitative performance indicators the fulfilment of which is assessed at regular intervals (2020 as a starting year, 2024 and 2027). This system allows for constant monitoring and improved accountability on behalf of RSU decision makers. The indicators include: the number of students, the proportion of international students, the number of students per academic staff (PLE), employment of graduates in higher qualification professions, satisfaction with the quality and outcomes of the study programmes (mean scores on study programme questionnaires), revenues from the basic budget, etc.

RSU also complies with The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity adopted by All European Academies (ALLEA). This document serves the European research community as a framework for self-regulation. <https://www.rsu.lv/en/research-integrity> The four guiding principles are: reliability, honesty, respect and accountability.

The expert team (ET) believes that the execution of a plan for the development and consolidation of multiple StP will enable more efficiency and higher quality in both teaching and research over the course of time. In the study field “Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology” six study programmes were consolidated until 30th of November 2023. Meanwhile, several new study programmes were developed, including the academic Master’s study programme “Russia and Eurasia Studies”, the title of which has been proposed to change into “International System Transformation Studies”. However, the ET deems the latter title inappropriate and suggests keeping the existing title “Russia and Eurasia Studies” or changing it into “Eurasia Studies”, which better corresponds to the content of studies.

Nevertheless, it is still too early to claim total success in achieving all of the goals underlying RSUs consolidation decision. The ET deems that one should more clearly delineate key performance indicators at the level of various study fields represented in RSU programmes. The feasibility of fulfilling key performance indicators differs significantly between the domains of medical and social sciences. During the assessment visit the ET was informed that key performance indicators encompassing four study programmes under assessment were still in the process of being stipulated, with a provisional system in place at the beginning of 2025. It remains to be seen how this process will advance in the coming academic years and how well the study field under assessment will fit into the broader RSU development agenda. In a discussion with the Vice-Rector it was mentioned that there is a lack of state funding for the study programmes in the study field “Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology” and that RSU covers most of the expenses. Future Strategy and SAR should provide more detail on how to tackle these budgetary constraints.

Furthermore, in the opinion of the ET there is room for more synergy among all three scientific platforms upon which the modern RSU is currently being built. The ET deems that public health and social welfare could be better integrated with the study field “Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology” in the form of future MA programme Health Policy and Management. This direction would leverage RSUs existing strengths in a new multidisciplinary field that involves the study of health care systems, including organisation quality and structure, clinical and financial management, health care reform, health law, and policy analysis. Ageing populations in the context of the demographic crisis engulfing the developed world will put a premium on efficient and effective use of limited healthcare resources. This kind of strategic orientation might help RSU in attracting more international students and lecturers, as well as boosting its international reputation.

1.4.2. There is a noticeable integration of research conducted by students into study materials used in lectures and seminars, especially in the Academic Master’s (second cycle) Study Programme “Social Anthropology” (45314) within which students conduct various types of field work. This has been confirmed in a meeting with the teaching staff. A good example represents the case of the

FARP project “From indifference to making difference in climate policy: improving the interaction between political narrative and societal perceptions in Latvia”. The project has fostered 9 publications and enabled 27 activities, as visible from the RSU Research Portal.

Broadly, there are several avenues to how this is achieved. First, since 2019 the RSU hosts biannual Research Week, which includes international scientific conferences of researchers and students. It contributes to the wider development of international cooperation, involvement in scientific networks and associations. There have been three such events as of this report being drafted (2019, 2021 and 2023). The agenda consists of a two-day “International Student Conference” (ISC), three-day international research conferences – “Knowledge for Use in Practice”, on medical and health research, and “Society. Health. Welfare”, a multidisciplinary conference, and “PLACES”, a conference that gathers representatives from various social science fields such as law, political science, business and economics. Every event results in a book of abstracts which broadly covers all RSU research platforms: Medicina, University Teaching and Learning and PLACES, with the latter specialising in social sciences. All abstract Ebooks can be downloaded from the following website: <https://rw2023.rsu.lv/abstracts/e-books>. The participation in the conference is free of charge which fosters inclusivity, networking and knowledge dissemination.

Second, Vertically Integrated Projects or VIPs constitute a new and innovative way of including students in the learning and research process. The VIP teams are composed of both students and researchers. They are multidisciplinary and vertically integrated, which means that both first-year students from the social platform and residency students can work in the same teams. This creates balanced teams in terms of research experience so especially motivated students can learn from both experienced lecturers and other team members. Since the 2019 autumn semester there are six VIP teams working at RSU that carry out various research and activities. Within the study field under assessment one can point out to VIP “State Performance and Biosocial Relatedness in Social Anthropology”. The participation in the VIP is flexible and there are no application restrictions, as well as no minimum or maximum duration in terms of participation. RSU vertically integrated projects are implemented as a part of the ESF co-financed project Improvement of Governance Processes and Modernisation of Contents of Study Programmes.

1.4.3. International cooperation is visible both in participation in international research consortia, as well as in research publication statistics.

Project-related activities conducted on behalf of RSU also reveal a significant degree of cooperation with international institutions. A total of 130 international research projects were submitted in the period from 2017 to 2021, of which 39 have been funded. These include 13 Horizon 2020 projects and 9 ERA-NET projects. Overall, Horizon 2020 has an average success rate of 13%, while the ERA-NET programme has 22%, slightly higher than the EU average (SAR, p. 69). Those activities are shown very transparently and can be searched for in the Project catalogue at the following website: <https://www.rsu.lv/en/research-projects>. RSU projects boast multiple sources of funding such as: EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, EU Structural Funds, National Research Programmes, EEA and Norway Grants, Fundamental and Applied Research (state budget), etc. RSU can claim participation in multiple cutting-edge and international competitive research consortia such as: Horizon Europe, Horizon 2020, COST Programme, Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, Interreg Central Baltic Programme 2014–2020, EU Lifelong Learning Programme GRUNDTVIG, Leonardo da Vinci Programme, etc. Details can be retrieved from the website: <https://www.rsu.lv/en/eu-programmes>.

When it comes to scientific publications from the beginning of 2013 until the end of 2023 lecturers involved in 4 study programmes of the study direction “Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology” have published in total 285 publications, out of which 75 have a corresponding impact factor and are indexed in Web of Science/Scopus databases. 63 publications or 22% are international where at least one foreign author participated in publication. Over time one can notice the growing ability of researchers to publish their research with highly respectable academic publishers. One can point to

the excellent work of the younger generation of scholars.

1.4.4. Since the beginning of 2013 until the end of 2023 lecturers involved in the 4 study programmes of the study field “Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology” have published in total 285 publications, out of which 75 have a corresponding impact factor and are indexed in Web of Science/Scopus databases. It is praiseworthy that there was a major increase in the number of publications since 2020. Namely, 183 or 64.21% of publications have been published over the last four years. Among the 817 keywords added to the publication descriptions, the most common are “Latvia” (34), “COVID-19” (21), “European Union” (10), “remote work” (8), “Baltic countries, Baltic states” (7), “China” (7), “Russia” (7). 96 keywords were used more than once.

According to SAR (p. 67) each structural unit responsible for science is expected to set specific indicators corresponding to the RSU's Science Development Plan. These include the number of publications in the WoS and SCOPUS databases, their proportion in Q1 scientific journals and in cooperation with foreign partners, the number of doctoral theses defended, the increase in external revenues in million euros in scientific activity programmes, incl. Horizon Europe, in the NRP and FARP programmes, as well as the creation of new scientific groups. After conducting an assessment visit to RSU on 16th and 17th of July the expert team was informed by the HEI management and directors of study programmes that the newly formed FSS is in the process of crafting a standardised metric for assessing every single member of the academic staff, based on their performance. The main goal is to improve monitoring and ensure coordination of research activities. Here, the HEI management declared their intention to mainly rely on the “carrot approach” of rewarding employees for meeting their ex-ante stated goals.

This kind of approach is necessary since the three most productive lecturers have 56, 48 and 20 publications. Overall, this concentration of publications among only three lecturers has to be seriously addressed in order to achieve a more balanced and dispersed publication output among members of the academic staff. A rough calculation shows that the other members of the academic staff published on average only 2.43 research papers over the course of ten years. As stated earlier, this has started to change in a positive direction lately but continued monitoring and timely interventions, if needed, remain of great importance.

A positive step is the fact that the newly formed FSS has a remuneration structure which incentivizes researchers to participate in life-long learning programmes and international research consortia, as well as to place their research in academic journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, especially Q1 and Q2 journals. For all single activity members of the academic staff collect credit points which are then translated into financial remuneration. The maximum remuneration is set at 18000 euro gross per employee. Beyond this financial incentive, one also has to put in place minimum criteria for the members of the academic staff who continue to struggle with publications. Finally, the Research Department and the Development and Project Department as RSU structural units should play an even more active role in matching academic staff with various project-related activities.

1.4.5. There are several important mechanisms in place which ensure the compliance with this criterion. As was already mentioned above, there are Vertically Integrated Projects or VIPs which include students in research activities. Second, the ET already elaborated in the context of criterion 1.4.2. how the RSU Research Week promotes active engagement on behalf of students in research, as well its integration into teaching. Third, the RSU established Student Research and Innovation Grants, the goal of which is to support and motivate RSU students to carry out research or innovation projects. The call for research proposals is open twice per year and students can obtain grants for their promising research in the range from 1000 to 4000 euros. Details are provided on the following website: <https://www.rsu.lv/en/student-grants>. Fourth, additional support can be factored in, as shown in Annex 5 titled “Activity of the Student Union”. The latter document states

that RSU SU provides financial support for the implementation of ideas and the promotion of access to the study environment in the following areas:

- support for students' research activities when attending scientific conferences or seminars
- support for the creation of new projects by applying for a project competition with own idea (<https://sp.rsu.lv/projektu-konkurss/>)
- support for the development of the competence of the members of the Student Union
- support for the provision of an accessible and high-quality learning environment - purchase of technical equipment and covering of health-related expenses

Furthermore, at RSU there are over 30 student interest groups, as seen on the RSU website: <https://www.rsu.lv/en/about-us/rsu-student-interest-groups>. They normally encompass medical and health care students from 1st – 6th-year and are formed with the goal of ensuring their professional growth, occasionally tested at student competitions in specific fields such as surgery, neuroscience or internal medicine. However, it is important to stress that the ET has not spotted any student interest group in the study field “Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology”, which needs to be addressed in the future.

In addition, RSU envisaged B-Space as a business incubator whose main goal is to support and promote excellence in developing new business ideas. The incubator provides students with an opportunity to experiment and create prototypes of their ideas, build teams and exchange views with experts and mentors. More information is available on the following website: <https://www.rsu.lv/en/b-space-business-incubator>.

1.4.6. First, In terms of innovative teaching methods the ET welcomes progress made since the last assessment. The goal of offering simulation-based education within at least one course in the study programme has been achieved. Several lecturers in courses such as “Global Governance: Institutions and Processes”, “Information War and Propaganda” and “Power, War and Diplomacy” – enrich the study process with simulations and various mocks (p. 72). Additionally, the RSU website reveals its most recent initiative in this direction. In February 2024 it invited students to develop and submit a public health crisis communication simulation scenario to a competition, with the main prize constituting a trip to the 17th European Public Health Conference in Lisbon, Portugal.

RSU Research Portal represents a very convenient and innovative IT tool to map out existing research networks and projects. Furthermore, every single member of the teaching staff has an RSU Research Portal profile which collects data pertaining to project participation, research output, databases, media appearances, obtained awards, etc. Besides, every researcher has a “fingerprint” which derives key research words from their published works in the research portfolio. In this way, researchers enjoy the benefit of greater visibility, which also increases the chance of being cited or enlisted in an international research consortium. Furthermore, the tool enables a quick and informative overview of key academic collaborations from the last 5 years per country and academic partner. UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) play a key role in ensuring strategic guidance, so all activities, projects and publications are automatically linked with one of the 17 SDGs of the UN. The user interface is very intuitive and constitutes a stellar achievement in terms of fulfilling the goal of digitalization.

RSU continually invests in its employees and makes sure that they have additional competences. The fulcrum of this effort is the Centre for Educational Growth, created in 2014. Among its multiple activities, the core activities relate to organising regular training and seminars for teaching staff on the latest study methods and an interdisciplinary approach to promote cooperation between specialists from different sectors.

The Centre for Educational Growth keeps apace with technological change and it has recently developed guidelines titled “Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education” (available only in Latvian), which provide a thorough introduction to the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education, offering lecturers practical recommendations for the use, limitation and learning how to use AI. This

is also a very innovative solution applied to the implementation of the study programmes under assessment.

During the assessment visit to the IT Service Centre Technical Provision and Execution, the expert team was convinced that professors enjoy high levels of support in organising online classes and filming them. The integration of the Moodle platform with Panopto software and equipment ensures a high level of IT proficiency. There is a general trend of a rising number of online lectures available on the Moodle platform. The lectures are kept available to students for six years, which corresponds to the duration of the study programme in medical sciences.

The SAR also mentions that from 2014/2015 RSU lecturers have had an opportunity to receive a targeted scholarship from the Boris and Inara Teterev Foundation, precisely for the development of new innovative study courses, for the modernization of existing study courses, as well as for the integration of international experience at RSU. Within the framework of the target scholarship, four months are planned for the implementation of the planned activities, during which lecturers both introduce innovative learning and teaching solutions, such as, for example, gamification activities, digital scenarios and other interactive learning materials and resources, and student mutual assessment activities. The ET has checked the RSU website and identified that since the launch of the initiative 11 Boris and Inara Teterev Foundation Scholarship has been awarded to the RSU academic staff. In the future, the ET hopes to see more RSU social science scholars as awardees.

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

After carefully reading the SAR and consolidating insights obtained during the assessment visit, the ET deems that the study field “Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology” is fully compliant with requirements set out in the section “Scientific Research and Artistic Creation”. There are far more strengths than observed weaknesses such as successful integration of digital solutions into planning, implementation and reporting on scientific research. The research output has improved over the last couple of years both in terms of quantity and quality. Project-based activities have been rather successful and further improvement could be expected from the establishment of the one-stop agency for project preparation. There are also multiple mechanisms in place to include students at all levels in research. One suggestion for the RSU management is to consider the option of creating more synergy between three platforms upon which the RSU strategy is based. In that regard, a new MA at the very intersection of public health/social welfare and political science would be a welcome addition to the diversified supply of programmes at RSU.

In light of the identified weaknesses, RSU has to work on forming up at least one VIP and study groups in the study field under assessment. Until the next assessment all lecturers have to open verified Google Scholar, ORCID and ResearchGate profiles, to enhance their international recognizability. Younger scholars pursuing their PhDs and without scientific publications in Web of Science/Scopus/ERIH journals should be paired with senior lecturers to ensure more balanced publishing outcomes. Furthermore, several members of the teaching staff with PhD, who have not published any scientific articles or book chapters since 2017 should be further helped to do so, with a proper set of incentives to ensure their contribution to the collective research output.

Strengths:

1. The RSU Research Portal which significantly facilitates planning, implementing and monitoring scientific activities.
2. Very high level digitalization and availability of new IT solutions in organising teaching and research (solid IT Service Centre Technical Provision and Execution).
3. Strong commitment to life-long learning ensured by the Centre for Educational Growth.
4. Elaborate mechanisms for the inclusion of students in scientific research (Research Week, Student Research and Innovation Grants, Vertically Integrated Projects, etc).

5. Rising number of publications per teaching staff member since 2020.
6. Growing evidence of innovative teaching methods.
7. The launch of remuneration scheme which will motivate academic staff to participate in life-long learning projects, as well publishing in Q1 and Q2 journals.
8. Solid success rate in obtaining project-related grants.
9. Formation of the Social Sciences Research Centre and corresponding research groups (available at: <https://www.rsu.lv/en/social-sciences-research-centre>)

Weaknesses:

1. Excessive concentration of publications in only a handful of individuals, while too many scholars have not published their research in journals or books indexed in Web of Science, Scopus or ERIH databases.
2. Insufficient inclusion of students from the study field under assessment in VIPs and study groups.
3. Almost half of lecturers do not have current Google Scholar Profiles. Similarly, ORCID and Scopus profiles are also not part of a comprehensive standard.

Assessment of the requirement [2]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

RSU demonstrates compliance among all criteria of scientific research. The above listed strengths far outweigh weaknesses and they do not affect the requirements.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1. There are several key forms of cooperation in place. First, students have the opportunity to be placed in various internships, as discussed during ET meetings with students, graduates and external stakeholders. In this way, students can deepen their interests and improve competences by working and learning in various partnership institutions across all branches of government, in NGOs and private companies. Second, research projects, joint data collection and publications represent another form of cooperation. Third, lecturers from Riga Graduate School of Law, University of Latvia, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, University of Liepaja and Latvian Academy of Culture are often involved in the implementation of study programmes and final thesis defence committees.

Annex 13.2. (Anx_projects_implemented_RSU.pdf) contains the list of projects implemented over the course of the last ten years. Experts can point out to several recent ones such as: "From indifference to making difference in climate policy: improving the interaction between political narrative and societal perceptions in Latvia", "Critical Exploration of Media Related Risks and Opportunities for Deliberative Communication: Development Scenarios of the European Media Landscape (MEDIADCOM)", "Closing the Gap between Formal and Informal Institutions in the Balkans (INFORM)".

Last and not the least, is the joint project financed by The National Research Programme of the Latvian Science Council titled "Decision-making Support System for Achieving Climate Neutrality Goals". This is a really good example of interdisciplinarity and joint network formation among Latvian HEI. The goal of the project is to create a unified national decision support tool for achieving the goal of Latvia's climate neutrality. The goal of the project is to develop new solutions for mitigating the impact of climate change and to assess data needs and quality, emphasising compliance with regulatory enactments, primarily by using a system dynamic modelling approach

that covers economic, social, technological, environmental and climate aspects. RSU will work together with three other leading Latvian HEI: Riga Technical University, Institute of Energy Systems and Environment, University of Latvia and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. The project started in February 2024 and will last until February 2026. The project VPP-KEM-Klimatneitralitāte-2023/1-0002 will be financed with 1.16 million euro.

There have been further steps announced, which will ensure future compliance in this regard. The Social Sciences Research Centre will be established at the FSS, which will provide research infrastructure for social sciences research both for the faculty and for the other structural units of RSU. The Social Sciences Research Centre will cooperate with the Baltic Studies Centre and other partners (p. 67, SAR).

1.5.2. In conducting expert assessment of the study field, experts were able to retrieve data from multiple sources on the many dimensions of international cooperation. First, experts refer to data on academic mobility in the period from the academic year 2013/2014 until the academic year 2023/2024. This is an especially important form of international cooperation. The administrative unit in charge is the RSU International Department, which has established an extensive network of partnering higher education institutions in Europe. Besides, the RSU International Department organises every year the Erasmus+ International Week (p. 77, SAR).

In that light, experts analysed both outgoing and incoming mobility for students and academic staff, as crucial evidence for the extent of international cooperation. For the Academic Master's (second cycle) Study Programme "Social Anthropology" (45314) there were 13 registered outgoing student mobilities and zero incoming mobilities. For the Academic Master's (second cycle) Study Programme "Social Anthropology" (45314) 3 students engaged in outgoing mobility while 4 students used the opportunity for incoming mobility. For the Academic Bachelor's (first cycle) study programme "International Relations - European Studies" 43312 experts observed a far higher intensity of both outgoing and incoming mobility. 85 foreign students came to the RSU, while 64 domestic students travelled for part of their studies abroad, all within the available programmes stimulating academic exchange (Erasmus+ Study Mobility, Erasmus short-term mobility or Erasmus recent graduate traineeship). Since the Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International System Transformation Studies" 45312 is a newly introduced programme, there is no data on academic mobility so far. On the academic staff mobility component experts note that RSU staff, within the study field under assessment, embraced outgoing mobility opportunities 133 times in the period from the academic year 2013/2014 until the academic year 2023/2024. On the other hand, during the same period there were 62 incoming mobilities. 26 of guest lecturers stayed less than one week, 25 stayed more than three months, while the rest fit between. The guest lecturers come from more than 20 countries. In sum, there is a robust cooperation infrastructure in place and the RSU has 57 Erasmus+ Programme Agreements which are valid until the 31st of December 2027. There are also 202 additional cooperation agreements, including projects. Many of those cooperation agreements are still active and can be utilised.

1.5.3. The most important piece of the strategy for attracting foreign teaching staff and students is the decision to implement all four study programmes under assessment in English. Therefore, this will enable further increase in the share of foreign students at the RSU. In the RSU Development Strategy for the Period of 2022-2027 there is a goal to increase the share of international students from 26% in 2020 to 30% in 2027. Annex 16 titled "Statistical data on students" shows that over the last 5 years RSU has grown the number of full-time students (outside exchange programmes) from abroad. In academic years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 the study programmes under assessment enrolled 14 international students, while the last three academic years show a major increase to 45 international students. Experts observe that the number of students for the implementation of the study programmes in English has risen from zero in the academic year 2018/2019 to 37 in the

academic year 2023/2024 (Annex 16- Statistical data on students).

Second, as already stated, the RSU boasts a rather dense network of bilateral agreements which stimulate academic mobility. Third, the RSU organises bi-annual scientific conferences. Fourth, the RSU relies on active recruitment campaigns to attract international students, primarily on online and social media campaigns. RSU's YouTube channel has short videos advertising programmes such as "International Governance and Diplomacy" and "Russia and Eurasian Studies". This is a good approach, but all four programmes need updated videos targeting international audiences, since the ones which are available online as of the drafting of this report are more than three years old.

On the other hand, the attraction of international lecturers has seen modest success due to limited financial resources. Some noteworthy examples include visits by professors Andrey Makarychev, Michael Kaeding, Carlo Cubero, Michael Strmiska, Hanna Nieber, and Susanne Fehlings.

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

The study field is highly regarded among employers, graduates and students. It definitely demonstrates a lot of strongpoints. The RSU has a strong orientation towards keeping up with changing imperatives of higher education in the 21st century and is generally reform-minded. It can count on a robust network of cooperation agreements and project activities, both among domestic and international partners. Given the financial circumstances, there is a satisfactory level of academic mobility, both in terms of student and teaching staff mobility. However, RSU should put more effort into attracting international lecturers as visiting scholars or committee members for the defence of final theses. The implementation in English of the four study programmes under evaluation represents an important milestone. Nevertheless, programmes' management and RSU management should up the ante in terms of advertising and targeting student audiences in Latvia and beyond.

In light of the several identified weaknesses, which do not detract from the overall assessment that the RSU is fully compliant with all criteria mentioned above, the ET recommends to programmes' management to additionally boost participation in international research consortia.

Strengths:

1. Robust and diversified network of 57 inter-institutional agreements established by the RSU plus 202 other cooperation agreements, including projects.
2. Solid outgoing student mobility for almost all programmes.
3. Examples of several interdisciplinary research projects under implementation.
4. Growing signs of internationalisation, especially when looking at the number of international full-time students.
5. Finalised preparations for the implementation of four study programmes in English.
6. Streamlining of research activities under the banner of the Social Sciences Research Centre.

Weaknesses:

1. Low incoming mobility for international teaching staff.
2. An obsolete marketing campaign targeted at foreign student population.

