

APPLICATION

Study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" for assessment

Study field	<i>Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation</i>
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Self-evaluation report

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

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

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1. Information on the Higher Education Institution/College

1.1. Basic information on the higher education institution/ college and its strategic development fields,.

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter - ViA) was established in 1996, and acquired a status of the State higher education institution in 2001. In 2002, ViA was accredited for an unspecified period. ViA offers high-quality study programmes and provides the balance between theory and practice. Study programmes are constantly updated and adapted to the current needs of society and changes in the labour market. The quality of education is ensured by experienced and professional teaching staff, advanced forms of study, and integrated research and academic work.

ViA offers college programmes, undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes, in total - **17** programmes. ViA study programmes are implemented in **five** study fields which are combined in two faculties – the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Society and Sciences. Information on the list of study fields and programs is provided in [Annex 1](#) of the self-evaluation report.

During the reporting period (2017 - 2021, annual statistical data as of October 1), the average number of students enrolled in ViA per year is 269 students, the average total number of students per year is 716, with an average drop-out rate of up to 183 students who have not completed the study program or passed the theoretical course (the state final thesis has not been submitted and defended within the deadlines set by the ViA). In addition to the total drop-out rate, the fact must be taken into account that some students resume their studies after exmatriculation in the later stages of studies (average 30 students per year) or for the development and defense of a national final thesis (average 30 students per year). The average number of graduates per year in the reporting period - 156 graduates. During the reporting period, the number of students tends to decrease to an average of 3% per year, citing the demographic situation in Latvia as a whole, as well as taking into account the development of priority study and research areas defined in the ViA strategy, consolidating several study programs. In addition, the consequences caused by the Covid-19 pandemic must also be taken into account, especially for the tourism service industry. The detailed number of students can be reviewed in the annex to the report ([see Annex 2](#)).

Research work at ViA is carried out at two scientific institutes – the Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research (hereinafter - HESPI), established in 2015, and the Institute of Socio-Technical Systems Engineering (hereinafter - SSII), which was established in July 2006.

The vision of ViA – “ViA is an internationally recognized regional platform for higher education, science, knowledge transfer and idea leadership, offering versatile opportunities of the digital age ecosystem for acquiring professional higher education and interdisciplinary research, responding proactively to societal challenges.” The mission of ViA is to promote sustainable development of the knowledge society at the regional and national level, providing private and public sectors with high-level professionals, as well as conducting research to solve problems of public interest.

The aim of ViA is to build the future society in Vidzeme, Latvia and Europe by participating in regional, national and international knowledge ecosystem networks, with education, research and innovation as the main areas of activity.

The previous ViA strategy 2016-2020 was developed and approved in 2015 during the leadership of Rector G.Krūmiņš. Work on the new strategy for 2021-2024 was started already in 2019. However, with the start of the reform of the higher education (hereinafter - HE) system, which focused on changing the governance model of HE, the development of the strategy was in line with the

information available from education policy makers, delaying the strategy development process. The new ViA strategy is currently in the process of being developed, led by the five-member ViA Council. In the summer of 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted regulations on strategic specialization of universities. According to this, the areas of strategic specialization of ViA are: 1) engineering and technology (thematic area of education - computer science); 2) social sciences (thematic areas of education - information and communication sciences, business and administration, **personal services**). The strategic specializations of the universities have been defined, allowing ViA to continue the work of completing the new strategy. Throughout this period (from 2020), ViA has been working both according to the previous strategy, which is still relevant despite the time of its development, and, given the active involvement in international partnerships and projects in recent years, also according to the strategic specializations.

Since 2020, ViA has been cooperating closely with Valmiera Municipality and Valmiera Development Agency, and participated in Valmiera's strategic development planning for 2030, taking into account ViA's study and research offer and development opportunities, with the main emphasis on circular economy, wooden building construction, sustainable development, IT areas. These areas are included in the Valmiera Industrial Territories Development Plan, and it is planned to create 1770 new jobs in the planned period. In the context of city, county and regional development, ViA has defined tasks: preparation of a highly qualified workforce, provision of lifelong learning and retraining of the workforce, provision of research and promotion of innovations - development of new companies.

Refer to the annex for a list of ViA study programmes (see Annex 1).

Refer to the annex for student number dynamics during the assessment period (see Annex 2).

ViA strategy both *in Latvian* and *English* is available on the ViA website.

1.2. Description of the management structure of the higher education institution/ college, the main institutions involved in the decision-making process, their composition (percentage depending on the position, for instance, the academic staff, administrative staff members, students), and the powers of these institutions.

ViA is a derived public person. ViA was founded by the State, and its legal operation is regulated by the ViA Constitution. ViA is managed in accordance with the democratic management style and the principle of collegiality. Faculty deans and heads of other academic and administrative structures, as well as representatives of the student board are involved in the decision-making process, planning and implementation of ViA operational and strategic management. Operational management issues are addressed at weekly management meetings. ViA operational management is organized by the administrative vice-rector. The meetings are open, and information of the meetings is sent electronically to ViA staff. In order to assess the current processes and to successfully organize the study work, once a month ViA holds workshops of the study field and study programme directors, as well as meetings to deal with development, academic and scientific issues.

Taking into account the changes in the management of higher education institutions, ViA has not yet developed and approved the new management structure, the approval of which, according to the new procedure, is under the control of the Council of ViA. At the time of submitting the self-assessment report, the ViA Council has the rector's election process on its agenda, planning that the management structure will be approved after the election of a new rector. The annex to the report provides an overview of the current ViA governance structure.

Although there are planned changes in the structure of ViA, the main decision-making bodies of the management and representation of the ViA are:

Constitutional Assembly – the highest management institution of ViA, which approves the Constitution of ViA and its amendments, elects the Rector, as well as may initiate the removal of the Rector from his position; hears and approves the annual reports on ViA performance prepared by the Chairman of the ViA Council, the Rector, the Chairman of the Senate and the Audit Commission; elects the members of the Senate from among the academic and general staff and approves the regulations of the Senate, as well as may recall the members of the Senate; forms and elects the Audit Commission; elects the Academic Arbitration Court and approves its regulations, as well as reviews and decides on other strategic issues related to the activities of ViA and does not fall within the competence of other administrative institutions. The Constitutional Assembly is elected for three years. The Constitutional Assembly consists of 40 persons, of whom 24 representatives are elected from the academic staff, 8 representatives are elected from the general staff, and 8 representatives are elected from among the students.

ViA Council - a collegial highest decision-making body of ViA (consisting of 5 members of the Council), which is responsible for the sustainable development, strategic and financial supervision of ViA, as well as ensures the operation of ViA in accordance with the objectives set in its development strategy. The operation of the ViA Council is determined by the ViA Constitution, the regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia and the corresponding regulations of the ViA Council. The ViA Council protects the autonomy of ViA, as well as respects the academic freedom of academic staff and students and promotes its implementation.

Senate – collegial ViA's highest academic decision-making body, which is responsible for the excellence, development and compliance with internationally recognized quality standards of higher education, research and creative activities. The Senate regulates ViA's academic, creative and scientific activities. The Senate is elected for three years; its election and operation are determined in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions, as well as the regulations of the Senate, which are approved by the Constitutional Assembly. The Senate consists of 15 senators: 11 representatives of the academic staff (73%), three representatives of the students (20%) and administrative staff (rector) - (7%).

Rector - the highest official of the higher education institution (HEI) who implements the general administrative management of the HEI and represents the HEI without special authorization. When establishing a structural unit for the performance of organizational, economic and service work, the Rector shall approve its regulations and determine the procedures for its establishment, financing and supervision, as well as the basic rules of operation. When taking decisions on the reorganization or liquidation of a structural unit, the Rector shall determine the procedure for the implementation of the said decisions. In accordance with the goals set in the ViA Development Strategy, the Rector appoints and removes Vice-Rectors, as well as determines their areas of competence, powers and responsibilities in accordance with the procedure for nomination, appointment and removal of ViA Vice-Rectors approved by the ViA Council and Senate. In accordance with the goals set in the ViA development strategy, the Faculty Council nominates and the Rector appoints and dismisses the Deans, as well as determines their areas of competence, powers and responsibilities. The Rector supervises the scientific activity of ViA.

Vice-rectors (in the academic, scientific and administrative fields) - ViA administrative staff whose basic functions are administrative work. Vice-rectors, without special authorization, represent ViA in cooperation with state and local government institutions and other cooperation partners within the scope of competence defined in their work duties. Vice-rectors work to ensure the implementation of ViA's goals, the fulfillment of the mission, development and efficient, legal and competitive operation. Vice-rectors are appointed by the rector for no longer than their term of office.

Academic Arbitration Court – is a permanent ViA institution that reviews applications of students and academic staff regarding restrictions or violations of academic freedom and rights specified in the Constitution of the ViA, disputes between ViA officials, as well as administrative units of structural units in subordinate relations, as well as in cases specified in the Law on Higher Education contesting an act or actual action and taking relevant decisions regarding them, as well as performing other tasks provided for in the Constitution of the ViA. The Arbitration Court consists of 3 (three) members, of whom 2 (two) are elected by secret ballot by the Constitutional Assembly for two years from among the academic staff elected to academic positions (67%), and 1 (one) is elected by the student self-government from among full-time students (33%).

Audit Commission - a representative institution of ViA, which performs internal audit tasks and operates in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia, the Constitution of the ViA and other internal laws and regulations of the University. The purpose of the Audit Commission is to check the compliance of the activities of ViA with the regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia, the Constitution of ViA and other internal regulations of the university, as well as the decisions of the Constitutional Assembly, ViA Council and Senate. The Audit Commission consisting of 3 (three) persons is elected by the Constitutional Assembly for three years. The members of the Audit Commission may be removed by the Constitutional Assembly. Representatives of the elected academic staff and students may be elected to the Audit Commission.

Assemblies of the Faculties are collegiate decision-making institutions for academic, scientific and research activities of the faculties. The Assembly of the Faculty of Society and Sciences consists of 13 (thirteen) members: 10 (ten) representatives of the academic staff (77%), 3 (three) representatives of students (23%). The Assembly of the Faculty of Engineering consists of 8 (eight) members: 6 (six) representatives of the academic or research staff (75%), 2 (two) representatives of the students (25%).

Refer to the annex for ViA structure (see Annex 3).

Refer to the annex for the list of the main ViA internal normative documents and regulations (see Annex 4).

1.3. Description of the mechanism for the implementation of the quality policy and the procedures for the assurance of the quality of higher education. Description of the stakeholders involved in the development and improvement of the quality assurance system and their role in these processes.

[ViA Study Quality Assurance Policy](#) is part of ViA quality management system promoting ViA internal quality culture and its continuous improvement. It has been developed, reviewed and implemented in accordance with the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(2015\)](#), the *Law on Higher Education Institutions* of the Republic of Latvia and other regulatory enactments, while taking into account the views and needs of ViA's internal and external stakeholders. The policy supports the development of a quality culture in which all internal stakeholders take responsibility for the quality and engage in the quality assurance at all levels.

The following is an overview of the different aspects of the quality assurance system.

Quality assurance policy and measures

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences has developed and approved the Development Strategy for 2016-2020 which envisages striving for excellence and competitiveness in education, striving for

excellence and competitiveness in science and research, as well as striving for knowledge transfer and investment in regional development. Starting from 2022, the ViA Council decides on strategy development and financial issues (in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institution). Strategic control over the development of ViA is carried out by the Senate of ViA, while administrative and accounting control is implemented by the Faculty of Society and Sciences. The Faculty regularly (once a month) evaluates its activities and decides on topical issues at the meetings of the Faculty Council. The qualifications and competences of the academic staff are evaluated based on their professional, academic and scientific achievements. Every year, the development of the direction is evaluated during the development and discussion of the self-evaluation report both within the study direction, at the faculty level, and also in the ViA Senate. Since 2018, employers and graduates have also been involved in quality management and consulting.

Important issues are decided at the monthly meetings of the assembly of the faculty. ViA has a **Scientific Council** which task is to promote coordinated and purposeful ViA academic and research activities in accordance with the ViA strategy. The Scientific Council advises and, if necessary, prepares proposals for the Senate and the Rector on strategical issues of the academic and scientific research activities important for the higher education institution, including launching new research directions in ViA. The qualifications and competencies of the academic staff are assessed on the basis of their professional, academic and scientific achievements. Every year, the development of the study field is assessed as the self-assessment report is prepared and discussed within the study field, at the faculty level, and also in the ViA Senate.

ViA has approved a number of documents that regulate the relationships between teaching and research, the institution's quality and requirement strategy, and the organization of the quality assurance system. There is a regulation in place laying down responsibilities of faculties, fields of study, other structural units and persons for quality assurance, as well as specifying the participation of students in quality assurance, and the ways of implementing, monitoring and adjusting the quality policy. All regulatory documents are available to both students and academic staff on the ViA e-environment. Students are informed both in the introductory lectures and later in the study process about their rights and opportunities to participate in the development and implementation of ViA development policy. ViA student self-government which delegates candidates to the ViA Senate and Constitutional Assembly elections, organizes a meeting with ViA Rector and/or heads of the study fields as needed. ViA has developed the **Procedure for the Development, Approval and Supervision of the Study Programmes** and other documents, regulations related to ensuring the high-quality study process.

The study programmes and their components are developed to meet the goals, which, in their turn, correspond to the **ViA strategy**. Study programmes are developed using the vision of external stakeholders, they correspond to the defined learning outcomes which comply with the *Latvian and European Qualifications Framework*.

Quality assurance and assessment of the work of the academic staff

ViA has a number of measures in place to make sure and verify suitability of lecturers qualifications and competences for working with students, i.e., requirements are laid down in ViA **Regulations on Election to Academic Positions**, ViA **Regulations of Remuneration** contain breakdown of academic work, conditions for research work, likewise student surveys after each lecturer's study course in the respective semester are also taken into account. ViA Senate has approved **a job description of the teaching staff**; it lays down requirements for academic work, research, academic and scientific qualification improvement, as well as administrative work. In order to ensure improvement of skills, work quality and professional development of ViA academic staff, the lecturer is given an opportunity to supplement and expand his/her knowledge and professionalism by gaining foreign experience or engaging in internship at foreign higher education institutions/organizations, as well as by participating in relevant seminars and conferences – within Erasmus, etc. mobility programmes. Once per academic

year (in October), the lecturer must submit a report to the dean of the faculty specifying his or her achievements in scientific work, experience gained in projects, seminars and conferences attended during the previous academic year. The information submitted is used for the preparation of scientific reports and self-assessment reports of the study fields. In order to provide an opportunity for lecturers to improve and monitor the quality of their academic work, ViA implements various activities, incl. study course assessment surveys and study course observations.

The academic staff of the study field consists of elected lecturers, as well as of industry professionals who give not only individual guest lectures, but also teach complete study courses. This is one of the ways to balance the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge in the study content. The decision on the approval of both the elected lecturers (lecturers, assistant professors) and guest lecturers, based on the decision of the study field, is made by the Assembly of Faculty after getting acquainted with each applicant's qualifications and competencies. For the purpose of improving professional skills, ViA's elected lecturers participate in Erasmus+ and other professional development mobilities, attend courses offered by ViA, participate in the activities of professional organizations, etc.

Resources for academic work and research, support for students

ViA material and technical base and infrastructure enable students to acquire knowledge providing proper, suitable and available resources for each study programme. ViA library provides information resources necessary for academic and scientific activities, access to scientific articles and other electronic information databases from the ViA library portal. ViA also has e-learning environment which is an interactive student support environment containing study materials, it ensures electronic exchange of documents and communication with a lecturer, it also provides for an opportunity to submit test papers.

ViA has two buildings for the study process, science, research and administrative activities, with a total area of 7312 m² of which 2387 m² are used directly for the study and research process. The current study base consists of 38 classrooms (total area of 1445 m²), including 3 computer classrooms with 90 workstations and Internet connection (195 m²) and 12 laboratories: *Construction Laboratory; Spatial Research Laboratory; Energy Efficiency Laboratory; Data Security Laboratory (Cyber Security Laboratory); Computer Network Laboratory; Virtual Reality Laboratory; assets of the Multimedia Laboratory for study management and technology research field; assets of the Multimedia Laboratory for communication ecosystems and technology research field; Laboratory of Simulation Modelling and RFID Technologies; Mobile Technology Laboratory; Mechatronics Laboratory; Electrical Engineering Laboratory* (total area 324 m²). All computers are connected in a common network providing a unified information circulation; access to the Internet and usage of databases are also ensured. Subscribed full-text databases are accessible by logging in from anywhere where the Internet is available. A conference hall (257 m²) is also used for the study process; the study buildings have rooms for group work and rooms where students can work independently (350 m²). Booking and reservation system intended for booking premises, lecture-rooms and hostel rooms provides for a possibility to follow the lecture schedule.

ViA provides career development support services to students and applicants, enabling them to make decisions on the future education or employment, to find the most appropriate study field, to choose the most appropriate ways for developing their competencies through personal and ViA's resources, to prepare for successful professional activities, to develop their personality by achieving professional goals, to plan further education, to start their own business, as well as provides support regarding other career issues. The main career development activities at ViA are career counselling for students individually or in small groups (including counselling on writing CV, job hunting, getting ready for job interviews, etc.), as well as counselling for applicants helping choose the most suitable study field for starting studies at ViA. The mentor movement is also being developed, involving ViA graduates. ViA closely cooperates with companies of the industry, regularly informing students on current job vacancies and internship offers, and helps students get ready for starting the job and internship. Career development support is also fully integrated into study courses, raising awareness of employment in the

industry through collaboration with industry experts and specialists.

Information management

ViA key performance indicators are assessed and analyzed on an annual basis and reflected in self-assessment reports, annual management reports and other types of reports, while information on the student academic progress, achievements and drop-out rates, student satisfaction with the study programmes and graduate career is collected centrally, using both qualitative and quantitative methods – analysis of statistical and financial indicators, document analysis, as well as surveys of applicants, students and graduates.

ViA ensures efficient collection of information necessary for the management of study programmes and other processes through ViA website and social networks, as well as through ViA study administration information system *LAIS* (which provides for a possibility to collect data on all aspects of studies and successfully use them in the study process, besides students can keep track of their study assessment progress in their profiles), Record Keeping System, E-learning environment *Moodle*, ViA alumni database, Library system *ALISE*, Accounting system *Horizon*, and Study and student loan accounting system.

Information to the public

ViA regularly publishes up-to-date, neutral and impartial information of its activities on the website, including information on the college, Bachelor's, Master's, and higher level study programmes, degrees/qualifications and selection criteria for admission; expected learning outcomes of the programmes, qualifications to be awarded, teaching, learning and result assessment procedures, the minimum satisfactory grades or requirements, learning opportunities available to students and extracurricular activities, as well as information on career possibilities after graduation and graduate employment.

Each year ViA prepares, approves and publishes self-assessment reports of the study fields, as well as admission rules for the current academic year. ViA lecturers and employees are actively involved in the development of public opinion in the region and Latvia by participating in conferences, seminars, public lectures, NGO activities, by publishing scientific publications; the most up-to-date information of the above is posted on the ViA social media accounts and website, thus promoting higher education and study programmes.

ViA regularly posts up-to-date, neutral and impartial information on its activities, programmes and degrees/qualifications on social media – *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *draugiem.lv*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, as well as in printed leaflets and other handouts. Besides, up-to-date information that is relevant to current and future students, graduates, and other stakeholders and the public is posted on social media in Latvian and English. Information that is relevant to a specific person or groups of people, such as lecturers, ViA's administration staff, or students of a particular study programme, is emailed.

A contact with ViA graduates is maintained by help of the *Facebook* group "ViA Alumni", where ViA posts up-to-date information that is relevant to graduates, such as employment possibilities at ViA, gatherings, possible participation in events.

Media of the industry and other means of media at the regional and national level are also informed of ViA's activities and current events, inviting them to distribute information to the general public through print, electronic media or other versions and/or on their social media accounts. Besides, within the limits of competence, media representatives are provided with relevant information on current events, developments and news related to ViA, its staff, or students. Media monitoring is carried out on a daily basis, collecting information of ViA and current events related to it which is published in the media. Upon assessing the relevance and appropriateness of the information, it is re-posted on the institution's social media accounts.