Assessment of the requirement [3]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Cooperation with local and international organisations on all levels is fully compliant with the requirements. Minor weaknesses have been identified, but they do not affect the evaluation of

the requirement.

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

Analysis

1.6.1. The RSU study field "Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology" was last externally evaluated and accredited in 2012, and at that time, based on the annex "Report on the implementation of the recommendations" (11_Anx_Expert_Recom_compl_overview_StD_Soc_Pol_Antr. pdf) the study field received 7 recommendations. Subsequently, a new study programme was established in the study field - Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International System Transformation Studies" 45312 (current name "Russia and Eurasia Studies"), which according to the Latvian legislation underwent the procedure of study programme licensing (2021) and the procedure of study programme inclusion in the study field accreditation form (2023), where several recommendations were also received concerning both the study programme and the study field.

According to the RSU representatives during the assessment visit and referring to the above-mentioned Annex, all recommendations received in 2012 have been fully implemented, except in cases where study programmes have been closed. Recommendations received more than 10 years ago pointed out the need to link sociology study programmes more closely to the RSUs core profile - medicine, which has been done, for example, by involving faculty members more in the development of health policies, interdisciplinary research activities and projects, and by implementing specialised study courses ("Medical Anthropology", "History of Death", "How to Understand Madness"). Recommendations were also received to link the thesis topics in sociology more closely with medical sociology, sociology of health and social work, which is being done and is evidenced by the theses produced. Recommendations were also received to improve the library resource base to meet the needs of the study programmes, which is being actively pursued on an ongoing basis. Among the recommendations received was the idea of creating a social sciences summer school to attract more international students and academic staff, which has been attempted by intensifying incoming Erasmus mobility, but at the time of the assessment visit such a summer school had not yet been implemented, but is planned to be implemented by the end of 2024. In 2012, the experts recommended finding new premises for the student self-government body, which has been done. Two recommendations were also received concerning the political science study programmes, pointing to the need to assess the use of analytical tools and research methods in studies, as well as to develop a more systematic and grounded curriculum, but as regards the implementation of these recommendations, RSU notes that the programmes in question are currently closed.

In 2021, the licensing of the Master's study programme "Russian-Eurasian Studies" (now called Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International System Transformation Studies" 45312) received 4 short-term recommendations, 4 long-term recommendations and 2 from the AIKA Study Quality Commission. The short-term recommendations pointed to the need for targeted marketing activities for the study programme, the creation of a separate methods course, the elimination of duplication of study content in individual courses and the promotion of closer cooperation between guest lecturers in order to eliminate duplication of content.

Long-term recommendations were devoted to more active involvement of RSU experienced lecturers in the implementation of the study programme, to increase the number of lecturers' scientific publications in high quality and indexed scientific journals, to further improve the material base of the library, as well as to assess the possibilities of synergies with existing international relations study programmes. As RSU points out in the annex "Report on the implementation of the recommendations", all these recommendations have been implemented, however, in 2023 the evaluation procedure for the inclusion of this study programme in the study pathway took place. In

this evaluation, 4 short-term recommendations and 5 long-term recommendations were received. These included both continuing to work on the implementation of the recommendations received earlier in the licensing procedure and continuing to improve the sequencing of the study courses on offer. Concerns were also highlighted about: the large number of lecturers actively involved in politics and their workload to teach the courses outlined in the curriculum; the need to establish clear guidelines and boundaries between study, research and work in think tanks. Longer-term recommendations again included the need for a clear long-term development and marketing strategy for the study programme, including more clearly defined target groups of applicants, closer cooperation with academic institutions in Central Asia, including both research activities and exchange opportunities. As well as assessing the possibility of introductory courses on basic concepts and theories of international relations. A number of these recommendations have now been partially implemented, which can be explained both by the relatively short time between evaluations and by a number of structural changes at RSU in recent years (change of study programme director, study programme closures and reorganisations). It should be noted, however, that the information provided during the assessment visit and in the SAR indicates that more work is still needed to ensure that the recommendations received earlier are actually implemented in a meaningful way, both for the entire study field and for the specific study programmes.

Particular highlights include the need to further strengthen the research activity of lecturers involved in the implementation of study programmes, targeted marketing activities to attract international students, increased incoming students and academic staff mobility, and the inclusion of research methods and analytical tools in the study content.

This section assesses the implementation of the recommendations received in all assessment procedures. The most recent recommendations were received in 2021 and 2023, which mainly concerned the Master's degree programme "Russian-Eurasian Studies", but are sometimes also relevant to aspects of the whole study field. A more in-depth assessment of the actual implementation status and results of the recommendations received during these evaluations shows that several of them have now been partially implemented. This is due both to the relatively short time to implement the longer-term recommendations, and partly to the formal approach to their implementation. Looking at the situation in more detail, it should be noted that recommendation No. 6 "To increase, as much as possible, the number of scientific publications in high quality and indexed scientific journals by lecturers who are already in employment relations with RSU" was received when the study programme was licensed in 2021 (Annex "11_Anx_Expert_Recom_compl_overview_StD_Soc_Pol_Antr.pdf", p. 13). The RSU notes that this recommendation has already been implemented at the end of 2023 and work on it is ongoing, however, a review of the materials submitted for the assessment shows that it has only been partially implemented and that active work on its implementation should continue. A more detailed analysis of the research activities of the study programme teaching staff can be found in section 2.4.4. under the specific study programme.

Regarding the promotion, marketing activities and positioning of the study programme to applicants, 2 recommendations were received - in 2021 (recommendation No 1) and in 2023 (long-term recommendation No 2) (see above mentioned Annex, p. 8 and p. 26). RSU's response to the first recommendation indicates that it has been implemented, while the implementation of the second recommendation is indicated as a long-duration process; however, the study programme is new and work should continue on its implementation, especially given the fact that it has already enrolled students. Unfortunately, no students were admitted in 2023. These figures are worrying, compounded by the different visions of stakeholders on how to position the study programme in the future. During the assessment visit, meetings with the study programme and university management revealed a lack of a coherent and realistic vision on student recruitment, which should be given more attention for a successful joint RSU effort to open student groups in this and other

study programmes. RSU indicates a number of measures - signing of memoranda, activities in the USA, closer cooperation with Central European universities, foreign embassies, etc. - that it plans to take in the future, so further work is needed on their implementation and successful implementation in practice.

In terms of increasing inbound mobility of students and academic staff, establishing new international collaborations, 2 long-term recommendations (3 and 4) were received in 2023 (see Annex mentioned above, pp. 29-32). Although RSU has started work on their implementation, this needs to be continued and strengthened in order to successfully position the study programme as Eurasian Studies. At present, these recommendations have only been partially implemented. Finally, on the inclusion of research methods and analytical tools in the study content - both in the licensing of the study programme and in the inclusion in the study field, the experts stressed the need to strengthen this aspect of the study programme. RSU points out that the relevant recommendations have been implemented, however, the evaluation of the study content, the information obtained during the assessment visit (meetings with students and representatives of academic staff) showed that it would be useful to increase the content devoted to academic research, research methods, theories of international relations.

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

The RSU study field has made significant strides in addressing recommendations from the 2012 external evaluation. Most of the recommendations, especially those related to curriculum development, library resource enhancement, and interdisciplinary integration with RSUs core profile in medicine, have been implemented successfully. Although there has been progress, especially in the newer study programme Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International System Transformation Studies" 45312, there are still areas where further work is needed. Some long-term recommendations, particularly those concerning the development and marketing strategy, lecturer research activity, and international cooperation, have only been partially implemented. In conclusion, while RSU has made commendable progress in implementing past recommendations, there is still a need for continued focus on long-term strategic goals, particularly in research, marketing, and international collaboration, to ensure sustained academic excellence and global relevance.

Strengths:

1. RSU has shown a strong commitment to implementing the recommendations from the 2012 evaluation, particularly in aligning the sociology programmes with RSUs medical profile and improving library resources.
2. The creation of specialised courses and the introduction of new study programmes like Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International System Transformation Studies" 45312 demonstrate RSUs adaptability and responsiveness to academic needs.
3. The linkage between sociology and medical studies, evidenced by thesis topics and course offerings, is a significant strength that aligns with RSUs overall academic profile.

Weaknesses:

1. Despite progress, some long-term recommendations, particularly those related to the strategic development and internationalisation of the study programmes, remain only partially fulfilled.
2. The targeted marketing activities and the establishment of stronger international collaborations, especially in attracting international students and staff, require more sustained efforts and strategic planning.
3. The need for enhanced research output among lecturers and the integration of research methods into the curriculum has not been fully addressed, which could affect the academic rigour and

reputation of the programmes.

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

The requirement is assessed as partially compliant because, although RSU has made progress in addressing many recommendations from the 2012 evaluation and study programme licensing procedure, key long-term goals such as targeted marketing, internationalisation, and research integration remain only partially fulfilled. Structural changes, including programme closures and leadership shifts, have further disrupted the continuity of these efforts. While RSU has demonstrated commitment, the ongoing gaps and incomplete implementation of recommendations justify the partially compliant assessment.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

Across the various documents submitted and presented publicly, the collection of disaggregated gender statistics could be considered by the Faculty Council and improved and gender neutrality should be further improved by opting for the plural pronoun instead of his/her.

Indicators for evaluating and assessing quality should be made specific in ways that make them usable as benchmarking criteria.

Re-evaluate the impact of centralising the programme director role and shifting its emphasis from academic content to managerial administration, with a view to ensuring that sufficient disciplinary expertise exists to enable effective overview, management, and continuous improvement of content. It is recommended that one person should not lead four study programmes, particularly at the master's level, without a PhD title.

Review the poor turnout in student response and devise more efficient strategies to address it.

Ensure consistency in complaints and monitoring mechanisms across study programs including by improving student engagement in reporting, monitoring, and evaluation.

Enhance information collection to include more reporting of student experience.

Ensure that the programme to be re-titled ("International Systems Transformations") is correctly represented, either by keeping the current title or opting for a title that represents the regional studies approach taken, such as "Eurasia studies".

Enhance presence in social networks and create new YT videos advertising programmes to international audience.

Contribute more to the professional development of lecturers and incentivize publications. Means to do this could include workshops and training for staff in areas of book chapter publications, patent publications and principles of academic research, especially for staff without publications since 2017, mentoring arrangements, and pairing senior and junior researchers in joint research teams.

Set up a mandatory framework whereby every member of the teaching staff has Google Scholar, ORCID and Scopus profiles, to enhance visibility of research output.

Promote the growth of young scholars pursuing a PhD and who do not have scientific publications provide more support and supervision to them.

Review workloads to ensure that they avoid overextension, which could result in the non-fulfillment of set targets.

Review the approach of allowing individuals without a PhD to teach in master's programmes. Considering that this is not considered good practice in Latvia, it is suggested to either change the lecturers or reclassify the programmes as professional rather than academic. This will help maintain the quality and credibility of the programmes.

Improve communication and interaction with students and teachers, especially in clearly explaining strategic visions and involving them in the collaborative development of these strategies. Establishing regular meetings, open forums, and transparent channels for feedback can help ensure that all stakeholders are well-informed and actively engaged in the process, fostering a more cohesive and supportive educational environment.

Long-term recommendations

Put more emphasis on contacting academic staff from comparable programmes abroad and inviting them as guest lecturers, within bilateral and Erasmus+ cooperation framework.

Clarify the strategic focus of the study direction by distinguishing and aligning the priorities between Latvia's national focuses and internationalisation efforts within the study direction. Developing a clear framework that defines how these two objectives can complement rather than conflict with each other will help reduce confusion and ensure a coherent approach that benefits both local and international stakeholders.

Create a long-term academic career development plan for each teaching staff member in order to ensure stable and permanent affiliation of highly qualified academic staff to the study field at RSU.

Continue to implement the recommendations from the previous evaluation. In particular focusing on prioritising the completion of long-term strategic goals, particularly in internationalisation and development, to ensure continued progress and study programme relevance. Intensify targeted marketing efforts and establish more robust international partnerships to attract a greater number of international students and staff. Increase research output among lecturers and embed research methods more thoroughly into the curriculum to boost academic rigour and enhance the study programme's reputation.

II - "International Relations - European Studies" ASSESSMENT

II - "International Relations - European Studies" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. Academic Bachelor's (first cycle) study programme "International Relations - European Studies" (43312) (ABASP International Relations - European Studies) complies with the study field "Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology" (study field) . The study programme aims to provide students first with comprehensive basic knowledge and then with specialised and in-depth knowledge in the field of politics and international relations from a European and global perspective (SAR, p. 143), demonstrating a strong affiliation to the field of political science. The ABASP

International Relations - European Studies alignment with its study field is positively recognised, reflecting its adherence to legal standards and well-organised structure. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies content is closely tied to the field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology, with a particular emphasis on international relations and a focus on European region studies.

RSU is planning to continue implementing only one Bachelor's level study programme in this study field after accreditation. Therefore, this will be the base study programme at the first cycle level, thus providing students with the opportunity to continue their studies at the second cycle, master's level at RSU and creating a sequential continuity of study programmes.

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies content, as detailed in Annex 19 (Annex "19_Anx_StP_plan_ABSP_Intl_Relations_European_Stud.pdf"), supports the alignment between the programme's title and the degree to be awarded — a Bachelor's degree of Social Sciences in Political Science and International Relations. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies meets national academic education standards, with students earning a bachelor's degree that reflects the study outcomes achieved in the relevant field. The courses offered within the ABASP International Relations - European Studies are well-aligned with the study field. (more details in under 2.2.1. criteria)

2.1.2. Upon successful completion of studies and defence of the Bachelor's thesis, students of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies obtain Bachelor's degree of Social Sciences in Political Science and International Relations (Considering the new changes in regulations, in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 12, the degree should be changed to a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and International Relations).

The study programme code - 43312, is established in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 322 of 13 June 2017 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524>). The digits "43" stand for - academic education (bachelor's degree), following general or vocational secondary education. Full-time study lasts three to four years (in this case, a 3-year study programme is foreseen). The third, fourth and fifth digits of the code '312' indicate the affiliation of '3' to the thematic group 'Social sciences, business and law', '312' to the educational programme group 'Political science'.

The aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are clearly defined and interrelated. They are developed in accordance with the objectives set out both in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 May 2014 No 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education" and level 6 of the Latvian Qualifications Framework. Accordingly, the study programme has 6 learning outcomes, divided into knowledge, skills and competences.

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies is implemented only as full-time studies in Latvian and English. Full-time studies lasts 3 years, 180 ECTS. The admission requirement is secondary education and for studies in English - knowledge of English at least at B2 level. Admission requirements are based on and compliant with external legislation (SAR, study programme parameters) and, given that the study programme is offered also in English, proof of at least B2 level of English is logical and reasonable.

Overall, the ABASP International Relations - European Studies parameters - title, degree to be obtained, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, duration and scope of studies, delivery format and languages - are justified and interrelated.

2.1.3. A number of changes have been made to the parameters of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies (SAR, p. 146 -152):

1) Taking into account the changes in the external legislation, the education classification code was changed from "43310" (thematic programme group - Social and human sciences) to "43312" (thematic programme group - Political science), the change is logical and justified.

2) The language of the study programme has been changed to Latvian and English (from Latvian only), justified on the grounds of enhancing the competitiveness of the study programme by attracting international students.

3) In addition, the study programme has been changed to 180 CP, based on changes in the national legislation - the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education. This is related to the transition from the Latvian credit point system to ECTS. In the transition from the Latvian CP system to the ECTS credit system, RSU has determined that one credit point corresponds to 25-30 hours of study work, requiring course supervisors to clarify the distribution of contact hours and students' independent work in study courses, giving them more flexibility. In order to ensure this effectively, RSU has developed a summary of recommendations for study programme directors and course supervisors "Transition to the new credit system" (Appendix "30_piel_Rekomendācijas pārejai uz jauno kredītpunktu sistēmu.pdf").

4) During the accreditation period, the study programme has had three changes of programme directors, justified by different professional challenges and career development (SAR, p. 147). Currently, this and three other programmes in this study field are directed by a staff member who is herself a PhD candidate. The information gathered during the assessment visit raised concerns about the disproportionately high workload, the risks of study programmes being led by managers rather than by individuals with academic experience in the field and a vision for its development, and, in terms of overall workload, the risks to quality and efficiency.

5) In line with changes in external legislation and the introduction of an additional implementation language, the admission requirements have been clarified, which is reasonable and logical.

6) In response to student suggestions, the degree to be awarded upon graduation has been revised from "Bachelor of Social Sciences in Political Science" to "Bachelor's degree of Social Sciences in Political Science and International Relations" to reflect the specialisation in more detail and to highlight the role of international relations in the programme content. The change is logical and welcome.

In summary, the experts find the changes to the parameters of the study programme to be justified and supportable.

2.1.4. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies prepares graduates first with comprehensive basic knowledge and then with specialised and in-depth knowledge in the field of politics and international relations from a European and global perspective. According to the information available on the AIKA E-platform, in the summer of 2024 only 3 higher education institutions in Latvia offer international relations / political science study programmes at the Bachelor level in the study field "Sociology, political science and anthropology" (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv>).

It is welcome that RSU has independently conducted a study on the competitiveness of its study programmes and their relevance to labour market trends, however, it showed that the demand for specialists in the social and human sciences group is expected to decrease (SAR, p. 96). Despite this, the results of the alumni surveys show a high level of satisfaction with the study programme and its quality. The results of the graduate survey (Annex "21.2_Anx_Graduate_survey_European_studies_ENG.pdf") show that graduates are not regularly surveyed and analysed for their employability and that the response rate could be higher (21 respondents completed the graduate survey in total). In addition, the analysis of the Alumni Monitoring Tool available in the State Education Information System (VIIS) shows that the overall employment rate among graduates of Bachelor's level study programmes in the thematic group "Social Sciences, Business and Law" at RSU in 2022 is 79,1%, which is higher than the annual national indicator for this group by 0,7%. It is important to highlight that the study programme makes a significant contribution to the training of young specialists in Latvian public administration and especially in the foreign affairs sector, as evidenced by employment statistics - graduates are

employed in both local and national government structures (legislative and executive), as well as in EU institutions, NATO and other international organisations (SAR, p. 154).

However, in this area, the RSU would be advised to improve its feedback mechanisms, both through more active cooperation with the Alumni Association and by improving the survey methodology and evaluating other ways of obtaining information, for example by organising focus group discussions with alumni. This indicates that the management of the study programme and study field could improve the current approach to communication with its graduates in order to accumulate data on their employment patterns, as well as to more actively offer them opportunities to engage in the implementation and improvement of the study programme, for example, through proposals, guest lectures, other formats of cooperation.

Analysing the statistical data on student dynamics provided by RSU (Annex "16_Anx_Stat_data_stud_European_studies_ENG.pdf"), it can be seen that the dynamics of students enrolled in the period from 2016 to 2022 has been variable (but with a positive trend towards an increase in the number of students), ranging from 43 students enrolled in 2016 to 80 in 2019. Over the last 7 years, an average of 59 students have enrolled each year, 32 students have dropped out on average and 24 students have graduated on average.

RSU has analysed the drop-out rate, noting (SAR, p. 156) that the reasons for dropping out vary widely - personal/private reasons, inability to combine with paid work, health problems, slowed learning pace, etc., but in most cases, academic failure. It should be highlighted that RSU has established an algorithm for monitoring and reducing dropout - early identification of students' learning difficulties, followed by individual discussions with each student, creating an understanding of the reasons for the difficulties and finding individual solutions, for example, by creating an individual study plan for passing the study courses. Such an initiative is very welcome and should be developed in the future in all study programmes. So far, this study programme has been implemented only in Latvian, but despite that, students are very actively using the Erasmus+ mobility opportunities, as evidenced by the high rates of inbound and outbound mobility (Annex "08.2_Anx_Statistics_on_student_mobility_ENG.pdf"). Between 2013 and 2024, 64 students have been involved in outgoing mobility and 85 international students in incoming mobility.

Overall, the analysis of student dynamics shows a positive trend for the future, which will certainly be complemented by the fact that this will be the only bachelor degree programme in this field of study.

2.1.5. N/A

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

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies aligns well with the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology, offering a robust foundation in political science and international relations, with a focus on European studies. The study programme's structure and content comply with national academic standards, providing a coherent pathway for students from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. The recent adjustments to the study programme, including the inclusion of English as an implementation language and the adoption of the ECTS credit system, are justified and aim to enhance its appeal to both local and international students. However, there are areas where improvements could be made, particularly in alumni engagement and the management of student dropout rates.

Strengths:

1. The study programme closely aligns with the study field, particularly in political science and international relations, ensuring a solid academic foundation.
2. The study programme meets all legal and academic requirements, ensuring that the degree

awarded is well-recognised.

3. The inclusion of English as an implementation language and the adoption of ECTS make the study programme more competitive and accessible to international students.

4. Alumni have shown a high level of satisfaction and successful employment, particularly in public administration and international organisations.

Weaknesses:

1. The current approach to alumni engagement is insufficient, with limited feedback mechanisms and low survey response rates.

2. There is a significant dropout rate, despite efforts to monitor and address students' learning difficulties.

3. The programme's degree needs to be changed according to new regulations.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies demonstrates a strong alignment with the criterion, which requires that the content of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies be topical, interconnected, and complementary, corresponding to the programmes objectives and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes.

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies complies with the National Education Standard (Annex 17.1.17.1_Anx_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf). The content of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies is both topical and relevant, addressing the current geopolitical landscape, especially in relation to the European Union and global international relations. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies is designed to provide students with a comprehensive foundation in political science and international relations, with a particular emphasis on European and global perspectives. This is in line with the ABASP International Relations - European Studies goal of preparing professionals who are theoretically knowledgeable and practically ready to work in national, regional, and global political institutions.

The study courses within the ABASP International Relations - European Studies are well-structured and complementary. The curriculum is designed to progress logically from introductory courses in the first year, such as "Introduction to International Relations" and "Political History of Europe," to more specialised courses in later years, such as "Comparative Politics of European States" and "Foreign Policy Analysis" (Annex 19). This progression ensures that students build a solid foundation of knowledge before advancing to more complex topics. The complementary nature of the courses ensures that the skills, knowledge, and competencies acquired in one course are reinforced and expanded upon in subsequent courses, which aligns with the requirements of the Latvian education standards.

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies learning outcomes are clearly defined and align with the overall objectives of the programme. These outcomes are mapped to specific courses, ensuring that each course contributes to the development of the competencies needed for successful careers in international relations and political science. The focus on developing practical skills, alongside theoretical knowledge, ensures that students are well-prepared for the labour market. The mapping process has allowed for a thorough review of the interaction between the competencies, knowledge, and skills to be acquired in individual courses, thereby ensuring compliance with the learning outcomes required by the national regulations, including the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 on the National Standard of Academic Education.

The programme is designed to meet the needs of the labour market and industry, particularly in the context of Latvian and European public administration and international organisations. Graduates of the programme are well-equipped to work in various capacities within the EU, NATO, and other

international bodies, reflecting the current demand for professionals with expertise in international relations and European studies. The programme also incorporates the latest scientific trends by regularly updating its curriculum to include new developments in political science, international relations, and related fields, ensuring that students are engaged with current and relevant content (SAR, pp. 154-156).