Lecturers, students and graduates are interviewed in order to promote study fields, those interviews (print interviews and video interviews) are published on ViA website, as well as posted on social media

Facebook, Twitter, draugiem.lv, Instagram and YouTube. Besides, to promote study fields, ViA's website and social media accounts feature information on students' individual work, achievements in science, conferences, competitions, as well as on the study process and possibilities to improve their knowledge in ViA laboratories, during internship at companies, through courses, classes, creative workshops offered by ViA, etc. In order to ensure ViA publicity outside Latvia, information on ViA study programmes and possibilities for joint projects is presented to foreign cooperation partners within the framework of the mobility programmes.

Lecturers of the study field regularly participate in local and international conferences, seminars, public discussions as opinion leaders, act as experts in European Union projects on an international scale, regularly acquire new knowledge as participants in experience exchange missions, thus promoting the name of ViA and the field and helping establish new cooperation links.

Cooperation with students and graduates

Every year ViA conducts student opinion surveys on compliance of the study programmes implemented at the higher education institution with the students' expectations, on the quality of the study programmes, informative, material and technical provision, the quality of the academic staff, the quality of international cooperation, as well as on other issues. Results of surveys are analyzed and assessed, and decisions on various changes and improvements are made on the basis of these results. Responses are used for planning development and ViA performance improvement.

At the level of the study field, at the end of each semester, the study field director summarizes the results of the survey, reviews them, analyzes responses given by the students and summarizes suggestions for improvement which are discussed with the teaching staff. Within the framework of the discussions, the necessary improvements in the course content, teaching methods, mutual cooperation between lecturers within the semester and the year are also reviewed.

ViA has active student self-government – Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences Student Association. There is also a broader cooperation with the student ECO Council, which involves students in practical projects integrated into the early courses of the training programme, such as competitions and development of ideas for landscaping the campus.

ViA also conducts a graduate survey on an annual basis. The main purpose is to document satisfaction of the graduates with their education immediately after graduation, as well as to collect data on graduate employment. A survey is conducted a year after graduation. The results of surveys show successful integration of the graduates of the Bachelor's and Master's programmes into the labour market, they work in the private, public and municipal sector of the industry in accordance with the qualification acquired.

Refer to the annex for the Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (see Annex 5).

ViA Study Quality Assurance Policy is also available on ViA website: <https://va.lv/en/about-us/documents>

1.4. Fill in the table on the compliance of the internal quality assurance system of the higher education institution/ college with the provisions of Section 5, Paragraph 2(1) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions by providing a justification for the given statement. In addition, it is also possible to refer to the respective chapter of the Self-Assessment Report, where the provided information serves as justification.

1.	The higher education institution/ college has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education.	see Point 1.3. of Part I
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2.	A mechanism for the creation 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.	see Point 1.3. of Part I
3.	The criteria, conditions, and procedures for the evaluation of students' results, which enable reassurance of the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, have been developed and made public.	see Point 2.1.5. of Part II
4.	Internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the work quality have been developed.	see Point 1.3. of Part I
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.	see Point 1.3. of Part I
6.	The higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing their quality assurance systems.	see 1.3. (part I)

2.1. Management of the Study Field

2.1.1. Aims of the study field and their compliance with the scope of activities of the higher education institution/ college, the strategic development fields, as well as the development needs of the society and the national economy. The assessment of the interrelation of the study field and the study programmes included in it.

There are two study programmes in the study field “*Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Leisure Organization*” (hereinafter - VRSTAO). During the previous accreditation period, significant changes and growth have taken place in the study field – the consolidation of the study programmes and the development and licensing of the new Master’s study programme which is aimed at an international and local student audience. Taking into account the priority directions of studies and research specified in the strategy of ViA, the decision was made to consolidate the study programmes by closing those that do not make the expected contribution at the regional and national level, as well as to combine the existing ones and to develop new study programmes that cover strategically important areas for the State. Closing the non-competitive programmes is a purposeful step enabling the higher education institution to develop successfully and to continue in the direction it has started. The newly developed programmes are a sequential next step in order to continue development at all levels, providing students with the opportunity to study in the Master’s programmes in the study fields that are currently competitive and in demand on the labour market. Within the project SAM 8.2.1, the study programmes *Tourist Guide – Travel and Event Organizer* (43812), *International Tourism Event Management* (45812) were closed on 30 June 2021, while the study programme *Tourism Strategic Management* (47812) was closed on 30 June 2022. Instead of these programmes, within the framework of the project SAM 8.2.1, a new Master’s study programme was developed and licensed in cooperation with a partner from Finland on the resource sharing basis.

The VRSTAO study field is one of the cornerstones of ViA, which was the basis for establishing ViA in 1996. The study field has changed in the course of time and has been operating in close connection with the tourism industry and municipalities of Vidzeme region, cooperation has been established with professional education institutions, secondary education institutions and other higher education institutions in Latvia and abroad. Currently, the VRSTAO study field is one of the pillars of the strategic identity of ViA ensuring wider recognition of the higher education institution on the Latvian scale for potential students, as well as close integration with industry companies and institutions in the sustainable development of the region. The VRSTAO study field is one of the leaders of higher education and industry research in the country, and is also visible in the international academic and research environment due to publications, conference reports, participation in mobility and development projects in cooperation with international partners, participation in mobility and development projects abroad.

The development of the study field fits in the overall ViA strategy regarding the development of the study process, science and research, as well as in the vision of Vidzeme Region Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 and in the development of the entire Latvian tourism industry (Latvian Tourism Development Guidelines for 2014-2020) in general. The Department of Tourism and Leisure Studies represents the only set of professional higher education programmes in tourism and leisure studies within the region, which is implemented by the State higher education institution.

The strategy of ViA sets three strategic priorities: education, science, as well as knowledge transfer and leadership of ideas.

The VRSTAO study field first of all is subordinate to the priority “Education” – to ensure a modern and high-quality education offer based on research results meeting the demand and forecasts of the labour market, as well as complying with good international practice. The implementation of study programmes of the study field is in line with the mission of ViA: to promote sustainable development of knowledge society at the regional and national level, providing private and public sectors with high-level professionals, as well as conducting research to solve socially relevant problems. It is also important for the study field to implement the goals of the priority “Science” – to ensure a research environment that meets international criteria and research results that are used to solve specific problems (innovations), to prepare high-quality scientific publications, as well as to transfer research results to educational programmes and the national economy, because without research support it is impossible to achieve the goal of education. The goal of the priority “Knowledge transfer and leadership of ideas” is to ensure the

transfer of knowledge of ViA and its partner institutions to cooperation partners, popularization of ViA values and ideas, as well as taking up the role of the intellectual leader of Vidzeme region in promoting the growth of the country and the region – the achievement of this goal within the scope of the study field is subordinated to the meeting of the common needs of entrepreneurs, the region and the entire national economy.

The objectives of the VRSTAO study field are also aligned with the achievement of other ViA strategic goals, such as providing high-quality lifelong learning opportunities accessible to all, promoting the personal and professional development of each individual. The newly developed Bachelor and Master programmes complement each other, with the Bachelor programme focusing more on the acquisition and understanding of knowledge related to sustainable tourism, information acquisition, selection, processing, application of ICT tools in tourism, as well as various skills, such as assessing tourism and recreation resources and trends, analysing and evaluating the industry environment, planning, organising and evaluating the economic development indicators of the company, developing development plans and project preparations in accordance with the set objectives and market situation. The newly established Master's programme emphasises a deeper understanding, knowledge and skills in tourism competitiveness, marketing strategies in tourism, new product development and service innovation, sustainable tourism management, tourism entrepreneurship and global change, international economics and financial management, as well as the use of modern technologies in the tourism industry.

In accordance with ViA Development Strategy 2016-2020, three priorities have been set for the development of the VRSTAO, there is a strategic goal and directions of action specified for each priority.

Priority 1: studies

Strategic goals – to provide internationally competitive higher education in the field of tourism and leisure studies; to become a centre for training, promoting and supporting entrepreneurs in Vidzeme region, as well as export of business management study programmes and business services

Directions of activity (Priority 1):

Improvement of the existing study programmes and development of new ones;

Defining and positioning the study field niche in the higher education market;

Attracting international students to the VRSTAO study field programmes;

Development of a cooperation platform with general education and vocational education institutions of the region.

Priority 2: research

Strategic goals –

the direction as a scientific research centre in the field of sustainable development of the regional economy; the platform for the involvement of Master's and doctoral students in research.

Directions of activity (Priority 2):

Increasing research capacity by attracting lecturers with a doctor's degree and increasing the number of people with a doctor's degree;

Research activity, emphasizing prior directions for the development of the region and interests of entrepreneurs;

Developing students' research skills by cooperating with the lecturers within the framework of research projects.

Priority 3: Knowledge transfer and idea leadership

Strategic goals –

the direction as a platform for generating business ideas, starting business and testing innovative solutions.

Building a cooperation network with higher education institutions, other educational institutions, entrepreneurs and the public sector for knowledge transfer and commercialization.

Directions of activity (Priority 3):

Deepening cooperation with industry entrepreneurs and the public sector in the development of study content, assessing students' professional competencies and implementing innovative solutions in the industry;

Ensuring and developing a pre-incubation platform within the framework of projects of the Knowledge and Technology Centre, developing cooperation with Valmiera Business Incubator.

The study programme is highly competitive in Latvia, therefore the following will be emphasized in the future: programme improvements, sustainable involvement of local natural and cultural resources in tourism and leisure, promotion of smart destinations, research development, special emphasis on the priority directions of the region's development.

The Informative Report on the Medium and Long-Term Forecasts of the Labour Market of the Ministry of Economy of 2020 states that if the current workforce training structure remains the same, the demand for managers in the fields of hospitality, catering, trade and other services will increase in 2021 by ~7.6 thousand, in 2022 – by 7.9 thousand, in 2030 – by 9.2 thousand, while in 2040 – by 10 thousand. It is predicted that the most significant increase in new jobs in the medium term is expected in professional, scientific and technical services, information and communication services and construction, emphasizing that a significant increase in jobs in the long term is expected in the accommodation and catering sectors, taking into account the overall expansion of the tourism sector.

Considering the possibility of automation in terms of professions, the managers in the fields of hospitality, trade and other services are also named among the least affected, because the high level of professional education and the ability to engage in complex social interactions are required.

The current situation in the Latvian labour market shows that the demand for business specialists is stable and will remain in future. The European Commission's labour market portal EURES emphasizes that professional rather than general secondary or academic education will be more in demand – 46% of all new vacancies plan to attract employees with vocational/professional secondary education, while 14% of the total number of registered vacancies are high-qualified professions (senior experts, customer/sales consultants, project managers, senior assistants, sales specialists), which corresponds to the profile of the tourism and leisure studies direction. In the European Union, the demand for commercial services will grow the fastest by 2030 (the forecasted increase is 11.6%), thus providing for the opportunity to join the EU labour market in future. The demand for workforce with digital skills and analytical thinking will increase, therefore the content of the study field programmes is focused on this aspect.

The study "Possibilities and prerequisites for attracting human resources (including talents) to the city of Valmiera. Development of the population attraction strategy for the city of Valmiera" conducted by the Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research (HESPI) of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in 2018 indicates the need for highly qualified specialists for the growth of Valmiera as the economic centre of Vidzeme region.

Two significant events that have influenced the strategic development of the study field should also be mentioned. First of all, the Covid-19 pandemic has heavily and permanently affected the socio-economic situation on a global scale and also in Latvia. Due to pandemic-related restrictions the sectors directly affected by the crisis – aviation, restaurants, bars, public catering, international passenger transport, art,

culture and entertainment, hotels and tourist accommodation, organization of conferences and exhibitions, car rental, equipment and material asset rental, services of travel agencies and tour operators, sports facilities, clubs, fitness centres – suffered the most and experienced the most significant reduction in volumes and the negative impact. Secondly, due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the geopolitical situation has worsened, and there is high uncertainty about how the war and the associated sanctions and supply chain disruptions will affect economic development. The Ministry of Economics predicts that in 2022, economic growth will decrease by at least 3 percentage points, compared to the previous forecast, due to geopolitical factors. High uncertainty affects consumption capacity of people, investments of companies and foreign trade. At the same time, the extent of the economic impact of the conflict is highly uncertain and will depend on the duration of the war and political responses. However, it is clear that the war will significantly hamper the growth and increase pressures of inflation. An important and meaningful aspect as a result of these two events is the fact that the tourism and leisure industry as a career choice for young professionals has become unattractive due to its uncertainty, as a result of which industry organizations suffer heavily from a lack of labour force, whereof the tourism and leisure industry (only in Latvian) has repeatedly expressed publicly its opinion and concerns. In accordance with the latest World Tourism Barometer of the World Tourism Organization, international tourism experienced a strong rebound in the first five months of 2022, registering nearly 250 million international tourists, nearly half (46%) of 2019's pre-pandemic level. The World Tourism Organization's forward-looking scenarios published in May 2022 show that international arrivals will reach 55-70% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022. The results depend on changing conditions, mainly on changing travel restrictions, persistent inflation, including high energy prices, and general economic conditions, the evolution of the war in Ukraine, as well as the state of the pandemic. Recent challenges such as staff shortages, heavy airport congestion, flight delays and cancellations could also affect international tourism. Scenarios by regions show that Europe and America are recording the best tourism results in 2022, while Asia and the Pacific island countries will lag behind due to stricter travel policies. The number of international tourists in Europe could reach 65% or 80% of the level of 2019 in 2022, depending on various circumstances.

2.1.2. SWOT analysis of the study field with regard to the set aims by providing explanations on how the higher education institution/ college expects to eliminate/improve weaknesses, prevent threats, and avail themselves of the given opportunities, etc. The assessment of the plan for the development of the study field for the next six years and the procedure of the elaboration thereof. In case there is no development plan elaborated or the aims/ objectives are set for a shorter period of time, information on the elaboration of the plan for the development of the study field for the next assessment period shall be provided.

The analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the implementation of ViA VRSTAO study programmes indicates strategic opportunities for development and opportunities to adapt to the impact of external factors.

Analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of ViA VRSTAO:

Strengths

- Professional study programmes, the content of which ensures balanced academic and professional education, interdisciplinarity, the content includes current trends in the development of the national economy, region and industries.
- Synergy of academic and research work, implementation of an interdisciplinary approach, emphasizing the variety of forms of independent work, engaging in research and solving problems relevant to the industry and the region.
- The vision of ViA development based on green thinking and the principles of study course implementation.
- Professional study programmes, one of the two main driving forces in the tourism industry at the national level – a focus on becoming a niche leader (except for the number of students, where Riga's resources are bigger).
- Direct connection with the tourism industry and its growth promotion – involvement of lecturers in applied research, educational seminars and counselling, student research work and internships; close cooperation with industry companies and organizations.
- Close connection with the development of Vidzeme and Pierīga region, research is focused on the exploration of the region's needs, a lot of local examples of tourism in the daily study process (Valmiera, Gauja National Park, etc.). More than a third of graduates stay in the region and work there.
- The elected lecturers are motivated to achieve high results, they are oriented towards development, innovations, cooperation in science, academic work, as well as building cooperation with the industry.
- Interdisciplinary approach: integration of IT and social sciences, promotion of regional innovations.
- High level of student and alumni loyalty. High proportion of graduates who are already employers, high rate of graduate employment.
- Internationalization and international study environment: mobility, projects, seminars, conferences. Student internships in Latvia and abroad. Involvement of students and lecturers in academic international projects (*Nordplus*, *Erasmus*, etc.) The existing cooperation network and technological provision create favourable conditions for the development of international study programmes together with our partner higher education institutions.
- Individual approach to the study process and individual feedback, more attention to students as personalities and their growth, the opportunity to work in depth with specific and current study methods (integrated field research, problem solving, etc.).
- Modern study methods, e-learning, use of IT for the needs of social sciences. Modern library and ViA infrastructure (special emphasis in tourism – UN World Tourism Organization depository library).
- Motivated and qualified academic staff, lecturers' international experience; high flexibility and ability to respond to market requirements in the content of study programmes.
- Purposefully developed strategic cooperation network in Latvia and abroad with a commercial sector, governmental, municipal, non-governmental organizations and academic community. Representation in ATLAS, ITEM, LGB, LVRA, DAP, VTA, Gauja NP ATLAS (Association for *Tourism* and Leisure Education and Research), ITEM (International tourism master network), LCB (Latvian Convention Bureau), LVRA (Latvian Hotel and Restaurant Association), DAP (Nature Conservation Authority), VTA (Vidzeme Tourism Association), GNP (Gauja National Park), etc.
- Relatively lower study costs for everyday life of students (compared to Riga) – basically everything is within walking distance, infrastructure, amenities, positioning of Valmiera as a student city.
- Capacity, in collaboration with scientists from other higher education institutions (in Latvia and abroad), to conduct joint research, to participate in joint international projects and national research programmes.
- Capacity to expand the offer of study courses in English and other foreign languages
- Capacity to develop college study programmes in cooperation with secondary vocational education institutions (Valmiera, Smiltene, Priekule) or separately.
- The favourable internal microclimate within the study field, faculty and ViA, which is based on proper and business-like relationship in the mutual communication among lecturers, as well as in communication between lecturers and students.
- Appropriate conditions for a creative and successful study process (infrastructure, staff support).
- Research actively carried out by lecturers, including applied research commissioned by the industry.
- Close cooperation and international opportunities in the established HESPI UNESCO Department "Biosphere and Human", the European University Alliance project the E³UDRES², etc.
- The interest-related education programme "Smart Travel School" is developed and licensed for Valmiera municipality.

Weaknesses

- Relatively small number of students, lower solvency of potential students.
- Limited capacity of lecturers' time resources to combine active cooperation with the industry and high-quality administrative work, scientific research and effective student counselling.
- Motivation and ability of some lecturers' to teach courses in English or another foreign language, thus affecting international competitiveness.
- Within the framework of the ViA budget, without additional external funding, it is difficult to attract a large number of high-level guest lecturers from abroad.
- It is difficult to attract new (including young in terms of the age) lecturers in order to ensure succession and renewal.

Opportunities

- Changes in demand, or a broader view on students, including lifelong learning, individual courses for training entrepreneurs, e-environment for emigrants outside Latvia, etc.
- The threat of terrorism in the world and the tension in international relations can contribute to the growth of local and Baltic tourism.
- Attracting international students and lecturers through the network of international partner higher education institutions
- Improving the study programme content by integrating IT tools, increasing the number of courses in English, creating new professional study course modules.
- Involvement of lecturers within the project SAM 8.2.2 in internships at companies (as voluntary work without pay) to improve digital skills and English language skills.
- Participation in the project E³UDRES² of the European University Alliance.
- Training and internship at companies as an opportunity for professional development and cooperation with the industry.
- Wider involvement of graduates in the implementation of the study programme and the work of ViA's advisory institutions.
- Expanding cooperation with regional entrepreneurs within the framework of advisory councils to ensure the improvement of study content and internship organization.
- International and national cooperation within HESPI's UNESCO Department "Biosphere and Human" to conduct applied, industry-required research in the territory of the Northern Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve.

Threats

- Demographic and emigration tendencies (the number of young people of student age is decreasing).
- Negative changes in the level of knowledge and skills of secondary school students. Competences of students at the beginning of their studies affect the quality of studies – due to economic considerations, secondary school students with poor academic results are also admitted, which also affects the overall level.
- The economic situation and the low solvency of potential students, including termination of studies due to financial reasons, less State budget-funded study places in social sciences.
- Relatively low remuneration in the field of higher education, especially in lower positions, can contribute to the outflow of lecturers, as well as the overload of lecturers by engaging in additional jobs, as a result of which the quality of education is affected.
- The lack of long-term national education policy and inconsistency in the implementation of short-term policy decisions restricting the implementation of changes to the study programmes, preventing updating the content of programmes in the necessary amount and in a short period of time, limiting cooperation with international partner higher education institutions.
- Other external factors – imperfections in education policy, EU policy regarding project funding for higher education.
- Changes in the State policy regarding the tourism and hospitality industry.
- The threat of terrorism in the world and the tension in international relations may contribute to the decline of international tourism.
- Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, including potential students' interest in studies, or continuing studies (at the Master's level), which cannot be combined with full-time work.
- The currently unattractive image of the tourism industry as a potential career field, which does not motivate applicants to choose studies in a prospectless career.
- The educational offer of Latvia is generally unrecognizable internationally and insufficiently prestigious, which makes it difficult for each higher education institution individually to create international study programmes and/or attract international students.