The programme complies with national regulations, including the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ensuring that the degree awarded is recognized and valued both nationally and internationally. The programme's structure, including its credit volume of 180 ECTS, duration of three years, and the awarding of a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences in Political Science and International Relations, adheres to the standards set by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 322 and No. 240.

The course content is well-suited to the programme (Annex 20.1.20.1_course_descriptions_European_Stud.pdf), and the instructors' qualifications meet the required standards (SAR, 168-170). It is recommended to continue enhancing the scientific contributions of the academic staff and to encourage instructors to regularly review and update their course materials in line with the latest trends, incorporating the most recent relevant scientific publications.

2.2.2. N/A

2.2.3. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies employs a variety of teaching methods designed to ensure the achievement of the programme's aims and learning outcomes. These methods include lectures, seminars, practical classes, independent research, and project work. Each method is carefully selected to align with the specific objectives of the courses and the overall programme. For instance, seminars and practical classes encourage active participation, critical thinking, and the application of theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, which are essential for a comprehensive understanding of international relations and European studies.

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies places a strong emphasis on student-centred learning principles, which are evident in several aspects of the teaching and learning process. Regular tutorials and consultations are available to students, offering personalised support and guidance throughout their studies. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies encourages independent work, such as essay writing and research projects, which allows students to engage deeply with the material and develop their analytical and critical thinking skills. The flexibility in choosing elective courses also supports a student-centred approach, enabling students to tailor their education according to their interests and career aspirations.

Given that the IR and European Studies programme is offered in both Latvian and English, the ABASP International Relations - European Studies has been designed to accommodate students studying in a foreign language. The English language stream is carefully structured to ensure that non-native speakers can effectively engage with the course material. This includes providing access to English-language resources, tailored support from lecturers proficient in English, and the use of teaching methods that are accessible to international students. The wide offer of foreign languages is highly valued, and it is certainly considered relevant in the context of this programme.

Additionally, the ABASP International Relations - European Studies incorporates digital tools and platforms to support learning, especially in the context of distance-learning or hybrid models. The use of online platforms such as the MyRSU portal, e-learning systems, and remote communication tools like Zoom and Panopto facilitates the delivery of course content, even when students are not physically present. This adaptability was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be relevant for students who may need to study remotely due to various circumstances.

To further enhance compliance with this criterion, it is recommended that the ABASP International

Relations - European Studies continue to develop and integrate innovative teaching methods that reflect the latest pedagogical trends. This could include more extensive use of digital technologies, simulation exercises, and interdisciplinary projects that connect the course material with broader global issues. Additionally, regular feedback from students should be used to continuously refine and adapt the teaching methods to ensure they remain aligned with the evolving needs of the student body.

2.2.4. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies includes a mandatory internship component that is well-organised and effectively contributes to the achievement of the programme's learning outcomes. The internship, which takes place in the spring semester of the third year, is a critical part of the study programme. It is designed to consolidate the theoretical knowledge students have acquired throughout their studies by providing practical experience in relevant professional environments. The internship spans 160 working hours (6 ECTS), which ensures that students have sufficient time to immerse themselves in the professional setting and complete meaningful tasks that align with their study profile.

RSU has established a systematic approach to organising internships, with clear guidelines and agreements between the university and placement providers. These agreements ensure that the internship tasks are directly related to the learning outcomes of the programme, such as understanding the practical application of international relations and political science theories, engaging in empirical research, and participating in the daily operations of the host organisation. The tasks assigned during the internship are carefully crafted to ensure that students can apply their gained knowledge in university in real-world scenarios, which is crucial for achieving the intended learning outcomes. For instance, students are expected to familiarise themselves with the operational principles of their placement organisation and to perform specific tasks under the supervision of a designated mentor. This hands-on experience is integral to developing the professional competencies required for careers in international relations, European studies, and related fields. The internship concludes with a comprehensive evaluation process that includes both a written report by the student and feedback from the placement provider. This assessment ensures that the internship experience is aligned with the programme's academic goals and that students have met the expected learning outcomes (SAR pp. 162-164; Annex 9).

According to Annex 9 (Description of the Organisation of Student Placement.), for students enrolled in the English-language stream of the programme, RSU provides additional support to ensure that the internship experience is accessible and valuable, even when conducted in a foreign language. The university facilitates placements in organisations where English is the primary language of communication, ensuring that non-Latvian speakers can fully participate and benefit from the internship. This support includes guidance in securing appropriate placements and assistance throughout the internship process. In practice, foreign students have the option to work in institutions where Latvian is the primary working language, but a substantial portion of activities is conducted in English as well. Examples of such institutions include non-governmental organisations, think tanks, and similar organisations.

While the internship component is well-structured and effective, continuous improvement can be achieved by following a set of the aims in SAR(p. 163) and in expanding the range of placement opportunities, particularly in international organisations and institutions where students can gain experience in a global context. When considering distance or online internships (SAR, p. 163), it is advisable to carefully establish a new set of criteria for evaluating the outcomes of the student's practice. It should also be noted that the complete experience of in-person communication is lacking in such settings. Additionally, integrating more feedback from placement providers into the curriculum development process could further enhance the alignment of academic content with industry needs.

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. Based on SAR (pp. 164-165) and Annex 22 (Topics and assessments of students' graduation papers), the topics of students' final Bachelor's theses in the programme are highly relevant to the field and correspond well with the study programme's objectives. They fully correspond to the current agenda of international relations. These topics reflect the programme's emphasis on addressing complex issues in international relations and European studies, ensuring that students are prepared to analyse and contribute to key discussions within the field of international relations.

Furthermore, the topics chosen by students over the years show a consistent ability to respond to contemporary issues in international relations, confirming that the study programme successfully meets its goal of preparing students to engage with real-world challenges. The relevance of these thesis topics also aligns with labour market needs, particularly for roles within international organisations, public administration, and the diplomatic service, thus ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for their future careers.

The average evaluations also sufficiently show relevance to the study content and compliance with good higher education standards.

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

The content of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies is both topical and relevant, addressing the current geopolitical landscape with a focus on both- global international relations and European studies. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies has a sufficient number of introductory courses focused on both theories and research methods, as well as on practical contemporary aspects of international relations. Thus, the expert team concludes that the curriculum is well-structured, with courses that are interconnected and complementary, allowing students to build a solid foundation before advancing to more specialised topics. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies effectively aligns with national education standards and meets the needs of the labour market by preparing students for careers in international organisations. However, ongoing efforts to enhance the scientific contributions of academic staff and regularly update course materials with the latest research are recommended.

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies employs a variety of teaching methods that contribute effectively to the achievement of its learning outcomes. These include lectures, seminars, independent research, and project work, all of which support student-centred learning. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies is well-adapted to accommodate students studying in English, with appropriate resources and support systems in place. The use of digital tools and platforms has been particularly effective in maintaining course delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. Continued development of innovative teaching methods and regular student feedback is recommended.

The internship component is well-organised and directly contributes to the achievement of the programme's learning outcomes. It provides students with practical experience in relevant professional environments, aligning with the theoretical knowledge acquired throughout their studies. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies complies with national regulatory requirements and offers support for international students, ensuring that internships are accessible and valuable regardless of the primary working language. To further improve this component, the programme could expand the range of placement opportunities and establish new criteria for evaluating online or distance internships when such will be introduced.

The topics of students' final Bachelor's theses are highly relevant to the field of international relations and European studies, reflecting the programme's objectives and aligning with current global issues. These topics demonstrate the programme's success in preparing students to engage with complex international challenges. The relevance of these topics also aligns well with labour

market demands, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for their future careers. The evaluation of these theses confirms their alignment with good higher education standards.

Strengths:

1. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies offers a well-structured and up-to-date curriculum that addresses current global and European geopolitical issues, ensuring that students gain knowledge that is both timely and relevant to the field of international relations and European studies.
2. The courses within the programme are carefully designed to be interconnected and complementary, allowing students to build a solid foundation of knowledge that progresses logically to more advanced topics. This alignment ensures that the learning outcomes are consistently met, preparing students effectively for careers in international organisations and public administration.
3. The ABASP International Relations - European Studies includes a well-organised and mandatory internship that provides students with practical experience in relevant professional environments. This hands-on experience is crucial for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, enhancing students' readiness for the labour market.

Weaknesses:

1. While the curriculum is currently relevant, there is a need for continuous updates to ensure that course content continues to be aligned with the latest scientific trends and developments in international relations. This includes regularly incorporating the most recent academic research and publications into the course materials.
2. Although the internship component is well-structured, there is room for improvement in expanding the range of placement opportunities, particularly in international organisations. This would allow students to gain more diverse and globally relevant experiences, further enhancing their practical skills.
3. The reliance on digital tools and distance learning platforms, especially during situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, may limit the full interpersonal communication experience that is vital for developing certain professional skills. Establishing more robust criteria and support for evaluating the outcomes of online or distance internships is necessary to ensure that students receive a comprehensive practical experience.

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. Studies in the ABASP International Relations - European Studies are implemented both in a regular way and using remote communication forms – Zoom, Panopto, the MyRSU student portal, etc. At least 50% of classes take place in a regular way, the rest (respecting students' wishes) remotely. RSU has excellent study and research facilities. Well-equipped auditoriums, infrastructure resources and material and technical support are available for all study programs, including bachelor's study program "International relations - European Studies". The RSU Library provides access to a wide range of academic resources, including specialised databases, electronic journals

and books that correspond to the specifics of the programme “International Relations - European Studies”. E-journal databases: ProQuest platform Proquest Central databases - Political Science Database, Social Science Database, Sociology Database; EBSCO platform Sociology Source Ultimate database. Ebook databases: Ebook Academic Collection (EBSCO) and Ebook Central (Proquest), which contain subscription ebooks and ebooks purchased specifically for the programme (SAR, p.166).

In conclusion, material provision of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies creates prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicates the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. The tuition fee is EUR 2530/year in the Latvian direction. Each year, 2 students can get an excellence scholarship - 100% tuition fee discount (the study place is financed from RSU funds). Apart from tuition fees, the faculty budget is also made up of various international projects and grants. This allows for a high-quality study process and promotes further development of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies. Financial resources are invested in both developing academic staff and improving study and research infrastructure. The tuition fee is EUR 3000/year in the English direction.

As a result of the structural consolidation process of RSU, an improvement in efficiency in the context of cost items is expected, which will ensure a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

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

The ABASP International Relations - European Studies infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU contribute positively to the learning environment and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time ABASP International Relations - European Studies shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Strengths:

1. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies.
2. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the international relations and diplomacy study process.
3. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time ABASP International Relations - European Studies shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Weaknesses:

None

Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Excellent study and research facilities, including the study base created specifically for international relations - European studies; long term financial sustainability of the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. According to the Annex 24.7. (Analysis of the composition of the teaching staff) there are 39 lecturers involved in the implementation of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies, out of which 16 have PhDs (10 elected staff members have a PhD). In total there are 22 elected academic staff. There are two elected professors, 4 associate professors, 4 lecturers with PhD. This puts the programme in compliance with the Section 55 (1) (3) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

As with other programmes in the study field under assessment Human Resources Department at the RSU makes sure all lecturers have at least B2 level proficiency in English. It is possible to check this statement by observing publications and other activities conducted in English on behalf of teaching staff members at the RSU Research Portal. Two out of five lecturers whose English level is lower than B2 are foreign language lecturers (German and French). Lecturers whose English proficiency level is lower than B2 continue to improve their knowledge in English language courses offered by RSU for lecturers or privately (p. 169, SAR).

2.4.2. Over the observed period the study programme has seen the biggest turnover of staff, as compared to other three programmes in the study field under assessment. This is justifiable as this is a BA level programme comprising the largest number of academic staff. 10 members of the teaching staff either left their jobs and took jobs with other employers, took sabbaticals or simply retired. However, the programme management has been able to find suitable replacements, as was confirmed during the study visit. This can be especially seen in the replacements or reinforcements for methodological courses.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. Annex 6.4.1. titled "Summary of data from the RSU science portal about the publications of teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study direction" shows that 14 out of 32 members of the teaching staff have not published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions since 2017. Additionally, three lecturers have published only one paper, which is subpar. While checking those data in Scopus, ORCID and Google Scholar, it was visible that several members of the teaching staff have none or only one active profile, which reduces traceability of their research work. In the coming period all members of the teaching staff need to have active profiles in Scopus, ORCID and Google Scholar. Five members of the teaching staff have Scopus h-index higher than three, which could be taken as a proof that those are experienced researchers. However, it is highly important to increase teaching staff performance on that metric. In the coming period it would be useful to pair experienced and beginner researchers in order to ensure that younger researchers manage to fulfil this criterion.

2.4.5. There are essentially three pillars of cooperation, upheld in regular meetings of the study programme. First, there is cooperation in exchanging information on study methods and content of study courses. Second, joint research projects are discussed and implemented. Third, lecturers in the programme are encouraged to attend regular training at the RSU Centre for Educational Growth.

A very good example of cooperation in organising methodological courses and ensuring their interconnection is the course “Quantitative and Qualitative Tools for Innovative Policy Analysis”, developed in close cooperation with lecturers of the course “Development of Scientific Research and Methods of Research” (p. 171, SAR).

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

Overall, the presented CVs and RSU Research Portal profiles provide proof that lecturers involved in the implementation of the programme possess all of the necessary qualifications. Generally, this section has more strong points than weaknesses.

Strengths:

1. Relatively stable core of lecturers who ensure delivery of courses incorporating the newest developments in the scientific field.
2. Cooperation mechanisms to ensure continuous monitoring of the implementation (e.g. quality manager and developer of the study process).
3. Good coordination in organising methodological courses.
4. High number of invited lecturers.
5. 4:1 student to lecturer ratio at the BA level is very conducive to more emphasis on individual work.
6. Base of lecturers with diversified research interest suitable for supervising BA students in various topics.

Weaknesses:

1. 14 members of the teaching staff have no publications since 2017.
2. Only 5 members of the teaching staff have Scopus h-index score equivalent to 3 or higher.

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: Partially compliant

While there are numerous strengths elaborated above, the fact that there are so many lecturers without any publication since 2017 needs to be seriously tackled in the coming period.

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 ABASP International Relations - European Studies complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 240 of 13 May 2014 "Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266187>) confirmed by annex Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard (17.1_An_x_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf) .

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Provided course descriptions "20.1_course_descriptions_European_Stud.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. However, some courses rely on outdated reading materials, which may not reflect the most current trends and developments in the field, potentially limiting the relevance of the knowledge gained. It would be advisable for RSU to review and update the literature in the course descriptions based on the latest trends in the field. The program's curriculum needs updating to include more contemporary scientific literature and to strengthen the courses that develop theoretical knowledge of IR and research competencies.

- 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

Provided annex "24.1_AnxDiploma_Diploma_Supplement_Intl_Relations_European_Stud.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The annex, " 24.7.1_pielik_Apliecinājums par akadēmiskā maģistra (otrā cikla) studiju programmas "Starptautiskās sistēmas transformācijas studijas" akadēmiskā personāla atbilstību Augstskolu likuma prasībām.edoc," confirms that the ABASP International Relations - European Studies complies with Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which stipulates that "Not less than five professors and associate professors altogether who are elected in the relevant higher education institution shall take part in the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited elective part of academic study programmes."

An analysis of the programmes academic staff composition (see Annex 06.1_AnxAcademic_staff_list_Soc_Pol_Ant_ENG_new.xlsx) shows that the implementation of the compulsory and elective part of the programme is ensured by 29 lecturers, 17 of whom are elected to academic positions. Of the 17 elected academic staff, 2 are professors and 4 are associate professors.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.4_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām.edoc" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of this ABASP International Relations - European Studies complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex "24.5_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām_valodu prasmes.edoc" states that the English language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies corresponds to at least B2 level of the Common European Framework.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.8_Studiju līgums_par studijām fizisko un juridisko personu finansētajās vietās_2023.pdf" containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 "Rules to be included in the study agreement".

- 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

The attached annex, '24.2_pielik_Apliecinajums_par_stud_turp.edoc' (Agreement between the University of Latvia and RSU, 25.03.2024), confirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education at the University of Latvia in the Academic bachelor study programme "Political Science" (LRI code 43312), which is offered in Latvian. However, since the ABASP International Relations - European Studies is offered in Latvian and English, it would be necessary to provide students with the option to continue their education in English as well.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.3_pielik_Apliecinājums par studējošo zaudējumu kompensāciju.edoc" states that the RSU based on Section 55(8) of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and Cabinet of Ministers No 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations on Licensing of study programmes", Paragraph 13.4, confirms that the university guarantees compensation of losses to the students of study programmes in the study field "Sociology, Politics and Anthropology", which is pending accreditation, if the ABASP International Relations - European Studies fails to be accredited (due to action or inaction) of RSU, or if the ABASP International Relations - European Studies licence is withdrawn and the student does not wish to continue their studies in another study programme.

- 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: Fully compliant

ABASP International Relations - European Studies complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments. However, considering that the study programme is offered in both Latvian and English, RSU should conclude an additional agreement regarding the transfer of students in the English-language stream in the event that the implementation of this ABASP International Relations - European Studies is terminated.

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

The evaluation of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies reveals several strengths and areas for improvement, reflecting its alignment with educational standards and labor market needs.

The ABASP "International Relations - European Studies" aligns well with the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology, offering a robust foundation in political science and international relations, with a focus on European studies. The study programme's structure and content comply with national academic standards, providing a coherent pathway for students from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. The recent adjustments to the study programme, including the inclusion of English as an implementation language and the adoption of the ECTS credit system, are justified and aim to enhance its appeal to both local and international students. However, there are areas where

improvements could be made, particularly in alumni engagement and the management of student dropout rates.

The programme's content is topical and relevant, addressing the current geopolitical landscape effectively. It includes a sufficient number of introductory courses that cover both theories and research methods, as well as practical aspects of international relations. This well-structured curriculum allows students to build a solid foundation before progressing to more specialised topics. Furthermore, the programme aligns with national education standards and prepares students for careers in international organisations, indicating a strong connection to labour market demands.

A variety of teaching methods are employed, including lectures, seminars, independent research, and project work, which support student-centred learning. The programme is well-adapted for English-speaking students, with appropriate resources and support systems. The effective use of digital tools during the COVID-19 pandemic has also enhanced course delivery. However, experts recommend the continued development of innovative teaching methods and the incorporation of regular student feedback to further enhance the learning experience.

The internship component is well-organized and directly contributes to achieving the programmes learning outcomes by providing practical experience in relevant professional environments. It complies with national regulatory requirements and supports international students, ensuring accessibility. To improve this aspect, expanding placement opportunities and establishing criteria for evaluating online internships are suggested.

The topics of students' final Bachelor's theses are highly relevant to international relations and European studies, reflecting the programmes objectives and current global issues. This relevance ensures that graduates are well-prepared for their future careers, as confirmed by the evaluation of these theses against higher education standards.

The programmes infrastructure and the synergies among its structural units contribute positively to the learning environment, indicating the potential for a high-quality study process. Financial analysis shows a balance of revenue and expenditure, suggesting long-term sustainability.

The qualifications of the teaching staff are generally strong, with most members meeting the necessary criteria. However, there are notable weaknesses: 14 faculty members have not published since 2017, and only 5 have a Scopus h-index score of 3 or higher. This indicates a need for ongoing efforts to enhance the scientific contributions of academic staff.

In summary, while the programme demonstrates a solid foundation and alignment with educational and labor market standards, there are areas for improvement, particularly in faculty research output and the expansion of internship opportunities. Regular updates to course materials and innovative teaching methods will further enhance the programmes effectiveness.

Strengths:

1. The study programme closely aligns with the study field, particularly in political science and international relations, ensuring a solid academic foundation.
2. The study programme meets all legal and academic requirements, ensuring that the degree awarded is well-recognised.
3. The inclusion of English as an implementation language and the adoption of ECTS make the study programme more competitive and accessible to international students.
4. Alumni have shown a high level of satisfaction and successful employment, particularly in public administration and international organisations.
5. The programme offers a well-structured and up-to-date curriculum that addresses current global and European geopolitical issues, ensuring that students gain knowledge that is both timely and relevant to the field of international relations and European studies.
6. The courses within the programme are carefully designed to be interconnected and complementary, allowing students to build a solid foundation of knowledge that progresses logically to more advanced topics. This alignment ensures that the learning outcomes are consistently met,

preparing students effectively for careers in international organisations and public administration.

7. The programme includes a well-organised and mandatory internship that provides students with practical experience in relevant professional environments. This hands-on experience is crucial for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, enhancing students' readiness for the labour market.

8. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies.

9. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the international relations and diplomacy study process.

10. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time bachelor ABASP International Relations - European Studies shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

11. Relatively stable core of lecturers who ensure delivery of courses incorporating the newest developments in the scientific field.

12. Cooperation mechanisms to ensure continuous monitoring of the implementation (e.g. quality manager and developer of the study process). Good coordination in organising methodological courses.

13. High number of invited lecturers.

14. 4:1 student to lecturer ratio at the BA level is very conducive to more emphasis on individual work. Base of lecturers with diversified research interest suitable for supervising BA students in various topics.

Weaknesses:

1. While the curriculum is currently relevant, there is a need for continuous updates to ensure that course content stays aligned with the latest scientific trends and developments in international relations. This includes regularly incorporating the most recent academic research and publications into the course materials.

2. Although the internship component is well-structured, there is room for improvement in expanding the range of placement opportunities, particularly in international organisations. This would allow students to gain more diverse and globally relevant experiences, further enhancing their practical skills.

3. The reliance on digital tools and distance learning platforms, especially during situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, may limit the full interpersonal communication experience that is vital for developing certain professional skills. Establishing more robust criteria and support for evaluating the outcomes of online or distance internships is necessary to ensure that students receive a comprehensive practical experience.

4. 14 member of the teaching staff have no publications since 2017.

5. Only 5 member of the teaching staff have Scopus h-index score equivalent to 3 or higher

Some study courses rely on outdated reading materials, which may not reflect the most current trends and developments in the field, potentially limiting the relevance of the knowledge gained.

6. The current approach to alumni engagement is insufficient, with limited feedback mechanisms and low survey response rates.

7. There is a significant dropout rate, despite efforts to monitor and address students' learning difficulties.

8. Considering that the study programme is offered in both Latvian and English, RSU should conclude an additional agreement regarding the transfer of students in the English-language stream in the event that the implementation of this ABASP International Relations - European Studies is terminated.

Evaluation of the study programme "International Relations - European Studies"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "International Relations - European Studies"

Short-term recommendations

Implement a systematic process for regularly reviewing and updating course content. This process should ensure that the latest scientific trends, academic research, and publications in international relations are continuously integrated into the curriculum.

Develop more robust criteria for evaluating the outcomes of online or distance internships. This could include creating specific guidelines for supervisors to assess the effectiveness of these experiences and ensuring that students receive adequate support to develop the necessary professional skills. Furthermore, the university should explore hybrid models that combine digital learning with in-person interactions where possible, to provide a more balanced and comprehensive educational experience.

Considering the new regulations in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 12, the degree should be corrected.

Given the absence of similar study programmes in English in Latvia, RSU should consider establishing agreements with foreign universities to ensure the seamless transfer of students enrolled in the English-language stream of the ABASP International Relations - European Studies programme in the event of study programme termination.