Strategic opportunities provide for the use of strengths to simultaneously mitigate weaknesses, take advantage of opportunities, and flexibly adapt to challenges posed by external circumstances. Effective studies with a thoughtful individual approach and purposefully involved industry participation, relevance, integrating digital needs, sustainability, economic competitiveness with effective solutions.

The weaknesses related to the relatively small number of students and their ability to pay can be seen in the overall economic and social context of Latvia. From next year, the Ministry of Education and Science proposes to introduce a new funding project that will see a transition to fully-funded higher education within 7-10 years, with a partial public funding system to be introduced during the transition period. It is hoped that this project will be designed specifically to encourage more students and also to increase their ability to pay. The lack of capacity in lecturer time is partly addressed by building on the strengths of the strand - the ability to focus on research, the favourable internal microclimate and relationships and support within the strand, and the diverse opportunities for growth within the sector and the university. The SAM822 project has given lecturers the opportunity to improve their English language skills, so that lecturers in this strand have also reduced their weaknesses. The difficulty in attracting foreign lecturers has also been alleviated by the SAM822 project, which has led to contacts with a number of guest lecturers, and the Erasmus+ programme, which promotes international cooperation with lecturers from other countries. The threat of decreasing competence of secondary school students in the field of tourism is mitigated by intensive guest lectures in various secondary schools, providing an insight into the tourism profession and current issues in the field of tourism.

The study development plan also provides for mitigating the threats and weaknesses described in the SWOT analysis by creating a unified concept of lecturers' qualification, identifying individual lecturers' professional competences and their needs, by implementing the development of lecturers' qualification in the VRSTAO, by supporting lecturers' involvement in research work, by attracting various grant programmes, as well as by creating a unified model for attracting foreign students to the university, also using EU structural fund programmes for the development of university study programmes and the expansion of international cooperation.

Refer to the annex for the study field development plan, which is based on the SWOT analysis. The development plan is reviewed every year upon preparing the self-assessment report. The study field director, in cooperation with the working group for the development of the self-assessment report, analyses the implementation of the development plan.

Refer to the annex for the study field development plan (see Annex 6).

2.1.3. The structure of the management of the study field and the relevant study programmes, and the analysis and assessment of the efficiency thereof, including the assessment of the role of the head of the study field and the heads of the study programmes, their responsibilities, and the cooperation with other heads of the study programmes, as well as the assessment of the support by the administrative and technical staff of the higher education institution/ college provided within the study field.

VRSTAO operates as part of the Faculty of Social Sciences, it is administratively supervised by the Dean of the Faculty. The Assembly of the Faculty makes decisions on changes to the programmes, elects lecturers, approves guest lecturers. Student representatives from the study programmes implemented at the Faculty of Society and Sciences participate in the work of the Assembly. In addition, VRSTAO also has an advisory council for the department of tourism and leisure studies consisting of a representative of each course, a lecturer and the director of the study field. It is a consultative institution that, by giving advice to the director of the VRSTAO study field, the VRSTAO study field council, promotes the development of the VRSTAO study programmes, assesses the study outcomes and lecturers' course

evaluations.

Refer to Annex 7 for the management structure of the ViA VRSTAO study field.

Direct management of the VRSTAO study field is carried out by the study field council (hereinafter referred to as the Council). The Council is the highest collegial decision-making body of the study field and is made up of representatives of the elected academic staff of the Faculty of Society and Sciences, who work for the study field in accordance with the field of industry and professional activity.

In its activities, the Council complies with the external regulatory enactments, the ViA Constitution, the Senate decisions and other ViA internal normative documents, orders and instructions of the ViA Rector and Vice-rectors, decisions of the general meeting of the Faculty of Society and Sciences, decisions of the Assembly of the Faculty of Society and Sciences, orders of the Dean of the Faculty of Society and Sciences. The Council of the study field is chaired and meetings are convened by the director of the study field, who acts in accordance with the Council Regulations.

The Council has quorum if more than half of the total number of Council members participate in person or online. The Council adopts a decision if more than half of the meeting participants vote for it. Council meetings are open and take place at least once every two months. An extraordinary meeting of the study field may be convened at the request of the director of the study field, the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, or 1/3 of the members of the Council.

The Council examines strategic changes to the study programmes, internal quality assessments (self-assessment reports, questionnaires, etc.) and issues related to the preparation for external assessment (licensing, accreditation). Reorganization or closure of the Council can only take place in cases where all the study programmes of the study field are closed; closure can be initiated by the Assembly of the Faculty of Society and Sciences or jointly by at least 2/3 of the Council members. The decision on the reorganization or closure of the Council is made by the Assembly of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The management structure ensures efficient, democratic decision-making and student involvement. Directors of the study fields exchange information with each other on a regular basis, meet in face-to-face meetings once a month, and maintain regular communication with the Dean of the Faculty. Meetings of the Council of the VRSTAO study field are held once a month, in which elected lecturers of the study field take part in accordance with the Council Regulations. Meetings are recorded in the minutes, the director of the study field ensures the exchange of information about the decisions made in the study field with the relevant structural units. Issues related to strategic changes to the study programmes, internal quality assessment and preparation for external assessment according to the decision of the Council of the study field are directed by the director of the study field to the Assembly of the Faculty and, if necessary, to the ViA Senate. Direct supervision and operational management of the study field is carried out by the director of the study field. The director of the study field is supported by a study specialist.

Several structural units provide support for the implementation of the study programmes of the study field at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. Below is a detailed description of each structural unit and their tasks in the implementation of study programmes.

Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research

The Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research (hereinafter - HESPI) is a structural unit of ViA established by the decision of the ViA Senate of 25 September 2013. HESPI is registered with the Register of Scientific Institutes of the Republic of Latvia on 28 November 2013. The main research directions of the Institute are as follows:

- Sustainable development of the national economy
- Sustainable tourism, micro-niches in tourism,
- Development of protected nature and cultural territories,
- Cultural space and development of cultural identity sites,

- Latvian social security system,
- Social investments,
- Innovation management,
- Science communication,
- Online communication and online media,
- Regional development (interaction between rural and urban environments).

The HESPI Institute engages students in research every year, entering into employment agreements with them for the performance of visiting research assistant work. HESPI supports processes of the tourism study field by providing financial support for field trips, intensive study courses implemented within the Nordplus projects, such as Spa and wellness. Every year at graduation, HESPI presents diplomas and gifts (books or gift cards) to graduates who have been involved in research projects, besides, the best authors of scientific articles at ViA student scientific conferences are also awarded.

Socio-Technical Systems Engineering Institute

ViA Socio-Technical Systems Engineering Institute (hereinafter - SSII) was founded in July 2006. Its research directions are as follows:

- Logistics information systems and RFID technologies;
- Business process modelling;
- Hybrid simulation modelling systems;
- Use of virtual and augmented reality in training.

ViA study process support functions are ensured by the **Administrative Department**. The department has seven main functions and tasks: study administration, international cooperation administration, IT infrastructure coordination, ViA operational management, financial management and accounting, marketing and public relations, as well as document management and circulation, and provision of internal communication. A detailed description of each function is given below.

In cooperation with the SSII, students have the opportunity to use various modelling tools, try out virtual and augmented reality in tourism research and in practice.

Study administration:

- to plan, organize and administer study processes: student enrolment, planning of the academic year, planning of study places funded by the State budget, student registration, rotation, scholarships, reports to external cooperation partners;
- to ensure maintenance and development of the study information system;
- to manage and organize study record keeping and to ensure circulation, registration and archiving of study records;
- to maintain a database of graduates and conduct graduate surveys.

International cooperation administration:

- to organize ViA international activities in cooperation with the vice-rector for academic affairs, the vice-rector for scientific affairs, and faculties;
- to ensure international mobility of ViA students, international students and staff; to establish and maintain the international cooperation partner network of ViA.

IT infrastructure operation coordination - systems, servers, computer networks, computers;

- to install and configure new hardware, including servers;
- to repair and maintain computer hardware;
- to equip ViA lecture-rooms with the equipment necessary for the study process;
- to ensure independent and qualitative operation of ViA computer network and to establish new connections to the existing computer network;

- to promote professional development of ViA staff in IT issues; to ensure protection of ViA information systems against third party intrusion.

ViA operational management and maintenance of the material and technical base:

- to maintain and repair electric power system, heating system, water and sewerage systems, ventilation and air conditioning systems, fire safety, alarm and notification systems;
- to ensure purchase and production of household items, equipment and furniture for ViA needs; to ensure record keeping, assembling and maintenance of inventory and furniture;
- to ensure cleaning and improvement of ViA buildings, premises and plots of land, including preparation of study premises for lectures;
- to ensure the operation of the hostel;
- to ensure compliance with the rules of procedure, labour protection requirements and ViA internal regulatory enactments in ViA buildings.

Financial management and accounting:

- to develop ViA draft budget and submit it to the ViA Senate for approving; to control rational use of ViA financial resources;
- to analyze ViA financial indicators;
- to keep record of the use of ViA funds in accordance with the approved estimates, as well as to keep record of liabilities and claims according to the laws and other regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia;
- to control the acquisition, use and management of material resources; to ensure organization and documentation of procurement procedures.

Marketing and public relations:

- to implement internal and external communication;
- to develop and implement the brand of ViA, marketing and PR strategy and operational plan;
- to coordinate ViA marketing activities by cooperating with various ViA structural units, other public and municipal entities and private entrepreneurs;
- to organize and participate in ViA marketing events in Latvia and abroad.

Organizing ViA document management and circulation and ensuring internal communication:

- to organize and manage document circulation at ViA, ensuring record keeping, document registration, preparation of orders, powers of attorney, statements, drafts of outgoing documents;
- to provide support to ViA management and staff in record keeping matters; to archive documents.

Library

Main functions and tasks of the library:

- to plan the development of the library stock;
- to provide the process of ViA academic and scientific research with media from the library collection and from libraries in Latvia and abroad through the interlibrary subscription;
- to store and systemise information on ViA history, in cooperation with the directors of the study fields and teaching staff;
- to coordinate the provision of the academic process with library resources;
- to develop the library's stock in accordance with ViA academic and scientific work directions, requirements of the study fields, by co-operating and coordinating resources in collaboration with Valmiera Library; to collect, systematize, catalogue, bibliographically process and preserve printed publications, electronic publications, manuscripts and other documents;
- to provide the library's collection, including availability of electronic databases for independent studies and research;

- to maintain and develop a database of author's works by ViA academic staff and students; to advise ViA academic staff and students on the use of informative resources.

Rectorate – rector, vice-rector for academic and vice-rector for scientific affairs, vice-rector for administrative affairs, assistant rector - scientific secretary, lawyer - HR specialist. Main functions and tasks of the rectorate:

- strategic management of ViA;
- ViA personnel management;
- legal aid;
- scientific management;
- project development, management and supervision.

Knowledge and Technology Centre (KTC)

Main functions and tasks of the KTC:

- to promote knowledge transfer, applied research and the development of ViA infrastructure through the funding of projects at the regional, national and international level;
- to cooperate with the education service providers in Vidzeme region to ensure the accessibility and offer of the education to all target groups by bringing together legal and natural persons involved in the adult education, promoting their activities and cooperation for achieving the goal of the KTC;
- to develop and maintain cooperation with other educational and scientific institutions of Vidzeme region by offering their services in the field of knowledge and technology transfer;
- to establish and maintain contacts with partners in the private, governmental and non-governmental sector and to promote feedback;
- to operate within the networks of the lifelong learning partners: higher education institutions, scientific institutions, entrepreneurs, associations, adult education centres and Alumni.

Refer to Annex 7 for the management structure of the ViA VRSTAO study field.

2.1.4. Description and assessment of the requirements and the system for the admission of students by specifying, inter alia, the regulatory framework of the admission procedures and requirements. The assessment of options for the students to have their study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education recognised within the study field by providing specific examples of the application of these procedures.

Admission criteria to ViA study programmes are approved by the ViA Senate which, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Latvia, approves admission requirements to ViA undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, as well as to each doctoral study programme by November 30. Upon applying for admission to the undergraduate programmes, the applicant or his/her authorized representative should fill in the application and present a passport or ID card, a certificate of secondary education, certificates of centralized examinations specified in the admission regulations, documents permitting admission beyond competition if a specific criterion is laid down in the regulations (*see Annex 8*).

Upon applying for postgraduate programmes, the applicant or his/her authorized representative should fill in the application and present a passport or ID card, a document of higher education, as well as documents specified in the programme requirements (*see Annex 8*).

International applicants should additionally present a certificate of English proficiency in internationally recognized examinations TOEFL (minimum 500 points for the test taken on-the-spot and 70 points for the online test), IELTS (minimum 6.0 points) or other evidence of English language proficiency. If previous education is acquired in English, evidence of English language proficiency is not required. In addition, a statement from the Latvian Academic Information Centre on the compliance of the education obtained abroad with the requirements of the admission regulations should be submitted.

It is possible to apply for the undergraduate studies at ViA electronically in the Information System of Unified Admission to Undergraduate Programmes (*VUPP IS*) through the e-service on the portal www.latvija.lv. It is possible to apply for the postgraduate study programmes, using ViA's electronic questionnaire va.dreamapply.com.

In accordance with the Cabinet Regulation No. 932 "Regulations for starting studies in later stages of studies", it is possible to start studies at ViA at a later study stages, subject to the requirements of the regulation regarding the mandatory amount of credit points, which is equalized to the content of ViA study programmes. Recognition of study results obtained in previous education is a regular procedure for any student who has started studies at a later stage and who, in accordance with international cooperation agreements, studied one or two semesters at a higher education institution abroad. In this case, the equalization of study results is performed by the director of the study programme when the student has submitted supporting documents (academic statement or diploma with a diploma supplement for previously obtained higher education). The equalization of the study results with the study results obtained within the framework of the international exchange programme is performed on the basis of the higher education institution cooperation agreement, the tripartite study agreement (Erasmus learning agreement) and the certificate of the acquired study courses.

In accordance with the Cabinet Regulation No. 505 "Regulations for recognition of competences acquired outside of formal education or professional experience and study results achieved in previous education", every person has the right to submit an application to ViA for recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in previous education or professional experience in the study programme implemented by the higher education institution or part thereof. Information on the possibilities of recognizing non-formal education or professional experience is [available on the ViA website \(Only in Latvian\)](#). Study results achieved by the person while studying (a student has been matriculated) in the study programme are recognized in accordance with the Cabinet Regulation No. 932 "Procedure for Starting Studies in Later Studies" of 16 November 2004.

The decision on the recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired outside formal education or acquired through professional experience, as well as on the study results achieved in previous education is made by the Study Results Recognition Commission established by ViA. In accordance with the Regulations on the recognition of competences acquired outside formal education or through professional experience and on the recognition of study results achieved in previous education ([see Annex 9](#)), a person must submit an application for recognition of knowledge, skills and competences. The procedure for the recognition of study results is described in the above-mentioned regulations.

Information of ViA study fields and study programmes is published on ViA website www.va.lv (Only in Latvian, The English version of the website is available at the following address: <https://va.lv/en>) ViA Administrative Department (Marketing Group and Study Administration Group) is responsible for publishing the information.

Lifelong learning opportunities through the Open University

The service **Open University** of ViA Knowledge and Technology Centre (KTC) (https://ztc.va.lv/en/open_university) offers everyone an opportunity to apply for a study course at Vidzeme University of Applied (ViA) sciences. It is an opportunity, on the basis of previously acquired education, to acquire the knowledge and skills offered by ViA study programmes. For those ViA students who can not continue their studies due to academic or financial debts, this is an opportunity to maintain

a connection with the higher education institution and continue their studies according to their abilities.

The Open University is an opportunity not only to fully acquire the content of the course, take examinations and receive an assessment in the chosen course like any ViA student, but also to get involved and experience the life of students and the environment of the higher education institution, and to receive a ViA certificate after successful completion of the course.

The certificate issued by ViA's KTC includes an indication of awarding credit points corresponding to the study course. In accordance with the Cabinet Regulation "Regarding Recognition of the Study Results Achieved in Previous Education or through Professional Experience", a holder of such a certificate may apply to any higher education institution or college of Latvia requesting to recognize the knowledge, skills and competence acquired while studying the particular course.

Course participants have free access to ViA library materials, databases, computer classes and other resources that facilitate and make the learning process easier.

Refer to the annex for ViA Admission Rules (see Annex 8).

Refer to the annex for ViA Regulations on the recognition of competences acquired outside formal education or through professional experience and on the recognition of study results achieved in previous education (see Annex 9).

2.1.5. Assessment of the methods and procedures for the evaluation of students' achievements, as well as the principles of their selection and the analysis of the compliance of the evaluation methods and procedures with the aims of the study programmes and the needs of the students.

The ViA Senate has approved the Study Regulations which lay down the procedure for the implementation of study programmes, the rights and obligations of students, the procedure for financing studies and the general procedure for organizing State examinations. The Study Regulations lay down criteria, forms and terms for the assessment of student knowledge, conditions regarding academic debts, and other requirements for achieving learning outcomes. Descriptions of the study courses and other programme components define requirements for the commencement of studies, specific implementation goals and planned learning outcomes, outline the content necessary for achieving learning outcomes, a study calendar, compulsory and additional literature, and other sources of information, describe the organization and tasks of student independent work, define criteria for assessing learning outcomes.

Criteria, conditions and methods published in the course descriptions are used to assess academic progress of students, and they are applied consistently. To provide guidelines for the procedure of writing and defending annual projects and graduation papers, the following document is prepared and approved: Methodological Guide for the Preparation and Defence of Annual Projects, Bachelor Papers, Master Papers and Qualification Papers. The composition of the State Examination Commission is approved by the Assembly of the Faculty; specialists/experts of the field are included in the commission and they act in accordance with the methodological guidelines for preparation of the graduation papers. Internships within the study programmes are regulated by the Internship Regulations which lay down the process of internship, conditions for preparation and defence of reports.

The diversity of student needs is respected during the study process at ViA by choosing appropriate learning approaches. ViA uses innovative teaching methods and implements an individual approach.

Study programme directors make sure that the lecturers involved in the implementation of the programme are familiar with the methods of assessing learning outcomes and receive support for the development of their skills in this area; assessment criteria and methods, as well as marking criteria are made public in advance; an assessment provides for a possibility to show the extent to which students have achieved learning outcomes; students receive feedback from the lecturers who provide advice on the study and research process, if necessary; assessment is consistent, fair to all students and is carried out in accordance with the approved course descriptions. Study course lecturers are responsible for providing students with publicly available course assessment criteria, while the director of the study programme is responsible for general supervision. The rules regarding student's absence, illness and other excusing circumstances are included in the course descriptions. These measures ensure that students are informed of the ViA assessment strategy, criteria, examinations and other assessment techniques that will be implemented during the assessment process of the study outcomes, and of what is expected of students. In case of questions, students consult with the lecturers of the specific study courses or with the programme director. These measures ensure that the evaluation serves as an opportunity for students to both evaluate their academic progress and also to assess opportunities for further growth and improvement of skills or knowledge.

Appropriate procedures – ViA Study Regulations and the Regulations of Ethics – are in place for resolving student complaints.

Students may get acquainted with the criteria, conditions and binding procedures for assessing academic progress on moodle.va.lv (only in Latvian)

Refer to the annex for ViA Study Regulations (see Annex 10).

Course descriptions of ViA study programmes, Internship Regulations and methodological guidelines for writing papers can be found after the description of each study programme.

2.1.6. Description and assessment of the academic integrity principles, the mechanisms for compliance with these principles, and the way in which the stakeholders are informed. Specify the plagiarism detection tools used by providing examples of the use of these tools and mechanisms.