Long-term recommendations

Consider developing a more active alumni network that collaborates with the study programme on curriculum development, guest lectures, and mentoring current students.

Improve survey methodology and increase engagement through focus groups or regular alumni events to gather more comprehensive feedback.

Regularly review the curriculum to ensure it remains relevant and challenging, potentially reducing dropout rates by maintaining student interest and motivation.

Expand the current algorithm to identify at-risk students earlier and provide more targeted support, such as tutoring or mentoring programmes.

Expand the range of internship placements, particularly within international organisations. This could involve establishing partnerships with a broader array of global institutions, offering students access to more diverse and relevant experiences. Additionally, the university could create a dedicated internship office tasked with identifying and securing these opportunities, while also providing tailored support to students in securing and maximising these placements.

II - "International Relations and Diplomacy" ASSESSMENT

II - "International Relations and Diplomacy" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. The study content of the study programme "Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International Relations and Diplomacy" (AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy) corresponds to the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology. It specifically focuses on the discipline of international relations and diplomacy and aligns well with the study field (SAR, pp. 93-95). This study field is relevant and important considering the specifics of the geopolitical situation, expertise held by the experts and academics in this region, as well as interest of students and needs of the labour market. 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 SAR(p.91) 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>).

2.1.2. Upon successful completion of studies and defence of the Master thesis, students of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy obtain Master's degree of Social Sciences in International Relations and Diplomacy (Considering the new changes in regulations, in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 21.1, the degree should be changed to a Master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy).

The study programme code - 45312, is established in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 322 of 13 June 2017 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524>). The digits "45" stand for - academic education (Master's degree), following a Bachelor's or Professional Bachelor's degree. The duration of full-time studies should be one to two years (in this case, a 2-year study programme is foreseen). The total duration of full-time studies must be at least five years. The third, fourth and fifth digits of the code '312' indicate the affiliation of '3' to the thematic group 'Social sciences, business and law', '312' to the educational programme group 'Political science'.

The aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are clearly defined and interrelated. They are developed in accordance with the objectives set out both in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 May 2014 No 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education" and level 7 of the Latvian Qualifications Framework. Accordingly, the study programme has 9 learning outcomes, divided into knowledge, skills and competences.

The study programme is implemented only as full-time studies in Latvian and English. Full-time studies lasts 2 years, 120 ECTS. The admission requirements are first cycle higher education in the following social sciences or humanities: political science, economics and business, sociology and social work, law, social and economic geography, media and communication, military science, history and philosophy, ethics and religion. Additionally, an entrance examination is planned for applicants. Admission requirements are based on and compliant with external legislation and, given that the study programme is conducted also in English, proof of at least B2 level of English is logical and reasonable.

Overall, the programme parameters - title, degree to be obtained, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, duration and scope of studies, delivery format and languages - are justified and interrelated.

2.1.3. A number of changes have been made to the parameters of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy (SAR, p. 88):

1) Taking into account the changes in the external legislation, the education classification code was changed from "45310" (thematic programme group - Social and human sciences) to "45312" (thematic programme group - Political science), the change is logical and justified.

2) The language of the study programme has been changed to Latvian and English (from Latvian only), justified on the grounds of enhancing the competitiveness of the study programme by attracting international students.

3) In addition, the study programme has been changed to 120 CP, based on changes in the national legislation - the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education. This is related to the transition from the Latvian credit point system to ECTS. In the transition from the Latvian CP system to the ECTS credit system, RSU has determined that one credit point corresponds to 25-30 hours of study work, requiring course supervisors to clarify the distribution of contact hours and students' independent work in study courses, giving them more flexibility. In order to ensure this effectively, RSU has developed a summary of recommendations for study programme directors and course supervisors "Transition to the new credit system" (Appendix "30_piel_Rekomendācijas pārejai uz jauno kredītpunktu sistēmu.pdf").

4) During the accreditation period, the study programme has had four changes of programme directors, justified by different professional challenges and career development (SAR, p. 89). Currently, this and three other programmes in this study field are directed by a staff member who is herself a PhD candidate. The information gathered during the assessment visit raised concerns about the disproportionately high workload, the risks of study programmes being led by managers rather than by individuals with academic experience in the field and a vision for its development, and, in terms of overall workload, the risks to quality and efficiency.

5) In line with changes in external legislation and the introduction of an additional implementation language, the admission requirements have been clarified, which is reasonable and logical.

In summary, the Experts find the changes to the parameters of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy to be justified and supportable.

2.1.4. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy prepares graduates with a wide range of skills and knowledge in the international relations and diplomacy field, they can not only to contribute substantially to the development of foreign and security policy of Latvia, the EU and third countries, but develop analytical, representative and representation skills that allow for graduates' successful entering into the labour market (SAR, p. 96). According to the information available on the AIKA E-platform, in the summer of 2024 only 3 higher education institutions in Latvia offer international relations / diplomacy study programmes at the Master level in the study field "Sociology, political science and anthropology" (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv>).

It is welcome that RSU has independently conducted a study on the competitiveness of its study programmes and their relevance to labour market trends, however, it showed that the demand for specialists in the social and human sciences group is expected to decrease (SAR, p. 96). Despite this, the results of the alumni surveys show a high level of satisfaction with the study programme and its quality. The results of the graduate survey (Annex "21.2_Anx_graduate_survey_Int_rel_gov_dipl_ENG.pdf") show that graduates are not regularly surveyed and analysed for their employability and that the response rate could be higher (17 respondents completed the graduate survey in 2024). In addition, the analysis of the Alumni Monitoring Tool available in the State Education Information System (VIIS) shows that the overall employment rate among graduates of Master's level study programmes in the thematic group "Social Sciences, Business and Law" at RSU in 2022 is 88.4%, which is higher than the annual national indicator for this group by 2.65%. In this area, the RSU would be well advised to improve its feedback mechanisms, both through more active cooperation with the Alumni Association and by improving the survey methodology and evaluating other ways of obtaining information, for example by organising focus group discussions with alumni. This indicates that the management of the study programme and study field could improve the current approach to communication with its graduates in order to accumulate data on their employment patterns, as well as to more actively offer them opportunities to engage in the implementation and improvement of the study programme, for

example, through proposals, guest lectures, other formats of cooperation.

Analysing the statistical data on student dynamics provided by RSU (Appendix "16_Anx_student_stats_Int_rel_gov_dipl_ENG.pdf"), it can be seen that the dynamics of students enrolled in the period from 2016 to 2022 has been variable, ranging from 13 students enrolled in 2022 to 32 in 2021. On the positive side, the Covid-19 pandemic has not had a negative impact on enrolment outcomes, which have even increased compared to the pre-pandemic period. Comparing the drop-out and graduation rates, there is a positive trend with more students graduating than dropping the course. RSU has analysed the drop-out rates of students, indicating (SAR, p. 97) that the most frequent reasons for students to drop out in the first year of study (as confirmed by statistical data) are the realisation that this is not a suitable choice of study or the difficulty of combining studies with professional activity. In addition, a number of external factors have also influenced the choices made by students in recent years, such as foreign policy challenges and the economic situation in the country, which affect the choice of self-funded studies. On the positive side, the successful opening of the English language stream from 2019, with a total of 45 students enrolled in the first three years of implementation (15 on average per year), with the exception of 2022, when only 1 student was enrolled. This shows that there is potential for English-language studies in international relations and diplomacy, which RSU should further develop through targeted marketing activities both in Latvia and abroad.

2.1.5. N/A

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

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy aligns well with the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology. It meets legal requirements and provides relevant knowledge and skills for students, particularly in the context of geopolitical needs and labour market demands. The study programme structure is compliant with legal standards, and the recent changes to its parameters, such as the transition to ECTS, are well-justified. Additionally, while the programme is competitive and relevant, the institution must improve alumni engagement and feedback mechanisms to better assess graduate employment outcomes.

Strengths:

1. The study programme's content is well-aligned with the field of international relations and diplomacy, addressing current geopolitical needs and labour market demands.
2. Despite external challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, student enrollment has remained stable, with a positive trend in graduation rates.
3. The introduction of an English-language stream has shown potential, indicating a broader appeal to international students.

Weaknesses:

1. The feedback mechanisms for alumni engagement are underdeveloped, leading to insufficient data on graduate employment and programme impact.
2. Enrollment numbers have fluctuated, with a significant drop in 2022, particularly in the English-language stream.
3. The programme's degree needs to be changed according to new regulations.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The content of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy in general is designed to be

current and in line with the latest global and European trends in international relations and diplomacy practice. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy includes a wide range of study courses that cover essential topics in modern international politics from a practical point of view. The dean of the programme is focused on updating the curriculum based on developments in the industry and labour market needs. Unfortunately the missing element is scientific perspective and latest trends in it.

The study content of the study programme corresponds to the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology. It specifically focuses on the discipline of international relations and aligns well with the study field (description of the study programme pp. 94-96). The knowledge, skills, and competences listed in the Description of the Study Programme (Annex 17.1-17.1_Anx_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf) formally 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>) and demonstrates formal 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 in general, although sequence of study course layout and the proportion of theoretical content is not convincing enough that this programme is really a part of academic studies and that it provides some of the promised knowledge and competences in sufficient depth.

The emphasis on the presentation of the theoretical and methodological components is crucial here. As currently structured, the programme does not adequately meet the clearly defined goals outlined in the SAR (pp.85-86), and Annexes 17.1 and 18.1. (18.1_Anx_St_course_outcome_mapping.pdf)—to provide in-depth knowledge of international relations theories and research methods. Combining theory and methodology into a single course with only 6 ECTS in the final semester of the master's programme cannot be considered best practice. 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 study direction staff several times before in other licensing processes, but the recommendations were not considered in a sufficient manner.

It should also be noted that the ambition already mentioned in the SAR (pp.85-86 and Annexes 17.1 and 18.1) is to provide in-depth knowledge in theories and research methods, while the description of the specialised course offers only basic knowledge (Annex 20.1.). This is related to both theories and research methods. For example, it's not feasible to claim in-depth research knowledge when only two lectures are offered on the selection of literature and sources, research planning, and an overview of qualitative and quantitative methods (Annex 20.1.20.1_Anx_Course_Descriptions_Diplomacy.pdf). International best practice indicates that this process typically requires multiple courses, beginning early in the studies. This approach ensures that students can use theories as an analytical framework for their research activities and apply methods effectively to conduct meaningful, well-informed research from the outset.

Although some courses claim to introduce students to international relations theories, this is not clearly evident from the course descriptions. For instance, the course "Belarus: Between the West and the East" exemplifies this issue. Despite the detailed lecture outlines, which are commendable, neither the course content nor the recommended literature adequately engage with international relations theories (Annex 20.1.).

A more effective approach might involve replacing less critical courses, which have a broad scope and are less likely to be utilised, with foundational courses that more accurately reflect the core focus of the study field in which the programme is offered. For instance, it is unclear why such specialised courses as "Russian Political Culture in Transformation" (the course content, which includes theoretical knowledge of cultural analysis and practical insights into the development of

religion and culture in Russia (Annex 20.1), appears too distanced from the core focus of the study programme to be positioned in Part B) or "Belarus Between the East and the West" are included in this programme, especially when the programme's stated objective is to focus on global trends in international relations and diplomacy. It might be more appropriate to offer these courses as part of the elective options in Part C, thereby freeing up space for more relevant theory and methods courses. The course "Security Governance: the Euro-Atlantic Space and Beyond" shows some improvement. It does include certain theories related to security studies (not diplomacy or IR, although these are at least related).

It is also surprising that the programme includes several courses focused on very specific dimensions of Russian and Belarus politics, yet there are no specific courses dedicated to the Baltic states or the Baltic Sea region, despite the programme's stated ambition to reflect on Latvia (SAR, p.85) from comparative perspective and ambition of the study field to underline specific regional competences. The course titled "Russia, the U.S. and the Baltics - Interaction in the Past and Present" does not focus on comparative politics or a detailed analysis of regional dynamics. Instead, it primarily discusses the role of small countries in the context of great power politics.

True, the ambition to cultivate an understanding of comparative politics (SAR, p. 86) raises concerns, especially given that the programme does not include a comprehensive explanation of what comparative politics entails or how to conduct relevant research in this field. It is of great importance in political science.

Another objective of the programme is to equip students with up-to-date knowledge on current events in international relations and diplomacy (Annex 18.1.). There are some courses, which are content wise up to date. Truly modern is the study course "Social Media and Digital Diplomacy", for example.

Meanwhile, the required reading materials in some courses fail to reflect the latest trends. For instance, in the course "International Governance: Institutions and Processes," the most recent source in the mandatory literature dates back to 2010, with the newest reference in the supplementary literature being from 2015. Or another example is a course on Belarus, where the obligatory literature lists no information materials newer than 2020. Consequently, this material is unlikely to accurately reflect the current state of affairs. The same goes for the course "Politics and Religion: Governing the Middle East", where the compulsory literature is not newer than from 2016 (8 years old). Additionally, Allsion's 2020 text on new spheres of influence for the course "Russia, the U.S. and the Baltics - Interaction in the Past and Present" is outdated, as more recent and relevant materials have been published since then in order to reflect the great power dynamics discussed there. Similar issues are present in the courses "Energy, Security and Diplomacy: Power Relations and Strategic Perspectives" and "Information War and Propaganda", where the most recent sources listed are from 2020, or courses "Foreign Policy Vectors of the People's Republic of China", "EU and International Governance" and "Regional and Social Policy of European Union Member States" with literature no newer than from 2018 (Annex 20.1.). For the course "Social Policy of European Union Member States" the latest compulsory literature is from 2014, despite the fact that the regional and social policies have changed dramatically since then. Or, for example, in the study course "Security Governance: the Euro -Atlantic Space and Beyond" cyber related topics in compulsory literature part are dated 2009. This raises concerns about whether students will have access to the most current and relevant information .

The academic staff demonstrate high qualifications and expertise in their respective fields. They hold advanced degrees, relevant research experience, and a track record of scholarly contributions. The mandatory requirements of the academic master's study programme and the implementation of the limited elective part are supported by 21 lecturers, 14 of whom hold elected academic positions at RSU. Among these 14 elected academic staff members, there are three professors and three associate professors (Table 1, Fig. 1, information as of 26.02.2024.), all of whom meet the requirements stipulated in Paragraph 3 of the first part of Article 55.1 of the Higher Education Law

(Annex 24.7. Analysis of the composition of the teaching staff). According to the course descriptions provided there are 3 professors, who are involved in the study program: one of them is a medical doctor (and teaching no study courses in the programme); one professor with 2 study courses in the programme and one professor teaching 1 study course in the programme which poses a risk of insufficient time and potential interest conflicts. There are 3 associate professors: two actively involved in the program and one teaching the study course related to social sciences.

This demonstrates that the formal requirement of having a certain number of professors is met. But the practical performance could be valued higher, if the professors all worked in the relevant field of science. Currently, there are 5 individuals involved in the implementation of the master's programme who do not hold a doctorate degree. It should be noted that one person is listed among the programme's lecturers, although none of the courses she teaches are currently reflected in the SAR (Annex 24.7. Analysis of the Composition of the Teaching Staff). This means that approximately one-third of the staff working with the study programme do not possess a PhD, which is a significant proportion, especially considering that the programme is led by someone who also does not hold a doctorate degree.

This disadvantage also applies to scientific publications and participation in scientific conferences. Since 2017, several lecturers have had no scientific publications at all, there are few or no publications at all, or publications in WOS and Scopus are missing. Two professors in social sciences have very good indicators, the rest have significantly lower indicators. Several of the lecturers have not fulfilled the absolute minimum - one publication or one participation in a scientific conference (Annex 6.4.1. Summary of data on the publications of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field).

It is unclear who will actually lead the course "EU and International Governance," as Māris Andžāns is listed as the lecturer in Appendix 20.1 (Description of Study Courses), while Vineta Kleina is mentioned in Appendix 19 (19_Anx_StP_plan_AMSP_Intl_Rel_Diplomacy.pdf, Academic Master's Study Programme "International Governance and Diplomacy" Plan for Full-time Regular Studies, p.4). Another unclear issue is the attraction of foreign lecturers to the programme. SAR describes that "Foreign lecturers are purposefully sought and invited to teach several study courses to offer a different approach, bring the exchange of experience into the study process and also prevent the content of study programmes from being "stagnant". The internationalisation of study processes has also been promoted by the inclusion of the flow implemented in English in the study programme, expanding the range of representation of students, who are not from Latvia" (SAR, pp.100-101), but looking at Annex 19 or 20.1, no course taught by a foreign guest lecturer is to be found.

In general, the study courses within the programme are interconnected and complementary, although it is hard to identify logical sequences of study blocks, where each course builds on the knowledge and skills acquired in previous courses. This lack of such a classical structured approach does not ensure that students are empowered to develop a comprehensive understanding of international relations and diplomacy from a scientific perspective since the programme formally in its goals emphasises the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical skills, which is achieved through a combination of lectures, seminars, and practical classes, while the content of courses does not provide it in sufficient manner. The current approach also lacks more interconnections with the other study programmes within the study field (e.g. anthropology).

Despite the stated shortcomings, in general, from a practical perspective, the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy content from IR and diplomacy practical perspective, is designed to meet the objectives of the study programme and ensure that students achieve the intended learning outcomes. These outcomes include mainly practical knowledge of IR and diplomacy, and the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. True, it is not clear why several important elements of modern diplomacy, such as public diplomacy, do not appear in the content of the study programme.

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy also includes mechanisms to ensure that the

learning outcomes are aligned with the needs of the labour market and the latest scientific trends. For example, the involvement of guest lecturers from the field and the integration of digital skills into the curriculum contribute to the programme's relevance and effectiveness. Cooperation with think tanks and the non-governmental sector can also be evaluated positively. However, when interviewing one of the mentioned actors, it could not name the relevant activities mentioned in the SAR. Therefore, there were certain difficulties in verifying this cooperation with external actors.

2.2.2. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy places a strong emphasis on academic rigour and excellence, requiring students to engage with the most recent research, developments, and findings. However the academic component of the programme is missing in terms of theoretical knowledge and academic research skills. At the same time, the research interest and expertise of lecturers shows potential. The commitment for excellence and new pace of the dean ensures the faculty will take care that graduates are well-prepared to make meaningful contributions to the field (at the moment, mainly from the practical point of view). The programme adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating history, political science, cultural studies, and economics, which provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the field. It also encourages original research, promoting innovative thinking and scholarly contributions, with opportunities for students to conduct research, publish their findings, and engage with think tanks, thereby broadening their academic experience. True, the courses providing competencies and skills for the academic research should be upgraded and extended.

RSU supports the continuous development of its lecturers by offering a variety of further education courses and professional growth opportunities. These courses cover diverse subjects, teaching methodologies, and educational technologies, ensuring that lecturers stay current in their fields. The university also provides support for enhancing academic writing skills, including financial incentives for lecturers keen on developing academic articles. Additionally, RSU fosters project-based research, enabling lecturers to engage in innovative and impactful research projects, supported by the necessary administrative resources to streamline project development and application processes.

The academic staff, with extensive academic and practical experience, contributes to both the development of academic knowledge and the integration of practical, applied aspects into the study process. This is evidenced by their involvement in practical politics, think tanks, and similar activities, providing students with opportunities to develop skills useful for future careers. However, there is a risk that the highly competent teaching staff initially planned for the programme may not be fully available. For instance, two potential lecturers currently hold top-level political and administrative positions, with one serving as the Minister of Defence and the other as the Head of the President's Chancery of the Republic of Latvia. This raises concerns about potential conflicts of interest, scheduling challenges, and the feasibility of their involvement in teaching while managing their substantial workloads in government or administration. It may be necessary to carefully manage their teaching commitments to ensure a balance of their responsibilities.

2.2.3. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy implements a range of teaching and learning methods designed to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy primarily utilises lectures and practical classes or seminars, which align with the intended learning outcomes by offering students a structured environment to acquire and apply gained knowledge (SAR, p.102). The inclusion of independent work, such as the development of individual essays and research papers, emphasises the student's ability to engage critically and independently with the material, further contributing to the achievement of the programme's objectives.

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy also incorporates student-centred learning principles (SAR, p.104), as evidenced by the regular tutorials provided for each study course (Annex 20.1.- 20.1_Anx_Course_Descriptions_Diplomacy.pdf). These tutorials, which can be conducted both

in person and remotely, offer personalised support to students, ensuring that they can engage with the course material effectively. This approach reflects a commitment to accommodating different learning styles and needs, a key aspect of student-centred learning.

The use of a ten-point grading system, along with detailed feedback on student performance, supports a formative assessment process that encourages continuous learning and improvement. The programme also supports the academic freedom of lecturers, allowing them to tailor their teaching methods to the specific learning outcomes of each course. This flexibility ensures that the methods used are relevant and effective in achieving the desired educational outcomes.

The inclusion of practical classes and the encouragement of independent research align well with the programme's goal of preparing students for professional challenges in international relations and diplomacy.

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy also adapts to contemporary educational needs, incorporating digital resources and innovative methods, such as the use of artificial intelligence in the study process. This modern approach to teaching not only enhances the learning experience but also ensures that students are well-equipped to meet the demands of the evolving international landscape.

While academic freedom is a strength, it may also lead to inconsistencies in the quality and delivery of course content. Without sufficient oversight or standardisation, there is a risk that some courses may not fully align with the programme's overall learning outcomes. Also, during the assessment visit, it was observed that some lecturers opt for online teaching. While this approach is not inherently negative, students lack clear guidelines or principles that determine when and why online teaching is implemented.

It is positive that foreign students are offered the opportunity to learn the Latvian language. However, additional activities, such as learning about the local cultural context, are not offered. Such activities could be helpful in aiding students to integrate more successfully into the study environment.

2.2.4. N/A

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy is designed to cover a wide range of topics within the broader field of international relations, including diplomacy, global governance, international law, and regional studies. Given this broad scope, the relevance of students' final thesis topics is expected to encompass a variety of issues that are pertinent to the contemporary international landscape.

Based on the SAR (, pp. 104-105) and Annex 22.1., it appears that the programme encourages students to explore a diverse range of topics that are deeply rooted in the field of international relations. This relevance is crucial as it ensures that the research conducted by students contributes to the understanding and resolution of real-world issues. The selection of thesis topics reflects current global challenges and identifies the main actors of the international system, and the evolving dynamics of international diplomacy.

The alignment of thesis topics with the study programme is indicative of the programme's success in guiding students to focus on issues that are both academically rigorous and professionally significant. The programme supports students in selecting thesis topics that are both relevant to the field of international relations and in line with the programme's objectives. This alignment not only underscores the programme's academic rigour but also its commitment to producing graduates who are capable of contributing meaningful research to the field. To further enhance this alignment, the programme could ensure ongoing support for students in selecting and refining their thesis topics, ensuring that they continue to reflect current trends and challenges in international relations.

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

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy demonstrates a strong commitment to providing students with a comprehensive education in international relations. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy is designed to align with global and European trends, emphasising practical applications in the field. However, there are several areas where improvements could be made to enhance the programme's overall effectiveness and relevance.