The principles of academic integrity are laid down in the ViA Regulations of Ethics approved on 26 April 2017 at the ViA Senate meeting.

The Regulations of Ethics define the basic principles and norms that ViA personnel (students, academic and general staff) must observe in their attitude towards ViA, in their work, in their relations with other ViA representatives and society.

The Regulations of Ethics also include a section on academic and research ethics stating that ViA staff treats the study and research process and personnel involved therein with integrity. In academic and scientific research, the staff complies with copyright, respects intellectual property, honours work results of others, and guarantees the truthfulness of the data used and analysis performed in research.

In order to promote the observance of academic and research ethics at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, the following principles must be adhered to: integrity, openness, objectivity, unambiguity, observance of the rights of research participants, independence from sponsors, acknowledgement of contribution of all involved persons to research.

The Regulations of Ethics list the types of violations of academic and research ethics indicating that plagiarism, falsification, the use of unauthorized sources and ways of obtaining information during

examinations (exams, tests), re-submission of one's own work to another study course without a prior agreement with the lecturer, as well as any other deliberate engagement in the activities that hinder or interfere with the study process and academic work at the institution of higher education, including participation in or concealment of violations of academic ethics, shall be deemed to be a violation of academic ethics. Furthermore, the following is considered to be a violation of research ethics: violations of requirements of research ethics specified in the professional codes; allowing conflicts of interest; data falsification; tendentious data analysis and interpretation; discrimination of research participants; disregard of voluntary participation in research; disregard of participant anonymity or confidentiality (as appropriate), except the cases when these issues are harmonized with research participants or data are collected in public environment (for example, observation in public environment); violation of informed consent, unless it is a simple observation in a public place and the audio or video recording is not used in a way allowing identification of or harm to a person; misleading or failure to inform the subjects of research on the purposes or significant aspects of research, unless it is not possible to use other effective alternative methods; misleading society without providing complete information; plagiarism and self-plagiarism, i.e., failure to refer to previously published data or discoveries; use of data collected by other researchers without a reference to the contribution of other authors.

The regulations also clearly define the sanctions for ethical violations, as well as the procedure for identifying violations and imposing sanctions.

Sanctions for the violations of research ethics may be initiated by the Academic Ethics Commission. Sanctions for the violations of the norms of academic ethics may be imposed on the students by a lecturer or the Rector in accordance with the decision of the Academic Ethics Commission. Sanctions for the violations of the norms of academic ethics may be imposed on academic and general staff by the Rector in accordance with the decision of the Academic Commission. Sanctions for the violations of general ethical principles may be imposed on the general staff (including academic staff if the violation is not related to academic work) by the employee's immediate supervisor or Rector.

In 2017, ViA has entered into the agreement with the University of Latvia on the use of the *Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System*, one of the most essential anti-plagiarism tools at ViA. According to the order which is issued every semester regarding submission of the graduation papers (including the Qualification papers), students have to upload their papers to the study information system LAIS which is synchronized with the plagiarism control system. In situations where a lecturer has suspects regarding student's paper, the plagiarism control system is also used to check course papers or annual projects. In 2018, by the help of this system, a case of plagiarism in the development of the Qualification paper was detected, as a result of which the student wrote the paper repeatedly in the next academic year.

Refer to the annex for ViA Regulations of Ethics and the Ethics Violation Scheme (see Annex 11).

2.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

2.2.1. Assessment of the efficiency of the internal quality assurance system within the study field by specifying the measures undertaken to achieve the aims and outcomes of the study programmes and to ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes.

The internal quality system of the study programmes implemented by ViA and, therefore, the study field, is based on the European and national legislation, which defines the basic principles of higher education

development. The following text provides an overview of various aspects of the quality assurance system, specifically in the VRSTAO study field.

ViA has developed and approved the Development Strategy for 2016-2020, which envisages striving for excellence and competitiveness in education, striving for excellence and competitiveness in science and research, as well as the knowledge transfer and contribution to the development of the region. The strategy results in a series of measures to ensure the quality and standards of the study programmes and degrees to be awarded, which are also observed in the VRSTAO study field. Administrative and accounting control over the study programmes of the study field is implemented by the the Faculty of Society and Sciences. The Faculty decides on a regular basis (once a month) on current issues in the study field at the meetings of the Assembly of the Faculty. Self-assessment reports of study programmes, changes to the study programme, decisions on announcing vacancies for academic staff are made and candidates are assessed in the Assembly of the Faculty. Every year, the development of the direction is assessed during the preparation of the self-assessment report and its discussion within the study field, at the faculty level, and also in the ViA Senate.

ViA has approved a series of documents that define relationships between teaching and research, the institution's quality and requirement strategy, as well as organization of the quality assurance system. There are regulations on the responsibility of faculties, study fields and other structural units and individuals for quality assurance, as well as on student participation in the process of ensuring quality assurance, and on the ways of implementing, monitoring and adjusting the quality policy. These documents are binding on the activities of the VRSTAO study field and are observed in our daily work. Students are informed of the binding internal normative regulations in the VRSTAO study field both during the introductory lectures and also later during the study process. Students receive information of their rights and possibilities to participate in the development and implementation of ViA development policy.

Students participate in the work of the Assembly of the Faculty and the Senate. Every semester, the director of the study field has a meeting with the students; the student self-government of ViA also implements its activities and delegates candidates for the elections to the ViA Senate and the Constitutional Assembly, and organizes a meeting with the Rector and/or directors of the study fields, if necessary. Every year, ViA conducts a student survey to find out their opinion on the compliance of the study programmes implemented by ViA with student expectations, the quality of the study programmes, informative and material technical provision, the quality of academic staff, the quality of international cooperation, as well as on other issues. Survey results are analyzed and assessed, and decisions are made on their basis on various changes and improvements. The feedback received is used in the development planning and improvement of ViA operation. Within the framework of the study field, the director of the study field meets students of all programmes twice an academic year and discusses and talks over various current events, listens to students' opinion and suggestions. Every year each student group chooses also its representative, who coordinates cooperation and communication between the student group and the director of the VRSTAO study field. All of these methods are the ways to get in-depth feedback from the students, to plan and make various changes regarding the scheduling of courses by semesters, the involvement of lecturers in teaching specific courses, replenishment of library collections, and other aspects related to study organization and quality assurance.

ViA actively cooperates with alumni in various ways. Every year, ViA also conducts a graduate survey. Its main purpose is to document the satisfaction of graduates with the education they have received immediately after graduation, as well as to collect data on their employment. The survey is conducted a year after graduation. In general, it should be pointed out the tendency that the graduates of the Bachelor's programmes of the VRSTAO study field successfully enter the labour market and work in accordance with the qualification conferred. It would be preferable to conduct graduate employment surveys also over a longer period of time in order to analyze the career dynamics of graduates, professional development in the chosen industry over a longer period of time. This would require additional investments on the part of ViA, therefore, at the level of the study field, data collection takes

place, as far as possible, through contacts which the lecturers and the director of study field maintain with graduates on social media, upon meeting at public events and in other ways. As one of the factors that could be assessed as the professional development of graduates (and to a large extent also satisfaction with the education received), is the active involvement of graduates in the study process after graduation, which manifests itself in various forms – as guest lectures, offering research topics, providing internship places, and other forms of engagement. It should be noted that some graduates are lecturers of the VRSTAO study field, they participate in the work of the advisory council of the study field, they are active entrepreneurs and are involved in providing internship.

2.2.2. Analysis and assessment of the system and the procedures for the development and review of the study programmes by providing specific examples of the review of the study programmes, the aims, and regularity, as well as the stakeholders and their responsibilities. If, during the reporting period, new study programmes have been developed within the study field, describe the procedures of their development (including the process of the approval of study programmes).

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences has developed the procedure for study programme developing (ViA Study Quality Assurance Policy, Annex 2 - see Part I, Section 1.3), approving and monitoring. This procedure lays down guidelines for the development, approval, monitoring and updating of the study programmes, lifelong learning courses and other curricula and components thereof. The programmes and components thereof are elaborated to meet the objectives set, which, in turn, are in line with the ViA strategy. Programmes are developed using the vision of external stakeholders in such a way to meet the study results defined and to ensure compliance of the learning outcomes with the Latvian and European Qualifications Framework, and to promote higher education goals – to promote personal growth and employment, the formation of civil society and the expanded knowledge base.

Audit of the course descriptions of the study programme: course descriptions are updated and improved every year at the beginning of the academic year. The assessment of the study programme content and the evaluation of its implementation quality are based on the self-assessment reports, regular student surveys on the study course and lecturer performance, feedback from internship supervisors within the industry, graduate surveys, employer surveys on ViA graduates, suggestions of the advisory board, as well as on the opinions and recommendations of industry experts.

Student surveys are organized at the end of each study semester. Their purpose is to maintain the quality control of studies, identify problems and offer solutions through a dialogue between students and lecturers. By filling in the questionnaires, students provide an assessment both on the course as a whole and on its lecturer. Course evaluation includes the following: questions about the course topics and their relevance, usefulness of the acquired knowledge and skills, assessment of the importance of lectures, practical work and independent work, opportunities to consult the lecturer, assessment of technical support, as well as there is a possibility to provide free-form recommendations for course improvement. A lecturer performance questionnaire covers questions regarding lecturer's performance including lecturer's professional competence, lecturer's skills to rouse interest in the study course, ability to link theory and practice, work organization skills, attitude towards students, etc. Open-ended questions allow students to make suggestions, point out to lecturer's strengths/weaknesses and issues which require more attention.

A graduate survey is also organized every year to find out the satisfaction of graduates with the quality of studies. In general, within the framework of the study field programmes, the employment of graduates after graduation is high proving the market demand for specialists of this level.

*The study quality assurance policy document is available on the ViA website:
https://va.lv/sites/default/files/5P-ViA_Studiju-kvalitates-nodrosinasanas-politika-APST-31012020-ENG.pdf*

2.2.3. Description of the procedures and/or systems according to which the students are expected to submit complaints and proposals (except for the surveys to be conducted among the students). Specify whether and how the students have access to the information on the possibilities to submit complaints and proposals and how the outcomes of the examination of the complaints and proposals and the improvements of the study field and the relevant study programmes are communicated by providing the respective examples.