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy content is generally well-aligned with the field of international relations, covering essential topics. However, the balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application needs adjustment. The programme's ambition to provide in-depth knowledge of international relations theories and research methods is not fully realised, as these components are condensed into a single course towards the end of the programme. This approach may not adequately prepare students for the analytical demands of their final thesis.

The literature and sources used in some courses are outdated, which may hinder students' ability to engage with the most current trends and challenges in international relations. Updating these materials is crucial for maintaining the programme's relevance and ensuring that students are well-prepared to contribute to contemporary discussions in the field.

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy includes several courses focused on specific aspects of Russian and Belarusian politics, but there is a noticeable absence of courses dedicated to the Baltic states or the Baltic Sea region. Given the programme's location and stated goals, it would be beneficial to include more regional studies that reflect the local context and comparative politics. The involvement of high-profile professionals in the programme is commendable, but there is a risk that their demanding primary roles may limit their availability for teaching. Additionally, the use of online teaching methods lacks clear guidelines, which may lead to inconsistencies in the delivery of course content.

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy supports student-centred learning and offers opportunities for foreign students to learn the Latvian language. However, additional cultural integration activities could enhance the overall student experience and help foreign students integrate more effectively into the study environment.

Strengths:

1. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy incorporates various disciplines such as history, political science, cultural studies, and economics, offering a holistic understanding of international relations and diplomacy. The largest proportion of lecturers possess expertise and experience in the field.
2. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy includes regular tutorials and a commitment to accommodating different learning styles and needs, which is a key aspect of student-centred learning.
3. Lecturers have the flexibility to tailor their teaching methods to specific learning outcomes, promoting a dynamic and adaptive learning environment.
4. The incorporation of digital resources and innovative methods, including the use of artificial intelligence, ensures that students are well-prepared for contemporary challenges in international relations.
5. Close connections with the practical field of international relations and diplomacy.

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient emphasis on theories and methods within the curriculum.
2. While online teaching is utilised, there are no clear principles or guidelines for when and why it is implemented, leading to potential inconsistencies in the learning experience.
3. Lack of academic publications, and participation in scientific conferences for a significant number

of lecturers.

4. Potential risks related to the fact that some of the local lecturers will not be able to provide lectures due to the other working commitments.

5. Some courses rely on outdated reading materials, which may not reflect the most current trends and developments in the field, potentially limiting the relevance of the knowledge gained.

6. Share of staff, which does not hold PhD, involved in the Masters programme should be overviewed, and the scientific performance of the academic staff might be upgraded.

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

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The content of the studies is generally well-aligned with its name, as well as development needs of the Latvian society and labour market. The programme is interdisciplinary and offers flexibility to students in meeting their study goals. The same flexibility is awarded to lecturers who can adapt the content to a rapidly evolving social context. There are plenty of digital tools at disposal for both students and lecturers, to enhance learning outcomes. In terms of weaknesses one has to point out the need to incorporate more theoretical and methodological content pertained to International Relations & Diplomacy. The extent of PhD students in delivering courses at the MA level should be reduced and more relevant publications should be published by staff members.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. RSU has excellent study and research facilities. Well-equipped auditoriums, infrastructure resources and material and technical support are available for all study programmes, including AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy. Specific resources also are provided for the study process - various E-resources such as E-journal databases: ProQuest platform Proquest Central databases - Political Science Database, Social Science Database, Sociology Database; EBSCO platform Sociology Source Ultimate database. Ebook databases: Ebook Academic Collection (EBSCO) and Ebook Central (Proquest), which contain subscription ebooks and ebooks purchased specifically for the programme. The information provision for English language students is equivalent to that for Latvian language students. Latvian students have very few additional books in Latvian (SAR, p.104-105). Assessment of the informative and methodological provision regarding library resources for the implementation of the study field "Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology" Assessment of the informative and methodological provision regarding library resources for the implementation of the study field describes the library resources that ensure the implementation of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy (see Annex 23.1 Compliance of RSU study programmes with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) Part 1).

Students are also actively involved in university research networks; they present their research and projects at the scientific conference annually organised by the RSU. Close cooperation with state and European institutions, such as the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, the State Chancellery, the Cabinet of Ministers and the European Parliament, which is based on effective networking and ensures regular access of students to institutions, supports the practical dimension of study content. In conclusion, material provision of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy creates

prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicates the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. SAR provides detailed analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy in the Latvian flow (the tuition fee of EUR 2550 starting from academic year 2024/2025) and in the English flow (the tuition fee of EUR 2800 starting from academic year 2024/2025) (SAR, p. 107). As a result of the structural consolidation process of RSU, an improvement in efficiency in the context of cost items is expected, which ensures a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

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

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU contribute positively to the learning environment and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Strengths:

1. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy.
2. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the international relations and diplomacy study process.
3. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Weaknesses:

None

Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Excellent study and research facilities, including the study base created specifically for the international relations and diplomacy study process; long term financial sustainability of the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. Annex 24.7 (Analysis of the composition of the teaching staff) shows that the implementation of the compulsory and elective part of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy is ensured by 21 lecturers, 14 of whom are elected to academic positions. Of the 14 elected academic staff, 3

are professors and 3 are associate professors, 4 lecturers with PhD positions, 3 lecturers and 1 researcher. 17 lecturers are employed in a substantive capacity (elected, acting or hourly) and 4 are guest lecturers. Section 55 (1) (3) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions has been duly complied with.

Teaching staff are capable of offering classes in English as the precondition for their employment since the RSU Personnel Department checks for their language skills. The majority of teaching staff has published their research in English, as visible from the RSU Research Portal, which additionally corroborates the aforementioned statement.

The favourable ratio between teaching staff and students, characterised by the ratio of students to teaching staff of 1,5:1 in the Latvian language study flow and 1,2:1 in the English language study flow, paired with qualified teaching staff, principally ensures beneficial learning outcomes.

Compliance of the qualification of the academic staff and lecturers with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements of the laws and regulations is almost completely fulfilled.

However, some risks are identified: availability of guest lecturers; large share of involved academic staff does not hold PhD; growing but still insufficient pace of scientific activities (publications and participation in the scientific conferences).

2.4.2. Changes in the composition of lecturers in most cases are made by introducing new study courses into the study programme. Generally, the turnover of lecturers is low and it is related to:

1. Lecturers' career development and unwillingness to continue academic work;
2. Students' feedback and recommendations to change the lecturer; and
3. Changes in the course content/delivery language which are incompatible with the professional qualification of the current lecturer (p. 110, SAR).

The replacement of the teaching staff has served well in diversifying courses and topics on offer to students. The SAR mentions several examples, including of a researcher who has aligned the course content with his scientific research and currently qualifies for the status of an associate professor, and a lecturer who has historically expanded the topic of her doctoral thesis in the content of the course on methods (and currently qualifies for defending her doctoral thesis). This was elaborated with more detail in the SAR (p. 110).

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. Annex 6.4.1. titled "Summary of data from the RSU science portal about the publications of teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study direction" shows that 6 out of 21 members of the teaching staff have not published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions since 2017. While cross-checking these data in Scopus, ORCID and Google Scholar, it was found that several members of the teaching staff have none or only one active profile, which unnecessarily reduces traceability of their research work. In the coming period all members of the teaching staff need to have active profiles in Scopus, ORCID and Google Scholar. Six members of the teaching staff have Scopus h-index higher than three, which could be taken as proof that those are experienced researchers. In the coming period it would be useful to pair experienced and early career researchers in order to ensure that younger researchers manage to fulfil this criterion of publishing at least one scientific paper.

2.4.5. There are multiple cooperation mechanisms among the teaching staff in place to ensure that the implementation of the study programme leads to desired outcomes. Apart from organising regular meetings at least once per semester, the teaching cooperation is also within the framework of external institutions to bring best practices to the programme. Importantly, since February 2024, a new role of staff – the quality manager and developer of the study process – has also been

introduced, to improve evaluation. In interviews which the expert team conducted on site lecturers pointed to a good cooperation with the programme's director, who is also a lecturer in the programme itself.

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

Overall, the presented CVs and RSU Research Portal profiles demonstrate that lecturers involved in the implementation of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy possess all of the necessary qualifications. Generally, this section has more strong points than weaknesses. The programme's orientation towards international audiences is a good and timely strategic move. In the future the programme's management has to ensure that all lecturers involved have at least two publications in the Web of Science, Scopus or ERIH databases, unless they have recently finished their PhDs. Some lecturers are very productive scientifically but also others have to come on board. It would be good to work in networks comprising senior and junior lecturers to tackle this issue.

Strengths:

1. Stable core of lecturers who ensure delivery of courses incorporating the newest developments in the scientific field.
2. Rising scientific production on behalf of several researchers.
3. Cooperation mechanisms to ensure continuous monitoring of the implementation (e.g. quality manager and developer of the study process).

Weaknesses:

1. 6 out of 21 members of the teaching staff have a very modest or almost non-existing research output (less than 2 publications in Web of Science, Scopus or ERIH since 2017). Six researchers have no publications at all.

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: Partially compliant

The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy ticks most of the boxes in the section covering Teaching Staff, apart from fulfilling criterion 2.4.4. Several members of the teaching staff need to up the ante and start publishing their research, regardless of whether they are experienced researchers or early career.

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 AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 240 of 13 May 2014 "Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266187>) confirmed by annex Compliance with the study programme with

the State Education Standard (17.1_Anx_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Provided course descriptions "20.1_Anx_Course_Descriptions_Diplomacy.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. However, some courses rely on outdated reading materials, which may not reflect the most current trends and developments in the field, potentially limiting the relevance of the knowledge gained. It would be advisable for RSU to review and update the literature in the course descriptions based on the latest trends in the field.

- 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

Provided annex "24.1_Anx_Diploma_Diploma_Supplement_Intl_Relations_Diplomacy.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The annex, "24.7.1_pielik_Apliecinājums par akadēmiskā maģistra (otrā cikla) studiju programmas "Starptautiskās attiecības un diplomātija" akadēmiskā personāla atbilstību Augstskolu likuma prasībām.edoc" confirms that the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy complies with Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which stipulates that "Not less than five professors and associate professors altogether who are elected in the relevant higher education institution shall take part in the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited elective part of academic study programmes."

An analysis of the programmes academic staff composition (see Annex 06.1_Anx_Academic_staff_list_Soc_Pol_Ant_ENG_new.xlsx) reveals that implementation of the compulsory and elective part of the programme is ensured by 21 lecturers, 14 of whom are elected to academic positions. Of the 14 elected academic staff, 3 are professors and 3 are associate professors.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.4_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām.edoc" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of this AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex "24.5_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām_valodu prasmes.edoc" states that the English language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy corresponds to at least B2 level of the Common European Framework.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.8_Studiju līgums_par studijām fizisko un juridisko personu finansētajās vietās_2023.pdf" containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 "Rules to be included in the study agreement".

- 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

The provided annex "24.2_pielik_Apliecinajums_par_stud_turp.edoc" (Agreement between the University of Latvia and RSU, 25.03.2024) confirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education at the University of Latvia in the Academic master's study programme "Diplomacy" (LRI code 45312) and the Academic master's study programme "Political Science" (LRI code 45312), both offered in Latvian. However, since the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy is offered in Latvian and English, it would be necessary to provide students with the option to continue their education in English as well.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.3_pielik_Apliecinājums par studējošo zaudējumu kompensāciju.edoc" states that the RSU based on Section 55(8) of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education Institutions and Cabinet of Ministers No 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations on Licensing of study programmes", Paragraph 13.4, confirms that the university guarantees compensation of losses to the students of study programmes in the study field "Sociology, Politics and Anthropology", which is pending accreditation, if the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy fails to be accredited (due to action or inaction) of RSU, or if the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy licence is withdrawn and the student does not wish to continue their studies in another study programme.

- 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: Fully compliant

AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments. However, considering that the study programme is offered in both Latvian and English, RSU should conclude an additional agreement regarding the transfer of students in the English-language stream in the event that the implementation of this AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy is terminated.

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

The Academic Master's study programme in International Relations and Diplomacy aligns well with the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology. It meets legal requirements and provides relevant knowledge and skills for students, particularly in the context of geopolitical needs and labor market demands.

The study programme structure is compliant with legal standards, and the recent changes to its parameters, such as the transition to ECTS, are well-justified. Additionally, while the program is competitive and relevant, the institution must improve alumni engagement and feedback mechanisms to better assess graduate employment outcomes.

The evaluation of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy reveals several key strengths and areas for improvement that align with the overarching goals of providing a comprehensive education in international relations.

The programme demonstrates a strong commitment to providing a comprehensive education in international relations, aligning well with global and European trends. This focus on practical applications is commendable and essential for preparing students for real-world challenges in the field.

While the programme covers essential topics in international relations, there is a need to improve the balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The current structure, which condenses critical components like international relations theories and research methods into a single course at the end of the programme, may not adequately prepare students for the analytical demands of their final thesis. A more integrated approach throughout the curriculum could enhance student preparedness.

The use of outdated literature and sources in some courses poses a significant challenge. To maintain the programme's relevance and ensure students are equipped to engage with contemporary issues, it is crucial to update course materials regularly. This will help students stay informed about current trends and challenges in international relations.

The programme includes courses on Russian and Belarusian politics but lacks offerings focused on the Baltic states or the Baltic Sea region. Given the programme's location and objectives, incorporating more regional studies would provide valuable context and enhance the comparative politics aspect of the curriculum.

The involvement of high-profile professionals in the programme is a positive aspect; however, their primary commitments may limit their availability for teaching. Additionally, the lack of clear guidelines for online teaching methods could lead to inconsistencies in course delivery. Establishing a more structured approach to online education could improve the learning experience.

The programme supports student-centred learning and offers opportunities for foreign students to learn the Latvian language. However, enhancing cultural integration activities could further improve the overall student experience and facilitate better integration for international students.

The programme's infrastructure and the synergies among its structural units contribute positively to the learning environment. The analysis of financial resources indicates a balance of revenue and expenditure, suggesting long-term sustainability for the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy.

The qualifications of the lecturers involved in the programme are generally strong, with most possessing the necessary credentials. Nevertheless, the extent of engaging so many PhD students in teaching at MA level should be revised. However, there is a need for all lecturers to have at least two publications in recognized databases like Web of Science or Scopus, unless they are newly enrolled PhD candidates. Addressing the research output of some staff members, particularly those with minimal publications, is essential for maintaining academic rigour and credibility.

In summary, while the programme has a solid foundation and several strengths, addressing the identified areas for improvement will enhance its overall effectiveness and relevance in the field of international relations.

Strengths:

1. The study programme's content is well-aligned with the field of international relations and diplomacy, addressing current geopolitical needs and labour market demands.
2. Despite external challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, student enrollment has remained stable, with a positive trend in graduation rates.
3. The introduction of an English-language stream has shown potential, indicating a broader appeal to international students.
4. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy incorporates various disciplines such as history, political science, cultural studies, and economics, offering a holistic understanding of international relations and diplomacy. The main part of lecturers hold strong expertise and experience in the field.
5. The AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy includes regular tutorials and a commitment to

accommodating different learning styles and needs, which is a key aspect of student-centred learning.

6. Lecturers have the flexibility to tailor their teaching methods to specific learning outcomes, promoting a dynamic and adaptive learning environment.

7. The incorporation of digital resources and innovative methods, including the use of artificial intelligence, ensures that students are well-prepared for contemporary challenges in international relations.

8. Close connections with the practical field of international relations and diplomacy.

9. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy.

10. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the international relations and diplomacy study process.

11. Stable core of lecturers who ensure delivery of courses incorporating the newest developments in the scientific field.

12. Increasing scholarly outputs by several researchers.

13. Cooperation mechanisms to ensure continuous monitoring of the implementation (e.g. quality manager and developer of the study process)

Weaknesses:

1. The theoretical and methods courses are insufficiently developed, failing to provide a robust academic foundation and high-level research skills.

2. The study programme director, who is responsible for managing multiple study programmes, lacks a PhD and faces an unsustainable workload, potentially compromising study programme quality.

3. The feedback mechanisms for alumni engagement are underdeveloped, leading to insufficient data on graduate employment and program impact.

4. Enrollment numbers have fluctuated, with a significant drop in 2022, particularly in the English-language stream.

5. While online teaching is utilised, there are no clear principles or guidelines for when and why it is implemented, leading to potential inconsistencies in the learning experience;

6. Potential risks that some of the suggested local lecturers will be able to provide lecturing (such as the Minister of Defence, for example).

7. Some courses rely on outdated reading materials, which may not reflect the most current trends and developments in the field, potentially limiting the relevance of the knowledge gained.

8. Share of staff, which does not hold PhD, involved in the Masters programme should be viewed, and the scientific performance of the academic staff might be upgraded.

9. A significant portion of the teaching staff demonstrates a notable lack of academic output. Specifically, six out of twenty-one faculty members have published fewer than two articles in Web of Science, Scopus, or ERIH since 2017. Additionally, there is limited evidence of participation in scientific conferences among a significant portion of the teaching staff.

10. AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments. However, considering that the study programme is offered in both Latvian and English, RSU should conclude an additional agreement regarding the transfer of students in the English-language stream in the event that the implementation of this AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy is terminated.

Evaluation of the study programme "International Relations and Diplomacy"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "International Relations and Diplomacy"

Short-term recommendations

Conduct a thorough evaluation to enhance the logic and sequence of teaching within the university study programme, ensuring that the order of courses aligns with the overarching goals and objectives of the programme, with each course contributing effectively to the development of the competencies required for the specific field.

Review the large proportion of lecturers without a PhD involved in the programme with a view to ensuring that required qualifications on scientific publications and other scientific activities by staff are met.

Improve the survey methodology and increase efforts to engage alumni through regular communication and targeted outreach.

Enhance marketing efforts for the English-language stream, focusing on attracting international students through targeted campaigns.

Given the absence of similar study programmes in English in Latvia, RSU should consider establishing agreements with foreign universities to ensure the seamless transfer of students enrolled in the English-language stream of the AMASP International Relations and Diplomacy programme in the event of programme termination.

Reduce the share of academic staff without scientific publications and increase the share of publications in Scopus/Web of Science/ERIH+ databases

Considering the new regulations in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 21.1, the degree should be corrected.

Long-term recommendations

Continue to work with previous recommendations.

Put emphasis on introductory courses focusing on theories and research methods to cover the fundamental concepts and theories in international relations, as well as to explain good scientific research practice from the very beginning of the studies. These courses should serve as prerequisites for more advanced topics. Alternatively, consider reforming the programme to lean more towards professional training rather than providing academic studies.

Develop a succession plan to ensure the study programme is managed by qualified personnel, and consider restructuring the workload distribution to allow for effective study programme management and employee development.

Establish a formal alumni network that actively participates in programme development, offering insights through guest lectures, mentoring, and feedback on curriculum relevance.

Develop a strategic enrolment management plan that includes market analysis, partnerships with international institutions, and continuous monitoring of enrolment trends to ensure stable and sustainable growth.

Review and update the literature in the study course descriptions based on the latest trends in the field.

II - "International System Transformation Studies" ASSESSMENT

II - "International System Transformation Studies" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International System Transformation Studies" 45312 (formerly called "Russia and Eurasia Studies") (AMASP International System Transformation Studies) generally corresponds to the study field "Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology" (study field). The study programme aims to prepare international relations and diplomacy specialists who specialise in Russian and related Eurasian issues (SAR, p. 175), demonstrating a strong affiliation to the field of political science. The study programme's alignment with its study field is positively recognised, reflecting its adherence to legal standards and well-organised structure. The programme's content is closely tied to the study field with a particular emphasis on international relations and a focus on Russia and Eurasia area studies. This alignment is especially important due to the geopolitical significance of the region and the specialised expertise of the programme's faculty.

RSU is planning to continue implementing only two Master's level study programmes in this study field in the thematic group of Political Science after accreditation, in addition to AMASP International System Transformation Studies, there is also Academic Master's (second cycle) study programme "International Relations and Diplomacy". On the positive side, each study programme has its own specialisation niche, thus reducing competition between them, while at the same time allowing for resource sharing: common theoretical and methodological courses, as well as the Master's thesis development process, as well as at least 50% overlap in the teaching staff, thus allowing for resource sharing (SAR, p. 182).

The study programme's content, as detailed in Annex 19 (19_Anx_StP_Plan_Intl_System_Transform_Stud.pdf), supports the alignment between the programme's title and the degree to be awarded. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies meets national academic education standards, with students earning a master's degree that reflects the study outcomes achieved in the relevant field. The courses offered within the programme are well-aligned with the study field.

2.1.2. Upon successful completion of studies and defence of the Master thesis, students of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies obtain Master's degree of Social Sciences in Political Science and International Relations (Considering the new changes in regulations, in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 21.1, the degree should be changed to a Master's degree in Political Science and International Relations).

The study programme code - 45312, is established in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 322 of 13 June 2017 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524>). The digits "45" stand for - academic education (Master's degree), following a Bachelor's or Professional Bachelor's degree. The duration of full-time studies should be one to two years (in this case, a 2-year study programme is foreseen). The total duration of full-time studies must be at least five years. The third, fourth and fifth digits of the code '312' indicate the affiliation of '3' to the thematic group 'Social sciences, business and law', '312' to the educational programme group 'Political science'.

The aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are clearly defined and interrelated. They are developed in accordance with the objectives set out both in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 13 May 2014 No 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education" and level 7 of the Latvian Qualifications Framework. Accordingly, the study programme has 9 learning outcomes, divided into knowledge, skills and competences.

However, the AMASP International System Transformation Studies title does not accurately reflect its primary focus on Russia and Eurasia, which encompasses a wide range of interconnected subjects and disciplines in regional studies. While the degree to be obtained corresponds to both the content and title of the programme, the title itself is misleading. The current title suggests a focus on global transformation, yet the programme is more specifically about Russia and Eurasia, with no clear foundation for claiming that the courses on Russian studies address system transformation.

Experts noted that the previous title more accurately reflected the content, and they consider it to have been significantly more successful. Therefore, it is recommended that the programme's title be changed to better align with its actual content (see more details under section 2.2.1 of this report).

Also, the ambition of the title, International System Transformation Studies, is not aligned with the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme, for the reasons mentioned above.

The study programme is implemented as full-time and part-time studies and in Latvian and English. Full-time studies lasts 2 years, 120 ECTS, part-time studies lasts 2 years and 6 months, 120 ECTS. The admission requirements are first cycle higher education in the following social sciences or humanities: political science, economics and business, sociology and social work, law, social and economic geography, media and communication, military science, history and philosophy, ethics and religion. Additionally, an entrance examination is planned for applicants. Admission requirements are based on and compliant with external legislation (SAR, study programme parameters) and, given that the study programme is conducted also in English, proof of at least B2 level of English is logical and reasonable.

Overall, the programme parameters - degree to be obtained, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, duration and scope of studies, delivery format and languages - are justified and interrelated. With the exception of the title of the study programme, which needs to be changed, in order not to mislead prospective students experts strongly recommend that the programme is renamed into "Eurasian Studies", if the unarticulated goal is to omit the word "Russia".

2.1.3. A number of changes have been made to the parameters of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies (SAR, p. 177-181):

1) The title of the Academic Master study programme has been changed from "Russia and Eurasia Studies" to "International System Transformation Studies". RSU justifies this through the fact that this title better reflects the content of the study programme, as well as changes in the geopolitical situation in the region and the world. The choice of the new title was made after discussions with industry representatives, students and lecturers, as well as a thorough analysis of the content of the study programme (SAR, p. 180). However, both after reviewing the content of the study programme and after discussions with stakeholders during the assessment visit, the Expert Team was not convinced that a new name was indeed more appropriate. On the contrary, the new title is not aligned with the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme. The study programme title does not accurately reflect its primary focus on Russia and Eurasia, which encompasses a wide range of interconnected subjects and disciplines in regional studies. While the degree to be obtained corresponds to both the content and title of the programme, the title itself is misleading. The current title suggests a focus on global transformation, yet the programme is more specifically about Russia and Eurasia, with no clear foundation for claiming that the courses on Russian studies address system transformation. Evaluators noted that the previous title more accurately reflected the content, and they consider it to have been significantly more successful. Therefore, it is recommended that the programme's title be changed to better align with its actual content.

2) In addition, the study programme has been changed to 120 CP, based on changes in the national legislation - the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education. This is related to the transition from the Latvian credit point system to ECTS. In the transition from the Latvian CP system to the ECTS credit system, RSU has determined that one

credit point corresponds to 25-30 hours of study work, requiring course supervisors to clarify the distribution of contact hours and students' independent work in study courses, giving them more flexibility. In order to ensure this effectively, RSU has developed a summary of recommendations for study programme directors and course supervisors "Transition to the new credit system" (Appendix "30_piel_Rekomendācijas pārejai uz jauno kredītpunktu sistēmu.pdf").

2) Between the licensing of the study programme in 2021 and the evaluation procedure for accreditation in 2024, the study programme has had two changes of programme director. Currently, this and three other programmes in this study field are directed by a staff member who is herself a PhD candidate. The information gathered during the assessment visit raised concerns about the disproportionately high workload, the risks of study programmes being led by managers rather than by individuals with academic experience in the field and a vision for its development, and, in terms of overall workload, the risks to quality and efficiency.

3) In order to align the degree more closely with the content of the study programme, it has been changed from "Master of Social Sciences in Political Science" to "Master's degree of Social Sciences in Political Science and International Relations". Considering the new changes in regulations, in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 21.1, the degree should be changed to a Master's degree in Political Science and International Relations.

4) As part of the evaluation process, the forms of study programme delivery are being adjusted, with distance learning being removed from the offer and only full-time and part-time study remaining. The changes are logically justified and supported.

In summary, the experts find the changes to the parameters of the study programme to be justified and supportable. With the exception of the title of the study programme, which needs to be changed, in order not to mislead prospective students we strongly recommend that the programme is renamed into "Eurasian Studies", if the unstated goal is to omit the word "Russia".

2.1.4. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies (formerly called "Russia and Eurasia Studies") prepares international relations and diplomacy specialists specialising in Russia and related Eurasian matters. According to the information available on the AIKA E-platform, in the summer of 2024 only RSU in Latvia offered international relations studies with specialisation in Russia and Eurasia region at the Master level in the study field "Sociology, political science and anthropology" (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv>). This is an important indicator, given the current geopolitical and security situation in the region, which not only highlights the uniqueness of the study programme, but also the importance for Latvia's national interests that higher education institutions train high-level specialists with a specialisation in Russian and Eurasian issues and conduct academic and research work on the region.

It is to be welcomed that RSU has independently conducted a study on the competitiveness of its study programmes and their relevance to labour market trends, however, it showed that the demand for specialists in the social and human sciences group is expected to decrease (SAR, p. 183). It is positive that the management of the study programme also conducts employer surveys and interviews at its own level to identify the skills required by graduates, as well as actively cooperates with international organisations and institutions (United Nations, institutions of the European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.; public administrations - ministries of foreign affairs, ministries of defence, trade and economic development departments of ministries etc. (SAR, p. 183).

Given that the first students were only enrolled in the academic year 2022/2023, the first graduates of this study programme are expected in the academic year 2023/2024, so it is not possible to assess graduate employability or feedback on the study programme at this time. It would be advisable for RSUs to prepare and establish a framework to effectively continue to communicate and connect with the graduates of this programme, starting with this first year of graduates. For example, through more active cooperation with the Alumni Association and by improving the survey

methodology and evaluating other ways of obtaining information, for example by organising focus group discussions with alumni, as well as to offer them opportunities to engage in the implementation and improvement of the study programme, for example, through proposals, guest lectures, other formats of cooperation.

Analysing the statistical data on student dynamics provided by RSU (Appendix "16_Anx_Stud_statistics_International_Syst_Transform_stud.pdf"), the dynamics of student enrolments between 2022 and 2023 has been variable, ranging from 11 students in 2022 to 0 students in 2023. The start of the study programme has been challenging, which, given the specific nature of the study programme, is also linked to changes in the geopolitical situation of the region from 2022 and the increase in inflation in the country. In the academic year 2023/2024, 8 students are enrolled in the study programme, two of the first enrolled students were withdrawn in the first year of study (reasons: non-start of studies and poor grades). The study programme is currently offered only in English, but RSU indicates that in the future it may open a Latvian language stream to attract local students. Currently, the study programme has international students from the USA, France and Cameroon. During the assessment visit, the Expert Group was not convinced that the programme has a clearly defined, analytically grounded potential target group of foreign students. It would be advisable to improve this in order to organise more successful and targeted promotional activities and to attract interested and motivated students. The study programme has great potential and relevance for political science research, as evidenced by the fact that it has been granted public funding for the creation of state funded study places (SAR, p. 184) , but strategic and targeted promotional activities are now needed in order to attract students and further develop and expand the study programme. As indicated in the SAR, the requirement of an English language certificate demonstrating at least B2 language proficiency emerged as one of the most important reasons for discouraging or hindering admission to the study programme in surveys of students and prospective students. This is seen by respondents as a difficult and financially demanding measure. RSU would be well advised to consider ways of facilitating this process for applicants, while ensuring that students with sufficient language skills start their studies.

2.1.5. N/A

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

The AMASP International System Transformation Studies thus far titled "Russia and Eurasia Studies," generally aligns well with the study field "Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology." The study programme's focus on Russia and Eurasia is a significant strength, especially given the geopolitical importance of the region. However, the proposed new study programme title does not accurately reflect this focus, leading to a misalignment between the title and the study programme's content. Although the study programme structure, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are well interrelated and justified, the misleading title and some challenges in student recruitment constitute areas for improvement. The recent changes to the study programme, including the adjustment to the credit system and the change in study programme leadership, are generally supported, though concerns remain about the high workload on the programme director and the need for more targeted student recruitment efforts.

Strengths:

1. The study programme strongly aligns with the field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology, with a specialised focus on Russia and Eurasia, which is of high geopolitical significance.
2. The study programme offers a unique specialisation in Russian and Eurasian studies, which is valuable for both national interests and the broader field of political science.
3. The degree, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are well-aligned

and adhere to national standards.

4. The study programme benefits from resource sharing with another Master's study programme in the same thematic group, enhancing efficiency and collaboration.

Weaknesses:

1. The proposed title, "International System Transformation Studies," inaccurately reflects the study programme's focus on Russia and Eurasia, which may mislead prospective students into expecting a broader global perspective rather than the specific regional emphasis.
2. Recruitment has been hindered by fluctuating enrolment, ineffective promotion, and the high cost of meeting English language requirements, deterring potential students.
3. Frequent changes in programme leadership and the heavy workload on the current director, who is also a PhD candidate, risk undermining programme quality and management.
4. The programme's degree needs to be changed according to new regulations.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The compliance of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies with the study field is positively recognised, considering various aspects, including its adherence to legal requirements and effective structural organisation. The content of the study programme aligns closely with the study field, with a specific focus on international relations and more precisely Russia studies. This alignment is particularly significant given the geopolitical relevance of the region and the expertise available among the programme's faculty. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies demonstrates strong compliance with legal requirements and exhibits effective management and quality assurance practices. The knowledge, skills, and competencies outlined in the programme's description meet the standards expected of a master's programme and adhere to the Law on Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Latvia.

The analysis of Annex 17.1 (17.1_Anx_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf) further confirms that the programme complies with the national educational standards set by the Cabinet of Ministers' regulations 240. The courses offered within the programme are well-aligned with the study field. However, the proposed title of the programme might be misleading since the programme focuses on Russia in particular and Eurasia (the current title of the programme reflects the content more precisely). According to evaluators, the previous title was significantly more successful. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies is not actually about global transformation, even though the name suggests it. There is no foundation for asserting that the courses centred on Russian studies address the transformation of the system. It is recommended to re-change the name according to the content.

While the future courses are relevant and maintain quality standards, there is concern regarding the course that combines the theory and methods of international politics. Offering this course just before the thesis writing phase appears untimely, and the rationale for this sequence is unclear. This issue was highlighted during the licensing process, but the recommendations are not addressed. A potential solution could involve replacing less critical courses, which have a broad but potentially unfeasible scope, with foundational knowledge that better reflects the study field.

Regarding the alignment between the AMASP International System Transformation Studies title and the degree awarded, the content corresponds well to the requirements of the degree and reflects the latest trends in regional studies. These trends include considerations of global political shifts, traditional and emerging issues, and the integration of multidisciplinary approaches, including cultural and identity studies, history, gender, intersectionality, and postcolonial perspectives. At the same time, the content of the programme does not reflect global transformation studies in general in the manner suggested by the title "International System Transformation Studies". Content of only

two study courses (“International Governance - Institutions and Processes” and “Power, War and Diplomacy”) reflect this focus (Annex 20.1.20.1_Anx_course_descriptions_Transform_Stud.pdf).

The content of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies, as outlined in Annex 19 (19_Anx_StP_Plan_Intl_System_Transform_Stud.pdf), supports the alignment between the programme title and the degree to be awarded. But the title does not accurately reflect the programmes focus on Russia (mainly) and Eurasia, covering a broad range of interconnected subjects and disciplines in regional studies. The programme meets the national academic education standards, as students are awarded a master's degree that corresponds to the study outcomes achieved in the relevant field. Although the programme's title does not meet content, the degree to be obtained is interrelated with both content and title of the programme, directly resulting from the study outcomes.

This AMASP International System Transformation Studies is designed to offer students a comprehensive and multidisciplinary understanding of the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the Russian Federation in particular and the wider Eurasian region in general. However, the inclusion of more courses that focus broadly on Eurasian studies, rather than predominantly on Russia, would enhance the programme by providing a modern perspective on regional dynamics, distinct from the legacy of Russian colonialism.

Despite the AMASP International System Transformation Studies strong design, there is a challenge in that it does not allow students to progress through the study process in a sequential and logical manner. The well-structured courses are not taught in a sequence that facilitates the gradual accumulation of knowledge. Given the diverse backgrounds of students, it would be beneficial to begin the programme with foundational courses in international relations theory and political science. Additionally, starting with an overview of Russian politics and the general characteristics of the Eurasian region would better prepare students for the more specialised and in-depth courses that follow, which are both interesting and relevant to the programme and the broader study field.

The qualifications of the academic staff, including visiting professors, associate professors, docents, lecturers, and assistants, are highly compliant with the requirements necessary for implementing the study programme, as well as with relevant laws and regulations, as documented (SAR, pp. 174-198 and Annexes 24.7.1.). The qualifications of the lecturers involved in the programme, as detailed in Annex 24.7.1., along with 24.7.1_pielik_Apliecinājums par akadēmiskā maģistra (otrā cikla) studiju programmas “Starptautiskās sistēmas transformācijas studijas” akadēmiskā personāla atbilstību Augstskolu likuma prasībām.edoc, show the opportunities for further professional development provided by the university, and provide indications that the identified shortcomings can be addressed and resolved. At the same time, the description of the study courses (Annex 20.1.20.1_Anx_course_descriptions_Transform_Stud.pdf) demonstrates that there is a need to update curriculum with more contemporary scientific literature, as well as more attention to lecturers' scientific performance and share of PhD holders engaged in this particular masters programme taking in consideration that 7 lecturers within this programme do not hold PhD, one of which is the programme director with a large workload (the programme director's workload raises questions about how this is done). Additionally, the number of high quality scientific articles and scope of involvement of scientific events is limited in general despite the university's active stimulating support (SAR; results of the assessment visit).

All indicators are detailed in the description of the study programme (SAR,p. 174-199). The alignment of the programme's indicators, including the programme code, the credit volume (120 ECTS), and the implementation duration, with the defined learning outcomes SAR, p. 174) is addressed positively, except the compliance between the title of the programme and actual content of it. Overall, the study programme indicators are well-aligned with the defined learning outcomes, reflecting a well-structured educational programme designed to prepare students for successful careers and further academic pursuits in Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology. However, the question remains whether this intended framework will be fully realised in practice taking into

consideration the number of visiting lecturers, as well as practitioners involved in politics and state administration. The current activities do not provide strong assurance of this. By re-evaluating the curriculum to ensure a more coherent developmental logic and finding another title for the regional studies, the programme can further enhance its quality and overall impact.

2.2.2. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies and study field in general places a strong emphasis on academic rigour and excellence, requiring students to engage with the latest research, developments, and findings (SAR). However, compliance between the title of the programme and the content is missing. The research interests and expertise of the lecturers have the full potential to adapt to these updates. The commitment to excellence, along with the new direction set by the dean, ensures that the faculty will prepare graduates to make meaningful contributions to the field, currently with a focus on practical application. The programme adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating history, political science, cultural studies, and regional studies, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of the subject. It also encourages original research, promoting innovative thinking and scholarly contributions, with opportunities for students to conduct research, publish their findings, and engage with think tanks, thereby enriching their academic experience. However, there is a strong recommendation to upgrade and extend the courses that provide competencies on theories and skills for academic research.

RSU supports the continuous development of its lecturers by offering a variety of further education courses and professional growth opportunities. These courses cover a wide range of subjects, teaching methodologies, and educational technologies, ensuring that lecturers remain current in their fields. The RSU also provides support for enhancing academic writing skills, including financial incentives for lecturers who are keen on developing academic articles. Additionally, RSU promotes project-based research, enabling lecturers to engage in innovative and impactful research projects, with the necessary administrative resources provided to streamline project development and application processes.

The academic staff, with their extensive academic and practical experience, contributes to both the development of academic knowledge and the integration of practical, applied aspects into the study process. This is evidenced by their involvement in practical politics, think tanks, and similar activities, which provide students with valuable opportunities to develop skills for future careers. However, there is a risk that the highly competent teaching staff initially planned for the programme may not be fully available. For instance, two potential lecturers currently hold high-level political and administrative positions, with one serving as the Minister of Defence and the other as the Head of the President's Chancery of the Republic of Latvia. This situation raises concerns about potential conflicts of interest, scheduling challenges, and the feasibility of their involvement in teaching while managing significant responsibilities in government or administration. It may be necessary to carefully manage their teaching commitments to ensure a balance between their various responsibilities.

2.2.3. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies employs a variety of teaching and learning methods designed to achieve its aims and learning outcomes. Primarily, it utilises lectures and practical classes or seminars, which are well-aligned with the intended learning outcomes by providing a structured environment for students to acquire and apply their knowledge (SAR, pp.188-191). Independent work, including the development of individual essays and research papers, is also emphasised, fostering students' ability to engage critically and independently with the material, thereby contributing to the programme's objectives.

Student-centred learning principles are a key component of the programme (SAR, p.188-191), as demonstrated by the regular tutorials offered for each course (Annex 20.1). These tutorials, available both in person and remotely, provide personalised support, helping students effectively engage with the course material. This approach underscores the programme's commitment to

accommodating diverse learning styles and needs, a fundamental aspect of student-centred learning.

The AMASP International System Transformation Studies employs a ten-point grading system, coupled with detailed feedback on student performance, to support a formative assessment process that encourages continuous learning and improvement. Additionally, the programme respects academic freedom, allowing lecturers to adapt their teaching methods to the specific learning outcomes of each course. This flexibility ensures that the methods employed are both relevant and effective in achieving the desired educational outcomes.

The integration of practical classes and high level guest lectures (SAR, p.188), as well as promotion of independent research align well with the programme's goal of preparing students for professional challenges in international relations and diplomacy. Furthermore, the programme adapts to contemporary educational needs by incorporating digital resources and innovative methods, such as the use of artificial intelligence in the study process. This modern approach enhances the learning experience and ensures that students are well-prepared to meet the demands of the evolving international landscape.

However, while academic freedom is a strength, it may also result in inconsistencies in the quality and delivery of course content. Without adequate oversight or standardisation, there is a risk that some courses may not fully align with the programme's overall learning outcomes.

It is commendable that foreign students involved in the programme with an English curriculum are offered the opportunity to learn the Latvian language. However, additional activities, such as those that introduce students to the local cultural context, are not provided. Incorporating such activities could be beneficial in helping students integrate more successfully into the study environment. It is to be welcomed that all students are offered to learn the Russian language as well, which helps to delve deeper into the specific regional and specifically Russia studies, but in this case this again does not coincide with the new title of the programme.

2.2.4. N/A

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. Since the AMASP International System Transformation Studies is newly established and has not yet produced any graduates, the first cohort of students have defended their Master's theses at the end of the spring semester in the 2023/2024 academic year. The Master's thesis topics mainly focus on Russia (SAR, pp.191-192). The suitability of the final theses will be judged in more detail in time. At the same time, the topics chosen by students to write their thesis demonstrate coherence with a program as it is called now, and not the suggested one.

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

The AMASP International System Transformation Studies demonstrates strong compliance with the study field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology, particularly in international relations and regional studies with a particular focus on the Russian Federation. It aligns well with legal requirements and state educational standards, showcasing effective management and quality assurance practices. However, there are concerns regarding the mismatch between the programme's title, "International System Transformation Studies," and its actual content, which primarily centres on Russian studies rather than global transformations. This misalignment could mislead prospective students and should be addressed by either changing the programme's title to better reflect its focus or by adjusting the curriculum to align more closely with the current title. Additionally, the programme would benefit from a more logical sequence of course offerings, beginning with foundational courses in international relations and political science to better prepare

students for advanced topics.

The AMASP International System Transformation Studies emphasises academic rigour and excellence, requiring engagement with current research and developments. While the content is interdisciplinary and encourages original research, there is a critical need to update and extend courses that provide competencies in academic research theories and methodologies. The qualifications of the academic staff are generally strong, but the involvement of high-level political figures in teaching roles may present conflicts of interest and availability issues. This requires careful management to ensure consistent and high-quality education delivery. Also, there is a strong need to reevaluate the share of engagement of those lecturers, who do not have needed academic qualifications, such as PhD and meaningful academic performance. Special attention needs to be paid to the programme director role, currently charged with managing another 3 study programmes as well and at the same time not holding PhD. This misaligns with the academic ambitions the university has.

A variety of teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, and independent work, are employed in the programme, all contributing to achieving its learning outcomes. The incorporation of student-centred learning principles and the use of innovative teaching methods, such as digital resources and AI, further enhance the educational experience. However, academic freedom, while a strength, may lead to inconsistencies in course delivery. There is also a need for additional activities that introduce foreign students to the local cultural context to aid their integration. The inclusion of Russian language studies is valuable for regional expertise but highlights the disconnect between the programme's title and its content.

As the AMASP International System Transformation Studies is newly established, the first set of Master's theses will be defended in the 2023/2024 academic year. The range of potential thesis topics is known and focuses primarily on Russia. The relevance and alignment of these topics with the programme's objectives will need to be assessed once they are completed, especially in light of the potential changes to the programme's title or content.

Overall, while the study programme is well-structured and formally meets essential legal and educational standards, significant adjustments are needed to align the programme's title with its content. Ensuring a logical sequence of course offerings, updating research competencies, and addressing potential conflicts of interest among teaching staff will be crucial for enhancing the programme's overall quality and impact.

Strengths:

1. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies demonstrates compliance with national educational regulations and legal requirements, ensuring that it meets the necessary standards for accreditation and quality assurance. The programme adopts a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach, integrating history, political science, cultural studies, and regional studies. This provides students with a well-rounded understanding of the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the region.

The AMASP International System Transformation Studies is supported by highly qualified academic staff with extensive expertise in their respective fields. This includes both full-time and visiting lecturers who bring valuable practical knowledge to the classroom.

2. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies incorporates modern teaching methods, such as the use of digital resources and artificial intelligence, enhancing the learning experience and ensuring that students are well-prepared to meet contemporary challenges in international relations and can better understand regional dynamics on which the programme is focusing.

3. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies emphasises student-centred learning principles, offering personalised support through regular tutorials and adapting to diverse learning styles and needs. This approach ensures that students can effectively engage with the material and achieve their learning outcomes.

Weaknesses:

1. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies title, "International System Transformation Studies," does not accurately reflect its primary focus on the Eurasian region and Russian studies in particular. This discrepancy can be misleading for prospective students and may affect the programme's appeal and clarity.
2. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies lacks a logical sequence of course offerings, which may hinder the gradual accumulation of knowledge. This can result in gaps in students' understanding and make it difficult for them to build a cohesive foundation in the subject matter.
3. While the AMASP International System Transformation Studies predominantly focuses on Russia, there is a notable deficiency in courses that broadly cover the Eurasian region. This narrow focus may limit students' understanding of regional dynamics and miss opportunities to explore perspectives beyond Russian studies.
4. Several faculty members hold high-level political and administrative positions, which raises concerns about their availability and potential conflicts of interest. This could impact the consistency and quality of course delivery.
5. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies curriculum needs updating to include more contemporary scientific literature and to strengthen the courses that develop theoretical knowledge of IR and research competencies. The current lack of emphasis on academic research theories and methodologies may limit students' preparedness for advanced research and scholarly contributions.

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

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The suggested title of the programme is misleading. It is suggested to keep the existing title, as well as to review curriculum in order to provide more courses with focus on not only Russia, but also other regional actors.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. RSU has excellent study and research facilities. Well-equipped auditoriums, infrastructure resources and material and technical support are available for all study programmes, including AMASP International System Transformation Studies.

Specifically, resources provided to the study programme due to cooperation with the sector should be mentioned – students have full access to an updated library of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, as well as full access to the event platforms organised by the Center for Geopolitical Studies Riga and the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. In study courses on developments in action policies, students have access to the research documents of the sector and the results thereof (SAR, p. 192).

In conclusion, the material provision of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies creates prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicates the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. The SAR provides detailed analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP International System Transformation Studies. The full-time AMASP International System Transformation Studies in English is planned to be financed from state budget funds and the funds of individuals and legal entities setting the tuition fee for EUR 3300 in academic year 2024/2025. The study programme has state funding for 10 budget funded places, where the funding per study place with social security costs is EUR 3067 per year of studies. The part-time full-time English language StP is planned to be funded by private and legal entities, with a potential tuition fee of EUR 2 800 (SAR, p.193-194). As a result of the structural consolidation process of RSU, an improvement in efficiency in the context of cost items is expected, which ensures a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

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

The AMASP International System Transformation Studies infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU contribute positively to the learning environment and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP International System Transformation Studies shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Strengths:

1. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies.
2. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the international relations and diplomacy study process.
3. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP International System Transformation Studies shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Weaknesses:

None

Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Excellent study and research facilities, including the study base created specifically for the international system transformation studies; long term financial sustainability of the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. According to the Annex 24.7 (Analysis of the composition of the teaching staff) there are 26 lecturers involved in the implementation of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies, out of which 12 have PhDs (9 elected staff members have a PhD). In total there are 13 elected academic staff. There are two professors, 4 associate professors, 4 lecturers with PhD and 4

lecturers. This puts the AMASP International System Transformation Studies in compliance with the Section 55 (1) (3) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. As with other programmes in the study field under assessment, the Human Resources Department at the RSU makes sure all lecturers have at least B2 level proficiency in English. Additionally, it is possible to check this statement by observing publications and other activities conducted in English on behalf of teaching staff members at the RSU Research Portal. The newly integrated management of all 4 programmes under the one director will ensure that all practices applied in other three existing programmes are transferred to this programme as well.

The qualification of the academic staff and lecturers complies with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements of the laws and regulations are almost fulfilled. Some risks are identified: availability of guest lecturers; large share of involved academic staff does not hold PhD and scientific activities should be ramped up (publications and participation in the scientific conferences).

2.4.2. According to the SAR (p. 198) there has been no change of lecturers during the programme period (taking into account the short period of the programme implementation). The composition of the teaching staff has been completed in line with the needs of the programme content implementation, is stable and has remained unchanged, while, as already mentioned, increasing the academic capacity of the teaching staff (acquiring new scientific degrees).

One noteworthy change is that one visiting lecturer was elected Assistant Professor and became a full-fledged employee of the department, thereby ensuring a more direct link to sectors where programme graduates are expected to work. Namely, her role as the Head of the Chancery of the President of Latvia G. Reire could be helpful in developing and adapting programme content.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. Annex 6.4.1. titled "Summary of data from the RSU science portal about the publications of teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study direction" shows that 4 out of 23 members of the teaching staff have not published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions since 2017. Five members of the teaching staff, which have the best research publications credentials are not permanent employees but guest lecturers. Several lecturers have published only one or two in the aforementioned period, which is subpar. While checking those data in Scopus, ORCID and Google Scholar, it was visible that several members of the teaching staff have none or only one active profile, which unnecessarily reduces traceability of their research work. In the coming period all members of the teaching staff need to have active profiles in Scopus, ORCID and Google Scholar. Five members of the teaching staff have Scopus h-index higher than three, which could be taken as a proof that those are experienced researchers. In the coming period it would be useful to pair experienced and beginner researchers in order to ensure that younger researchers manage to fulfil this criterion.

2.4.5. There are essentially three pillars of cooperation, upheld in regular meetings of the study programme lecturers. First, there is cooperation in exchanging information on study methods and content of study courses through the aforementioned meetings. Second, joint research projects are discussed and implemented. Third, lecturers in the programme are encouraged to attend regular training at the RSU Centre for Educational Growth.

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

The basic requirements for this programme have been met and duly elaborated. Concrete set of evidence was presented for almost all of the claims made in the SAR. In terms of the overall quality

of the teaching staff, the programme can claim a skilled and relatively stable core of lecturers. There are cooperation mechanisms in place to ensure monitoring of the research and teaching activities on behalf of the teaching staff. Still, there is progress to be made, especially with regard to the need to ramp up scientific output and stimulate the younger generation of scholars to publish more frequently. Several members of the teaching staff have not published since 2017, while some members of the teaching staff have barely any publications indexed in Web of Science or Scopus journals. Overall, this set of criteria is partially fulfilled.

Strengths:

1. Relatively stable core of experienced lecturers who ensure delivery of courses incorporating the newest developments in the scientific field.
2. Cooperation mechanisms to ensure continuous monitoring of the implementation (e.g. quality manager and developer of the study process).

Weaknesses:

1. The need to include a lecturer or lecturers (either tenured or guest) in the programme who can teach courses dealing with the political economy of the Russian Federation and of the neighbouring states.
2. Several members of the teaching staff do not have publications since 2017, while there are several lecturers with publications only outside of Web of Science/SCOPUS databases.

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: Partially compliant

The AMASP International System Transformation Studies ticks most of the boxes in the section covering Teaching Staff, apart from fulfilling criterion 2.4.4. Several members of the teaching staff need to up the ante and start publishing their research, regardless of whether they are experienced researchers or beginners.

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 AMASP International System Transformation Studies complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 240 of 13 May 2014 "Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266187>) confirmed by annex Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard (17.1_Anx_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Provided course descriptions "20.1_Anx_course_descriptions_Transform_Stud.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. However, some courses rely on outdated reading materials, which may not reflect the most current trends and developments in the field, potentially limiting the relevance of the knowledge gained. It would be advisable for RSU to review and update the literature in the course descriptions based on the latest trends in the field. The program's curriculum needs updating to include more contemporary scientific literature and to strengthen the courses that develop theoretical knowledge of IR and research competencies.

- 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

Provided annex "24.1_Anx_Diploma_Diploma_Supplement_Intl_System_Transform_Stud.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The annex, " 24.7.1_pielik_Apliecinājums par akadēmiskā maģistra (otrā cikla) studiju programmas "Starptautiskās sistēmas transformācijas studijas" akadēmiskā personāla atbilstību Augstskolu likuma prasībām.edoc," confirms that the AMASP International System Transformation Studies complies with Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which stipulates that "Not less than five professors and associate professors altogether who are elected in the relevant higher education institution shall take part in the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited elective part of academic study programmes."

An analysis of the programmes academic staff composition (see Annex 06.1_Anx_Academic_staff_list_Soc_Pol_Ant_ENG_new.xlsx) shows that the implementation of the compulsory and elective part of the programme is ensured by 26 lecturers, 13 of whom are elected to academic positions. Of the 13 elected academic staff, 2 are professors and 3 are associate professors.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.4_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām.edoc" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of this AMASP International System Transformation Studies complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex "24.5_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām_valodu prasmes.edoc" states that the English language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies corresponds to at least B2 level of the Common European Framework.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.8_Studiju līgums_par studijām fizisko un juridisko personu finansētajās vietās_2023.pdf" containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 "Rules to be included in the study agreement".

- 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

The provided annex "24.2_pielik_Apliecinajums_par_stud_turp.edoc" Agreement between the University of Latvia and RSU (25.03.2024) confirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education at the University of Latvia in the Academic master's study programme "Diplomacy" (LRI code 45312) and the Academic master's study programme "Political Science" (LRI code 45312), both offered in Latvian. However, since the AMASP International System Transformation Studies is offered in Latvian and English, it would be necessary to provide students with the option to continue their education in English as well.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.3_pielik_Apliecinājums par studējošo zaudējumu kompensāciju.edoc" states that the RSU based on Section 55(8) of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and Cabinet of Ministers No 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations on Licensing of study programmes", Paragraph 13.4, confirms that the university guarantees compensation of losses to the students of study programmes in the study field "Sociology, Politics and Anthropology", which is pending accreditation, if the AMASP International System Transformation Studies fails to be accredited (due to action or inaction) of RSU, or if the AMASP International System Transformation Studies licence is withdrawn and the student does not wish to continue their studies in another study programme.

- 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: Fully compliant

AMASP International System Transformation Studies complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments. However, considering that the study programme is offered in both Latvian and English, RSU should conclude an additional agreement regarding the transfer of students in the English-language stream in the event that the implementation of this AMASP International System Transformation Studies is terminated.

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

The evaluation of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies reveals several strengths and areas for improvement that are crucial for enhancing its overall quality and alignment with educational standards.

The programme demonstrates strong compliance with the study fields of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology, particularly in international relations and regional studies focused on the Russian Federation. It adheres to legal requirements and state educational standards, showcasing effective management and quality assurance practices. However, there is a notable misalignment between the programme's title and its content, which primarily centres on Russian studies rather than broader global transformations. This discrepancy could mislead prospective students and should be addressed by either revising the programme's title or adjusting the curriculum to better reflect its actual focus.

Although the study programme structure, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are well interrelated and justified, the misleading title and some challenges in student recruitment suggest areas for improvement. The recent changes to the study programme, including the adjustment to the credit system and the change in study programme leadership, are generally supported, though concerns remain about the high workload on the programme director and the need for more targeted student recruitment efforts.

The current structure of the programme lacks a logical sequence of course offerings, which may hinder students' gradual accumulation of knowledge. Foundational courses in international relations and political science should precede advanced topics to ensure a cohesive learning experience. Additionally, while the programme emphasises academic rigour and encourages original research, there is a critical need to update and extend courses that provide competencies in academic research theories and methodologies. This will better prepare students for advanced research and scholarly contributions.

The qualifications of the academic staff are generally strong; however, the involvement of high-level political figures in teaching roles raises concerns about potential conflicts of interest and availability issues. This necessitates careful management to ensure consistent and high-quality education delivery. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to reevaluate the share of faculty who do not hold PhDs or lack meaningful academic performance, particularly in a Master's programme.

The programme employs a variety of teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, and independent work, which contribute positively to achieving its learning outcomes. The incorporation of student-centred learning principles and innovative teaching methods, such as digital resources and AI, enhances the educational experience. However, there is a need for additional activities that introduce foreign students to the local cultural context to aid their integration. The inclusion of Russian language studies is valuable for regional expertise but further emphasises the disconnect between the programme's title and its content.

As the programme is newly established, the first set of Master's theses were defended in the 2023/2024 academic year. The relevance and alignment of these topics, which primarily focus on Russia, will need to be assessed in the future to ensure they meet the programme's objectives.

In summary, while the study programme is well-structured and meets essential legal and educational standards, significant adjustments are necessary to align the programme's title with its content. Ensuring a logical sequence of course offerings, updating research competencies, and addressing potential conflicts of interest among teaching staff will be crucial for enhancing the programme's overall quality and impact.

Strengths:

1. The study programme strongly aligns with the field of Sociology, Politics, and Anthropology, with a specialised focus on Russia and Eurasia, which is of high geopolitical significance.
2. The study programme offers a unique specialisation in Russian and Eurasian studies, which is valuable for both national interests and the broader field of political science.
3. The degree, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are well-aligned and adhere to national standards.
4. The study programme benefits from resource sharing with another Master's study programme in the same thematic group, enhancing efficiency and collaboration.
5. The programme demonstrates compliance with national educational regulations and legal requirements, ensuring that it meets the necessary standards for accreditation and quality assurance.
6. The programme adopts a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach, integrating history, political science, cultural studies, and regional studies. This provides students with a well-rounded understanding of the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the region.
7. The programme is supported by highly qualified academic staff with extensive expertise in their respective fields. This includes both full-time and visiting lecturers who bring valuable practical

knowledge to the classroom.

8. The programme incorporates modern teaching methods, such as the use of digital resources and artificial intelligence, enhancing the learning experience and ensuring that students are well-prepared to meet contemporary challenges in international relations and can better understand regional dynamics on which the program is focusing.

9. The programme emphasises student-centred learning principles, offering personalised support through regular tutorials and adapting to diverse learning styles and needs. This approach ensures that students can effectively engage with the material and achieve their learning outcomes.

10. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies.

11. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the international relations and diplomacy study process.

12. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP International System Transformation Studies shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

13. Stable core of lecturers who ensure delivery of courses incorporating the newest developments in the scientific field.

14. Cooperation mechanisms to ensure continuous monitoring of the implementation (e.g. quality manager and developer of the study process).

Weaknesses:

1. Considering that the study programme is offered in both Latvian and English, RSU should conclude an additional agreement regarding the transfer of students in the English-language stream in the event that the implementation of this AMASP International System Transformation Studies is terminated.

The programme's title, "International System Transformation Studies," does not accurately reflect its primary focus on Eurasian region and Russian studies in particular. This discrepancy can be misleading for prospective students and may affect the programme's appeal and clarity.

2. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies lacks a logical sequence of course offerings, which may hinder the gradual accumulation of knowledge. This can result in gaps in students' understanding and make it difficult for them to build a cohesive foundation in the subject matter.

3. While the AMASP International System Transformation Studies predominantly focuses on Russia, there is a notable deficiency in courses that broadly cover the Eurasian region. This narrow focus may limit students' understanding of regional dynamics and miss opportunities to explore perspectives beyond Russian studies.

4. Several faculty members hold high-level political and administrative positions, which raises concerns about their availability and potential conflicts of interest. This could impact the consistency and quality of course delivery.

5. The AMASP International System Transformation Studies curriculum needs updating to include more contemporary scientific literature and to strengthen the courses that develop theoretical knowledge of IR and research competencies. The current lack of emphasis on academic research theories and methodologies may limit students' preparedness for advanced research and scholarly contributions.

6. Share of staff, which does not hold PhD, involved in the Masters programme should be overviewed, as well as the scientific performance of the academic staff might be upgraded.

7. The need to include a lecturer or lecturers (either tenured or guest) in the programme who can teach courses dealing with the political economy of the Russian Federation and of the neighbouring states.

8. Several members of the teaching staff do not have publications since 2017, while there are several lecturers with publications only outside of Web of Science/SCOPUS databases
9. Recruitment has been hindered by fluctuating enrolment, ineffective promotion, and the high cost of meeting English language requirements, deterring potential students.
10. Frequent changes in programme leadership and the heavy workload on the current director, who is also a PhD candidate, risk undermining programme quality and management.
11. Some study courses rely on outdated reading materials, which may not reflect the most current trends and developments in the field, potentially limiting the relevance of the knowledge gained.

Evaluation of the study programme "International System Transformation Studies"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "International System Transformation Studies"

Short-term recommendations

Continue to introduce previous accreditations' recommendations.

Carefully assess the title of the programme in the context of the course content to ensure it aligns both. Consider changing the study programme title to "Eurasian Studies" or keep the current title to better reflect its content and avoid misleading prospective students.

Carefully assess content of the programme in context of programme goals. At the moment, components of theoretical knowledge (IR and regional studies) and academic research skills are missing. Share of content related to wider Eurasia could be enlarged. To improve the logic and sequence of teaching within a university study programme, it is necessary to ensure that the course sequence aligns with the overall goals and objectives of the study programme. Each course particularly and logic of studies should contribute to the development of competencies required for the specific field.

Review the large proportion of lecturers without PhD involved in teaching and administration of the Master's programme and take steps to reduce this proportion.

Improve the definition of the potential target group for foreign students and enhance targeted promotional activities to attract more interested and motivated students.

Consider distributing administrative responsibilities more evenly among faculty members to reduce the burden on the programme director.

Explore options to facilitate the English language certification process for applicants, possibly through preparatory courses or partnerships with language institutions.

Review and update the literature in the course descriptions on an ongoing basis based on the latest trends in the field. The programme's curriculum needs updating to include more contemporary scientific literature and to strengthen the courses that develop theoretical knowledge of IR and research competencies.

Given the absence of similar study programmes in English in Latvia, RSU should consider establishing agreements with foreign universities to ensure the seamless transfer of students enrolled in the English-language stream of the AMASP International System Transformation Studies programme in the event of study programme termination.

Considering the new regulations in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 21.1, the degree should be corrected.

Long-term recommendations

Introduce introductory courses that cover the fundamental concepts and theories in international relations. These courses should serve as prerequisites for more advanced topics.

The research methods course (or courses) in the field of international relations is fundamental. It is recommended to be offered at the outset of the Master's programme and kept distinct from theory or particular subject courses. Otherwise, the programme may lean more towards professional training rather than having academic character, which is particularly important since the degree obtained is academic and not the professional one.

Develop a comprehensive international recruitment strategy, including partnerships with universities abroad, to attract a steady stream of qualified applicants.

II - "Social Anthropology" ASSESSMENT

II - "Social Anthropology" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. The Academic Master's (second cycle) Study Programme "Social Anthropology" (45314) (AMASP Social Anthropology) is one of the two main programme directions of the broader study field "Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology" (study field). The goal of the AMASP Social Anthropology is to train social anthropologists according to international standards and to gain both practical and academic knowledge. These competencies align closely with the broader expectations within the fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology.

The AMASP Social Anthropology tasks include understanding of societal problems from a social anthropology perspective and ability to collaborate with specialists, in-depth knowledge of different societies and social processes from critical perspectives, research skills in social anthropology, and life-long anthropological curiosity.

The AMASP Social Anthropology outcomes include in-depth knowledge of fundamental and current issues in anthropology, ability to engage with socio-anthropological issues on different societies using ethnographic material, carry out research individually and in teams, ability to discuss ethical dilemmas, fieldwork, and ethnographic writing, use anthropological theories, methods, and skills, apply social anthropology methods and approaches, and develop new theoretical approaches and understand ethical responsibility. These goals and results further align the programme with the broader study field, as they incorporate key aspects of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology.

In conclusion, the AMASP Social Anthropology is well-aligned with the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". The AMASP Social Anthropology title, its goal, tasks, and results all suggest a high degree of compliance with the study field. The programme provides a comprehensive anthropological education that is in line with the expectations and scope of the broader study field.

2.1.2. Title, Code and Degree to be Obtained: The title "Social Anthropology" and the code "45314" are well matched and accurately reflect the focus of the study programme on the field of social anthropology. The degree to be obtained, "Master's degree of Social Sciences in Social

Anthropology" (Considering the new changes in regulations, in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 21.1, the degree should be changed to a Master's degree in Social Anthropology) is also aligned well with both and reflects the focus equally well.

Aims, Objectives, Learning Outcomes, and Admission Requirements: These elements are well aligned with each other and with the field of anthropology. The AMASP Social Anthropology aims to prepare high-level specialists in social anthropology, with objectives and learning outcomes designed to support this aim.

Duration and Scope: The duration of the study programme is two years for a total of 120 credits (CP / ECTS). This aligns with the Bologna Process recommendations and is linked to the content of the preceding three-year bachelor's degree programme. The scope and duration are thus reasonable and justified.

Implementation Language: The AMASP Social Anthropology is offered in Latvian with the scope of offering it in English as well in the near future. This is appropriate given the international scope of anthropology as a discipline and the potential for students from various linguistic backgrounds to enrol in the programme.

In conclusion, all elements of the AMASP Social Anthropology are interrelated and justified.

2.1.3. The biggest changes in the study programme parameters were made within the larger shifts at Faculty level and had to do with programme management and direction. In all, the changes in the AMASP Social Anthropology are as follows:

(i) the programme code was amended to reflect changes in Cabinet Regulations (CM No. 322). This has no bearing on the present assessment.

(ii) two programme directors have been replaced since 2020, and the current director has overall responsibility for all study programmes under this evaluation. As stated in 1.2.1 this has a bearing on the overall management of the programme as it means that the role of study programme director is now more administrative than academic. Meetings with the programme director as well as administration and staff have pointed to significant problems with this shift, namely in terms of workload and in terms of the quality of content overview. While the work of the current study programme director is highly valued and appreciated among her peers and superiors, the experts committee remains concerned about the implications of this management structure for the quality of the programme. In particular, there are concerns over the extent of the capacity of the director to overview the programme, adequately assess content to carry out proper monitoring, evaluation, and improvement, and to resolve issues that may arise relating to such content. It would be reasonable to expect that the study programme director should have specialist knowledge in the field. In this regard, even though the programme direction has not changed in terms of the level of qualification (the programme having been directed by doctoral candidates in the past), the practice of assigning such significant administrative tasks to early career researchers should be reviewed and revised.

(iii) the tasks of the programme have been revised. They are in line with the study field and teaching practices internationally and thus pose no concerns.

(iv) the learning outcomes have been revised during a mapping exercise and in line with national and European frameworks and thus the change is fully justified.

(v) the future plans to offer the programme in English as well is fully justified and commendable.

(vi) the transition from CP to ECTS is justified and poses no significant change given equivalence between the two.

As stated in the report (SAR, p. 119) changes to the programme "have not been extensive" and thus most of them raise no significant concerns. However, the change in the management structure appears to be more significant than at first glance, with potential impact on programme development. This should be reassessed.

2.1.4. The AMASP Social Anthropology equips students with a breadth of knowledge that enables

them to work in various sectors. The skills gained through this programme, such as cultural awareness and social integration, ethnographic research skills, community development and policy, and international cooperation and human rights are highly transferable and valuable in the contemporary global society. The AMASP Social Anthropology alignment with the increasing needs in these directions further underscores its relevance and justification. The report (SAR, p.122) justifiably questions the suggestions of a 2020-conducted SIA "Dynamic University" study that suggests decline in interest in Social and Behavioural Sciences and refocusing of emphasis on STEM subjects.

AMASP Social Anthropology has produced 29 graduates over the past 5 years, which is admittedly a small number. It is also clear that these graduates have made use of their transferable skills as well as specialist skills that secured them positions in both government and industry. Some have also pursued further study at doctoral level.

Most graduates of the AMASP Social Anthropology have reported that their education has been beneficial to their careers.

The AMASP Social Anthropology has a strong social justification, and its graduates have achieved good employment outcomes. Of the graduates the expert group met during the assessment visit, Social Anthropology graduates were the most enthusiastic about their studies and the programme.

2.1.5. N/A

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

The AMASP Social Anthropology is generally well-aligned with its broader field of study. The AMASP Social Anthropology successfully prepares specialists with in-depth knowledge in anthropology, equipping them with the necessary skills for a wide range of professional opportunities in various sectors both in Latvia and abroad. The programme's goals, outcomes, and overall structure are consistent with the expectations of the broader field.

However, the current management of the programme does not seem adequate as it does not fully guarantee that matters relating content and related programme development and improvement can be addressed with the necessary expertise.

Strengths:

1. The AMASP Social Anthropology is comprehensive, covering a broad range of anthropological concepts and skills.
2. The programme is aligned with the broader study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology".
3. Graduates have found employment in various sectors.
4. The programme has a clear and well-articulated set of goals and outcomes, which align closely with the broader expectations of the field.

Weaknesses:

1. The management of the programme in its current form under a programme director tasked with overseeing all study programme in the study field does not seem to provide adequate support to the development and improvement of the programme. Firstly, a role shared among all programmes does not guarantee the disciplinary expertise that would allow the director to effectively manage the programme content and ensure continuous improvement. Secondly, the workload implications for such an administration-heavy all-encompassing role does not ensure in-depth engagement with the running of each programme independently.
2. The programme's degree needs to be changed according to new regulations.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The SAR states that the programme is compliant with National Educational Standard (, p. 128) as per Annex 17.1. (17.1_Anx_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf)

The programme has 120 credits of theoretical modules, modules applying the theory to current issues, and a dissertation (SAR, 126). This makes the content topical. The compulsory taught part carries 48 ECTS, and the dissertation 30 ECTS, leaving ample scope for students to choose between elective modules (42 ECTS). The theoretical content covers a broad range from classical theories to current debates and links well to the contemporary issues explored (environment, multispecies ethnography) testifying to the fact that the study modules is interconnected and complementary, and that it corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes. The content also offers a variety of regional specialisation modules from the Amazon and the Caribbean to Siberia and the Caucasus, making the course relevant to the analysis of cultures both closer to home and further afield. Branches of social anthropology are also well covered, including a number of modules in economic anthropology, and modules on kinship, medical anthropology, cultural, etc. The course also offers modules in research and methodology, including practice-based field visits and discussions of ethical approaches and dilemmas. While some courses are specific in content, others are broadly described presumably to allow for content development year on year (e.g. current debates). In all these aspects, the course undoubtedly meets the needs of the industry and national labour market. This was also evidenced in meetings during the assessment visit with alumni and employers. It also corresponds to scientific trends in the teaching of anthropology internationally. Thus, the content of the AMASP Social Anthropology complies with national regulations relating to credits required, methods of delivery, and standard for qualification. The programme is particularly strong on the exploration of current issues and debates, with current themes of relevance such as money and consumption, childhood, environment, multispecies ethnography, medical anthropology and mental illness. There appears to be ample scope here for emphasising this currency more and using it to brand the programme as distinctive in Latvia in this respect. The regional coverage is also impressive, as is the way in which research methods are discussed and analysed.

While the coverage of contemporary issues and debates is a strength of the module, the coverage of classical theories could perhaps be updated to shift the emphasis closer to the 20th century. Similarly, while the current debates module is broad to allow variability in content, some specification of the key debates being discussed from year to year would be welcome.

2.2.2. The title AMASP Social Anthropology seeks to promote and further the study of social anthropology in Latvia. At the same time, it takes cues from the teaching and practice of social anthropology in Europe and cultural anthropology in the US to keep developing the direction. The content of the programme (this report criteria 2.2.1) testifies to the fact this is achieved through the knowledge that students gain while on the programme. In doing so, the goal of the AMASP Social Anthropology is to prepare its students for a number of careers where, following employer consultation, it has been shown that “that a potential employee’s degree in social anthropology is an important factor in demonstrating a specific employee’s knowledge, skills and analytical view, which is also directly related to their overall image and identity.” (SAR, p.129). This corresponds to the mission of RSU, which is “to ensure the creation, accumulation and transfer of knowledge valued by the international scientific community and to offer excellent, inclusive and sustainable educational opportunities in the health, life and social sciences to realise everyone’s potential throughout life.” (SAR, p.5). The tasks and learning outcomes listed for AMASP Social Anthropology also feed back into the title, the degree, and the goal of the programme and the mission of RSU. It is safe to conclude that the AMASP Social Anthropology indications align well with each other.

2.2.3. Implementation methods are well described and they evidence alignment with strategic goals (SAR, 129-132). The programme offers different study elements which seeks to cater to student and staff needs as well as address the precepts of anthropology in regard to practical skills and research. This variety can present challenges, but the report indicates that a reasonable balance is kept to allow the achievement of aims and outcomes at the same time as following student-centred learning principles. In specific, the following points are worthy of consideration:

Online studies: The report (SAR, p.130) indicates that since 2020 the programme has been offered in both a physical and an online format, keeping the latter to under 50% as per regulations. While this allows for some staff members based outside the country to teach remotely, it mostly caters to students leaving outside Riga in Latvia. This is commendable and undoubtedly poses challenges to some of the teaching. Nevertheless, meetings with students and alumni did not raise such challenges as an issue. Possibly the biggest challenge it raises has to do with the practical aspects of the course, which include field visits to museums and ethnographic “expeditions” (SAR, p.130). Ensuring the participation of remote students in such modules could be given further consideration going forward.

Research-based teaching: The programme offers three opportunities for students to engage in field research type activities, all of which are impressive and commendable (SAR, p.130). This was confirmed in the meetings with students and alumni, who spoke with enthusiasm about these opportunities. The first is a museum visit incorporated in the module “Sex and Gender” (KSK047) which is a compulsory module. This is good practice that can perhaps be incorporated into other modules. The second is the specially designed module “Social Anthropological Expedition” (KSK215) which is listed as an optional module. This appears to be the place where students get a feel for ethnographic investigation. As such, consideration could be given to incorporating the module into the compulsory list, or creating opportunities for students to practise field methods in other compulsory modules, after being provided with appropriate training. The third opportunity is in the course of independent work and in preparing their Masters dissertations, in which the report indicates that students may undertake their own ethnographic research (SAR, p.134). The preparation in methods training for undertaking such research appears adequate and therefore this practice of encouraging students to try their hand in field research is highly commendable.

Non-formal training: It is also commendable that students in the course are encouraged to participate in professional academic activities including conferences and the work of the Latvian Association of Anthropologists. Both of these are notable initiatives.

Overall, these aspects of teaching methods speak volumes to the good work done in the programme, its focus on student needs, and they complement well the traditional format of lecture and seminar presentations.

2.2.4. N/A

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. The SAR provides a detailed description of the thesis module pursued in AMASP Social Anthropology (SAR, 132-134). The preparation for the thesis includes rigorous methods instruction and since 2021 a requirement for ethics clearance. This is a welcome change and the preparation for the small-scale field research required at this stage seems adequate. The range of topics researched within this module is impressive both in thematology and also in regional focus. In recent years there is a greater diversity of staff supervising theses and this is another improvement that potentially releases workload and diversifies the topics covered. Another commendable feature of the dissertation module is that students can partake in research projects at the department and write their dissertations on the basis of that work. This is a great way to train early career anthropologists and prepare them for professional roles in either academia or outside it. The grading

of theses between 6 and 10 speaks to the quality of work being done, not only on the part of the students but also that of supervising staff. Overall, the work done in this section is commendable.

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

The content of the AMASP Social Anthropology is topical, the content of the study modules is interconnected and complementary, and it corresponds to the objectives of the AMASP Social Anthropology and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes. The AMASP Social Anthropology comprises both compulsory modules and elective modules. This allows students to gain significant knowledge in core aspects of anthropology, with emphasis on contemporary theories and debates, and to pursue specialisation topics, both thematic and ethnographically focused. More could be done in some courses to refresh the content particularly those dealing with classic theory. Student-centred learning is a core mission of the programme and this is evident both in set-up (with distance-learning offerings) and in the enthusiasm with which students and alumni speak of their programme. The programme has ample scope for practising ethnographic methods, through encouragement of research in dissertation writing as well as ethnographic expeditions. Given that online studies distance-learning is a significant aspect of the programme, greater consideration could be given to how interactive sections of the programme could be delivered, such as ethnographic expeditions and field site visits.

Strengths:

1. Compliance with national standards and regulations.
2. Very good programme content with a variety of topics addressed.
3. Implementation methods that include interactive learning and fieldwork preparation foster enthusiasm in students for the course, desire for further study.
4. The AMASP Social Anthropology provides students with a competitive edge in the labour market in important sectors such as international organisations, industry, and civil society.
5. Student-centred approach aspiring to individualised teaching methods.
6. Ethnographic focus offers a range of global regions.

Weaknesses:

1. Some modules could be spruced up, as for example bringing the focus of classic theories further into the 20th century.
2. The balance between student-centred approaches that translate into online offer options and the interactive parts of the programme which require physical presence for ethnographic expeditions could be more clearly laid out.

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

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme is fully compliant with regulations, offers an impressive content, and implementation methods, ensures competitive graduates in the labour market, has a student-centred approach and good content in terms of ethnographic research and practice. Minor improvements on content and delivery of online aspects could be made, but these do not detract from full compliance.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. RSU has excellent study and research facilities. Well-equipped auditoriums, infrastructure resources and material and technical support are available for all study programmes, including AMASP Social Anthropology. However, social science studies also require specific resources, which are provided by the study base created specifically for the social anthropology study process. The RSU Library provides subscriptions for access to several anthropology journals published by Berghahn: Anthropological Journal of European Cultures, Focaal, Social Analysis, The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology, Journal of Legal Anthropology. Similarly, based on a recommendation of the lecturers of the programme, as well as other colleagues in the study direction, the RSU Library launched a subscription to the SAGE Research Methods database, which is currently actively used by both lecturers and students (SAR, p.134). Assessment of the informative and methodological provision regarding library resources for the implementation of the study field “Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology” describes the library resources that ensure the implementation of the AMASP Social Anthropology (see Annex 23.2 “Evaluation of the informative and methodological base on IT infrastructure and resources available”). RSU also provides access to the NVIVO qualitative data analysis programme for all lecturers and students. Students also learn and use the MAXQDA quality data analysis programme: several mobile licences have been purchased and are used during studies (SAR, p.135). As students in the study programme learn a wide range of high-quality research methods, including, for example, visual methods, they also have access to RSU shared resources that can be used for acquiring data. Such resources include photo and video cameras owned by the FSS, which students can borrow for several days for photo and video fixation of data. The purchase of a drone as a shared resource is also currently under discussion, thus expanding the range of methods and skills to learn. To ensure a research-based study process, individual students are also involved in research projects carried out by lecturers of the programme as scientific assistants and are also employed and get remuneration for a certain load (SAR, p.135). In conclusion, material provision of the AMASP Social Anthropology creates prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicates the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. The SAR provides detailed analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP Social Anthropology in the Latvian flow (the tuition fee of EUR 2500 starting from academic year 2024/2025) and in the English flow (the tuition fee of EUR 2900 starting from academic year 2024/2025) (SAR, pp. 136- 137). As a result of the structural consolidation process of RSU, an improvement in efficiency in the context of cost items is expected, which ensures a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

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

The programme's infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU contribute positively to the learning environment and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP Social Anthropology shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Strengths:

1. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the AMASP Social Anthropology.

2. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the social anthropology study process.
3. Analysis of the costs of the study process and the flows of available financial resources of the full-time AMASP Social Anthropology shows a balance of revenue and expenditure over the long term.

Weaknesses:

None

Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Excellent study and research facilities, including the study base created specifically for the social anthropology study process; long term financial sustainability of the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. Annex 24.7. (Analysis of the composition of the teaching staff) shows that teaching staff included in the AMASP Social Anthropology implementation possesses more than sufficient qualifications. Out of 25 lecturers involved in the implementation of the study programme, 18 lecturers have a doctoral degree, and 9 lecturers have a doctoral degree out of 10 representatives of the elected academic staff (2 are professors and 4 are associate professors). Hence, section 55 (1) (3) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions has been upheld. Part A courses of the study programme are taught mainly by lecturers, for whom RSU is their main job to ensure continuity and intellectual tradition. At the same time, it should also be emphasised that lecturers of Part B courses, who are mostly invited or visiting lecturers, have been cooperating with the programme for a long time (p. 138, SAR).

Since the majority of lecturers involved in the implementation of the study programme have either obtained higher education degrees from foreign universities where the study process is conducted in English, or have studied in exchange programmes outside Latvia, all have mastered the English language to be capable of holding classes in English. Lecturers of the programme are also active researchers and the SAR (p. 139) lists examples of six nationally and internationally financed research projects which demonstrate that academic staff is highly-skilled in attracting and implementing them (NRP, FARP and Horizon 2020).

2.4.2. Annex 24.7. shows that the implementation of the mandatory and limited optional part of the AMASP Social Anthropology is ensured by 25 lecturers, 10 of whom are elected to academic positions at RSU. Although there was some turnover in the composition of lecturers over the observed period, this has not affected the programme negatively. Namely, quality replacements have been found in time. Over the observed period the ratio of the number of students and the teaching staff within the programme has improved a bit to 0.96:1. The main reason for this is an increase in the number of lecturers involved in the study programme. For example, in 2017, one researcher was also awarded a doctoral degree at the University of Pittsburgh in the United States that same year, joined the study programme as an adjunct lecturer and became the director of the programme in 2020 (until February 2024). Diāna Kiščenko started her doctoral studies and from an adjunct lecturer became a lecturer. In parallel, the existing personnel engaged in continuous

upskilling (p. 139 – 140). In the reporting period, the first director of the study programme Klāvs Sedlenieks obtained a doctoral degree (at Tallinn University).

Former graduates are involved in the study programme as invited lecturers and simultaneously pursue or have completed PhD degrees at various prestigious universities. To name a few: Agnese Bankovska obtained a doctoral degree from the University of Helsinki and Andris Saulītis from the European University Institute while Anna Žabicka is a doctoral candidate at the University of Vienna. Besides, numerous graduates obtained fellowships or grants by respectable international donors (p. 140, SAR). One of the strong points about the programme is its success in cooperating with international scholars as invited lecturers, especially in regard to regional ethnography courses. The SAR gives an example of a cooperation initiated with Michael Strmiska in academic year 2019/2020, associate professor of SUNY-Orange (USA), who arrived in Latvia with the support of the Fulbright scholarship and taught the course “Anthropology of Religion”. The cooperation has continued up to this date (p. 140, SAR).

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. The staff list (Annex 6.1- Basic information on the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study direction (in Excel format)) indicates 25 staff members in AMASP Social Anthropology out of whom 19 appear to teach anthropology-specific modules. The collective outputs of staff members number 73 articles in web of science and scopus journals, which is impressive and well above the requirements. Given that these include non-field specialists, the output of anthropology specialists number 13 in such journals. This is understandable given the lone authorship tradition in the field, which puts the onus higher than in other disciplines. Another 7 publications correspond to the anthropology specialists, meaning that the collective effort is in fact commensurate with the standard sought. It is noticeable that a number of teaching staff do not yet have publications: however, this is understandable given that many of the staff are in fact ECRs. In this respect, it is also notable that multiple meetings with administration, directors, and staff have mentioned opportunities for research engagement through conference presentations that would help progress publications for such ECR colleagues. Further incentives were also noted, with a concern however, about whether penalties could also be imposed for failure to publish at the required standard within specific time limits, which may in fact disincentive staff. Given the above, it is fair to say that the department collectively fulfils this criterion.

2.4.5. Lecturers involved in the AMASP Social Anthropology cooperate together in multiple ways. They cooperate first and foremost in the implementation of study courses, especially in preparing and modernising courses such as: „Research Methods and Anthropology“, „Principles of Ethnographic Work Practice“ and „Principles of Developing Master's Thesis“. Furthermore, they take care of hosting guest lecturers. During the reporting period, cooperation took place in meetings of employees of the Faculty of Communication, while from February 2024 – in meetings of employees of the FSS. After conducting interviews with teaching staff members the ET came to a conclusion that the programme distinguishes itself by cultivating the spirit of collegiality and mutual help.

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

Teaching staff participating in the implementation of AMASP Social Anthropology have abundant qualifications necessary for ensuring good learning outcomes. There are plenty of arguments in favour of this statement, primarily, international academic background of the majority staff members, good publications in internationally-recognized journals and participation in multiple research projects, both nationally and internationally-financed.

Strengths:

1. Qualified teaching staff with a plenty of international academic experience
2. Good student-to-lecturer ratio, which ensures a lot of individual work and necessary feedback
3. Stable core of lecturers with many invited lectures in the regional ethnography domain
4. Participation in the implementation of many research projects
5. Good collaboration among the teaching staff

Weaknesses:

None

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 AMASP Social Anthropology has highly qualified, research-active staff at all career levels, great staff-student ratio, and good collaboration between staff. Although collectively the staff is well positioned o publication criteria, there is a range in the performance, which is nevertheless understandable given the publication practices within the discipline, range of career levels, and task distribution.

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 AMASP Social Anthropology complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 240 of 13 May 2014 "Regulations on the State Standard for Academic Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266187>) confirmed by annex Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard (Annex 17.1_Anx_compliance_nat_educ_stand_eng.pdf).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Provided course descriptions "20.1_Anx_course_descriptions_Soc_Antropo.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Provided annex "24.1_Anx_Diploma_Diploma_Supplement_SocAntro.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The annex, "24.7.1_pielik_Apliecinājums par akadēmiskā maģistra (otrā cikla) studiju programmas "Sociālā antropoloģija" akadēmiskā personāla atbilstību Augstskolu likuma prasībām.edoc," confirms that the AMASP Social Anthropology complies with Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, which stipulates that "Not less than five professors and associate professors altogether who are elected in the relevant higher education institution shall take part in the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited elective part of academic study programmes."

An analysis of the programmes academic staff composition (see Annex 06.1_Anx_Academic_staff_list_Soc_Pol_Ant_ENG_new.xlsx) reveals that 25 lecturers, including 10 elected academic staff members, are involved in delivering the programs compulsory and elective components. Of the 10 elected academic staff, two hold professorial positions and four hold associate professor positions.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.4_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām.edoc" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of this AMASP Social Anthropology complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties

and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex "24.5_pielik_Apliecinājums par studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija un antropoloģija" studiju programmām_valodu prasmes.edoc" states that the English language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the AMASP Social Anthropology corresponds to at least B2 level of the Common European Framework.

- 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

Provided annex " 24.8_Studiju līgums_par studijām fizisko un juridisko personu finansētajās vietās_2023.pdf" containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 "Rules to be included in the study agreement".

- 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

The provided annex "24.2_pielik_Apliecinājums_par_stud_turp.edoc" Agreement between the University of Latvia and RSU (25.03.2024) confirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education at the University of Latvia in the Academic master's study programme "Cultural and Social Anthropology" (LRI code 45314), offered in both Latvian and English, if the implementation of this AMASP Social Anthropology is terminated.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Provided annex " 24.3_pielik_Apliecinājums par studējošo zaudējumu kompensāciju.edoc" states that the RSU based on Section 55(8) of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and Cabinet of Ministers No 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations on Licensing of study programmes", Paragraph 13.4, confirms that the university guarantees compensation of losses to the students of study programmes in the study field "Sociology, Politics and Anthropology", which is pending accreditation, if the AMASP Social Anthropology fails to be accredited (due to action or inaction) of RSU, or if the AMASP Social Anthropology licence is withdrawn and the student does not wish to continue their studies in another study programme

- 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: Fully compliant

The AMASP Social Anthropology fully complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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

The AMASP Social Anthropology demonstrates a strong alignment with the necessary requirements for a high-quality educational experience.

The AMASP Social Anthropology benefits from highly qualified teaching staff who possess the necessary qualifications to ensure excellent learning outcomes. The majority of the faculty members have international academic backgrounds, notable publications in internationally recognized journals, and active participation in various national and international research projects. This wealth of expertise contributes significantly to the educational quality of the programme.

The infrastructure of the AMASP Social Anthropology, along with effective synergies among the structural units of RSU, fosters a positive learning environment. The analysis of the financial aspects of the programme reveals a balanced revenue and expenditure over the long term, indicating sustainability and the ability to maintain a high-quality study process.

The content of the AMASP Social Anthropology is topical and well-structured. The interconnectedness of study modules ensures that students achieve the learning outcomes aligned with the programmes objectives. The inclusion of both compulsory and elective modules allows for a comprehensive understanding of core anthropological concepts, while also facilitating specialization in thematic and ethnographic topics. However, there is room for improvement in refreshing the content of certain courses, particularly those focused on classic theories.

The AMASP Social Anthropology emphasizes student-centered learning, as reflected in its offerings, including distance-learning options. Students and alumni express enthusiasm for the programme, highlighting its effectiveness in engaging learners. The ample opportunities to practice ethnographic methods through dissertation research and expeditions further enrich the educational experience. Nonetheless, there is a need to enhance the delivery of interactive components such as field site visits and ethnographic expeditions, especially within the distance-learning framework.

The AMASP Social Anthropology is well-aligned with the broader fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. It effectively prepares specialists with in-depth knowledge and skills applicable to various professional sectors in Latvia and internationally. The programmes goals and outcomes are consistent with the expectations of the academic field.

Despite these strengths, the current management of the programme appears to be inadequate in addressing issues related to content and ongoing programme development. This lack of sufficient expertise in programme management could hinder future improvements and the overall effectiveness of the study programme.

Strengths:

1. The AMASP Social Anthropology is comprehensive, covering a broad range of anthropological concepts and skills.
2. The AMASP Social Anthropology is aligned with the broader study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology".

3. Graduates have found employment in various sectors.
4. The AMASP Social Anthropology has a clear and well-articulated set of goals and outcomes, which align closely with the broader expectations of the field.
5. Implementation methods that include interactive learning and fieldwork preparation foster enthusiasm in students for the course, desire for further study.
6. The AMASP Social Anthropology provides students with a competitive edge in the labour market in important sectors such as international organisations, industry, and civil society.
7. Ethnographic focus offers a range of global regions.
8. Excellent infrastructure and synergies among structural units of the RSU provide excellent study and research facilities and create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the AMASP Social Anthropology.
9. Specific resources necessary for social science studies are provided by the study base created specifically for the social anthropology study process.
10. Qualified teaching staff with a plenty of international academic experience
11. Good student-to-lecturer ratio, which ensures a lot of individual work and necessary feedback

Weaknesses:

1. The management of the AMASP Social Anthropology in its current form under a programme director tasked with overseeing all study programme in the study field does not seem to provide adequate support to the development and improvement of the programme. Firstly, a role shared among all programmes does not guarantee the disciplinary expertise that would allow the director to effectively manage the programme content and ensure continuous improvement. Secondly, the workload implications for such an administration-heavy all-encompassing role does not ensure in-depth engagement with the running of each programme independently.
2. Some modules could be spruced up, as for example bringing the focus of classic theories further into the 20th century.
3. The balance between student-centred approaches that translate into online offer options and the interactive parts of the programme which require physical presence for ethnographic expeditions could be more clearly laid out.

Evaluation of the study programme "Social Anthropology"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Social Anthropology"

Short-term recommendations

Review the new role of the programme director and ensure that appropriate disciplinary expertise is attached to the role to allow effective management and direction towards ongoing development and enhancement of content as well as more administrative aspects.

Review and refresh content, especially relating to more classical approaches, with a view to integrating into contemporary discussions and approaches.

Review the online offer to ensure ways of enabling participation in the interactive parts of the programme which require physical presence.

Reduce the percentage of the teaching staff without publications in the next evaluation period.

Considering the new regulations in the State Education Standard no 240, specifically point 12, the degree should be corrected.

Long-term recommendations

Enhance trust between the administration and teaching staff by fostering regular and transparent communication regarding the strategic vision and development aspects of the institution. Creating consistent opportunities for dialogue, such as regular meetings and collaborative planning sessions, will help build mutual understanding and alignment, ensuring that all staff members are informed, engaged, and supportive of the institution's goals.

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	RSU is largely compliant with the requirements of Section 5, Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, taking into account its quality management guidelines, University Strategy and Development Plan for the Study Direction Development Plan for "Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology". To ensure full compliance on all fronts in this regard assessment and evaluation indicators can be better specified; student response rates can be improved and used to improve the complaints and proposals management procedures; more data can be collected on student experience; and disaggregated gender statistics provided. Additionally, the centralisation of the programme director role raises concerns over compliance.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Fully compliant	RSU demonstrates compliance among all criteria of scientific research. The above listed strengths far outweigh weaknesses and they do not affect the requirements.
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Fully compliant	Cooperation with local and international organisations on all levels is fully compliant with the requirements. Minor weaknesses have been identified, but they do not affect the evaluation of the requirement.
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	The requirement is assessed as partially compliant because, although RSU has made progress in addressing many recommendations from the 2012 evaluation and study programme licensing procedure, key long-term goals such as targeted marketing, internationalisation, and research integration remain only partially fulfilled. Structural changes, including programme closures and leadership shifts, have further disrupted the continuity of these efforts. While RSU has demonstrated commitment, the ongoing gaps and incomplete implementation of recommendations justify the partially compliant assessment.

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

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
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No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	International Relations - European Studies (43312)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Good
2	International Relations and Diplomacy (45312)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Good
3	International System Transformation Studies (45312)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Good
4	Social Anthropology (45314)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

There are no dissenting opinion on behalf of experts.