ViA students can communicate their opinions, recommendations and admonitions about the content of the programme, course, quality and teaching staff to all levels of ViA management. ViA values are openness and accessibility at all levels and cooperation with students. Representatives of the student board are involved in the decision-making process and in the planning and implementation of the operational and strategic management of ViA, representing the interests of students in the decision-making institutions of ViA. The ViA student board meets ViA management once a month, discussing current topics and also student proposals for problems identified. For example, in the previous period, issues to be considered were mainly related to the situation caused by the pandemic and the study organization process, current issues regarding the situation in Ukraine, individual questions/challenges regarding the daily life of students in hostels, as well as issues related to the organization of joint clean-up work and a plan for organizing introductory studies for new students.

Apart from student surveys, there is a regular exchange of information with students of the study field at the level of the study field management, lecturers, and senior specialist. Students can submit their proposals and complaints orally, in the form of an e-mail communication, and in the form of a written submission. Every year each group of students chooses its representative who provides for daily communication with the director of the study programme.

It was particularly important to communicate with students, to listen to them and to take proactive steps on the part of the director of the study field due to the changes in the study process caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the director of the study field and the lecturers proactively communicate with students during online classes (and also outside the class setting), listen to their comments about the study process.

Once a month, at the meeting of the council of the study field, issues about the study process, including student suggestions, are discussed.

The director of the study field, based on the suggestions of the students, has asked lecturers to coordinate the submission of the final papers of the study courses with the deadlines for the final papers of other courses. Students are also informed of these actions by e-mail and orally, thus receiving feedback. The director of the study field meets each course once a semester to discuss course assessments (recommendations and complaints about the course, study organization, etc.), as well as current and expected events in the coming semesters. The advisory council of study field is also convened twice a year, where current issues are discussed both regarding the positive and negative aspects of the study organization process in each semester, as well as ideas and thoughts are exchanged among different courses, thus promoting the generation of ideas for improving the processes. For instance, we can mention the development of the study course "Introduction to studies", which summarizes and presents all the necessary information so that the 1st year student can more easily get used to the environment of the higher education institution, learn faster various skills and get

to know available resources (e.g., IT, libraries, scientific databases, academic ethics, etc.), as well as to introduce to the tourism and leisure industry (visiting companies, searching for information). In the same way, lecturers of the courses have been changed or discussions with the course lecturers have been carried out, the criteria for the topicality of the course content and the final paper have been supplemented and changed.

2.2.4. Provide information on the mechanism for collecting the statistical data, as developed by the higher education institution/ college. Specify the type of data to be collected, the regularity of collection, and the way the information is used to improve the study field. Describe the mechanism for obtaining and providing feedback, including with regard to the work with the students, graduates, and employers.

Various student profile data and student number statistics are used to make decisions about the development and improvement of the study field programmes. Statistical reports are compiled as necessary, distinguishing between mandatory (in accordance with the Cabinet Regulations) and optional statistics (as needed); the information to be collected is analysed in accordance with the purpose stated in the decision.

Applicant, student and graduate surveys are important sources of information for the improvement of the study field programmes. On the basis of the applicant surveys, it was decided to improve marketing activities, for instance, by launching individual activities for the postgraduate level students in the summer of 2020 because the overall direction of ViA marketing campaigns was focused on attracting undergraduate students.

Student surveys at the end of each study course allow the lecturer to assess the course and results achieved, as well as student satisfaction. The director of the study field controls the quality of the course and initiates changes if necessary (for example, to change the lecturer, to update the content of the course, to change the number of credit points, to change the course time in the study programme plan, etc.).

One of the ways to find out student opinion about the study process is an online survey, which is conducted after each study course ([lais.lv](#), [English version of the system for students available upon authorisation](#)). Students assess each study course using a 5-point system and the following criteria:

- course goals (defining and achieving results),
- assessment of teaching methods for achieving course goals (relevance and diversity of methods; opportunities for dialogue and discussion during the course; the ability of the lecturer to listen to the opinions and arguments of others),
- study process organization (course requirements, assessment, study load, availability and use of study materials, communication with students),
- lecturer performance evaluation (a possibility to receive answers to the questions asked by the students during lectures, seminars and consultations, as well as feedback from the lecturer on the work performed; assessment of knowledge in accordance with the criteria established; pedagogical mastery),
- involving students in the study course (motivating students, self-assessment of involvement and independent work).

Students also provide an overall assessment of the course and comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the course. At the end of the academic year, survey results are analyzed at the council of the VRSTAO study direction, advisory board of the VRSTAO study programme, working group which prepares a self-assessment report for the VRSTAO study direction, as well as at the advisory council,

thus ensuring improvements in both course content and practical organization.

Based on student assessment/graduate surveys, changes have been made in the study process, for example, course lecturers are changed, module C courses are rescheduled to later semesters to ease the workload in the first years of study, methods of submitting course final papers are changed, as well as lecturers, upon receiving course assessments, make changes and improvements to both the course content assignments and the assessment system.

Reports of statistical data on applicants, numbers of students and graduates are prepared on a regular basis (*see Table No.1*).

Table No.1. *ViA apkopoto statistisko datu pārskatu veidi.*

Type of statistics	Regularity	Profile (upon request)	Necessity	Statistics are compiled by
Applicants	After each admission and upon request	Number of applicants; Place of residence; Educational institution; Number of applications; Admission competition; Funding; etc.	Admission analysis; Admission planning; Planning of marketing activities; Programme improvement; Planning of the budget places; Self-assessment reports; etc.	Study administration group
Students	Each month and upon request	Number of students Funding; Average and weighted grades; Drop-out; etc.	Programme improvement; Planning of the budget places; Self-assessment reports; Rotation; Scholarships; etc.	Study administration group
Graduates	After graduation and upon request	Number of graduates; Funding; Average and weighted grades; Topics of graduation papers	Programme improvement; Planning of the budget places; Self-assessment reports; etc.	Study administration group

Refer to the annex for the analysis of the student, graduate and employer survey results (see Annex 12).

2.2.5. Specify the websites (e.g., the homepage) on which the information on the study field and the relevant study programmes is published (in all languages in which the study programmes are implemented) by indicating the persons responsible for the compliance of the information available on the website with the information published in the official registers (State Education Information System (VIIS), E-platform).

Information about ViA study fields and study programmes is published on the ViA website www.va.lv. The ViA Administrative Department is responsible for publishing information (on the website – Marketing group; on other websites – Study administration group).

Tourism Organisation and Management (only in Latvian):
<https://va.lv/lv/studijas/bakalaurs/turisma-organizacija-un-vadiba/par-programmu>

Tourism Competitiveness Management:
<https://va.lv/en/study-here/masters-degree/tourism-competitiveness-management/about-programme>

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

2.3.1. Provide information on the system developed by the higher education institution/college for determining and redistribution of the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the relevant study programmes. Provide data on the available funding for the scientific research and/or artistic creation activities, its sources and its use for the development of the study field.

In 2021, the provision of financial support for the VRSTAO study programmes reached 150 thousand EUR, including the State budget funding and ViA's own revenues (*see Table 2*).

Table 2. *Financial resources for the implementation of study programmes corresponding to the study field (EUR).*

Funding	2016, EUR	2017, EUR	2018, EUR	2019, EUR	2020, EUR	2021, EUR
State budget funding for the study field (without scholarship funding)	130 282	155 236	161 240	158 676	160 965	144 343
Own income – study field tuition fees	101 204	69 193	37 043	26 520	16 244	15 286
Funding, total	231 486	224 428	198 283	185 196	177 209	159 629

Funding for research activities at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences is not divided by the study fields, but is directed to scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned work in which **academic, research and student staff** from different study fields is involved, and in 2021 reached EUR 1.9 million (*see Table 3*).

Table 3. *Funding for research (creative) activities (EUR).*

Funding	2016, EUR	2017, EUR	2018, EUR	2019, EUR	2020, EUR	2021, EUR
Base funding for science	13 222	124 321	142 725	147 790	152 575	159 639
Funding for the State research programmes	56 119	82 811		325 099	471 050	126 430
Funding for research grants allocated by Valmiera city municipality	20 000	20 000	20 000	15 000		
Performance funding	24 514	122 192	150 240	181 806	197 011	191 713

Other income from the State budget	97 095	61 046	25 951	132 586	301 117	615 291
EU Structural Funds		510 796	534 951	295 163	288 424	319 971
Grants and programmes of the Latvian Council of Science					22 953	199 326
Income from contracts with legal entities of the Republic of Latvia	36 200	5 785	101 209	86 257	87 830	87 091
Other income for research activities		2 180		696		232
Income from international financial assistance	20 372	28 756	111 259	337 613	677 204	229 963
Funding, total	267 522	957 887	1 086 335	1 522 010	2 198 164	1 929 656

Funding for Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences library collections is not divided by the study fields because during the study process the library resources are often used by students of several study fields (see Table 4). The most important items within each course are renewed on a cyclic basis, while the most current items of additional literature are purchased regularly.

Table 4. Funding for the purchase of literature items and subscription to electronic databases (EUR).

Expenses for library collections	2016, EUR	2017, EUR	2018, EUR	2019, EUR	2020, EUR	2021, EUR
Periodicals	1 930	1 955	2 218	1 865	1 623	1 573
Books	5 873	17 954	14 470	10 849	7 303	8 502
Electronic documents and databases	4 373	2 870	2 789	3 068	523	5 535
Total:	12 176	22 779	19 477	15 782	9 449	15 610

Funding for the student self-government

Funding for the student self-government is provided in the amount of at least one-twentieth of the State funding for the study process and tuition fees, and is approximately seven thousand EUR per year, however in 2021 it reached almost eight thousand (see Table 5). The information on the amount of the state budget and tuition fees included in Table 5 is presented in order to show that ViA complies with the legal regulations and that the student self-government is financed by at least one two-hundredth of the state funding for studies and tuition fee income.

Table 5. Funding for the student self-government (EUR).

Funding	2016, EUR	2017, EUR	2018, EUR	2019, EUR	2020, EUR	2021, EUR
Funding for the student self-government	6 958	7 173	7 470	7 470	7 470	7 961
<i>State funding for the study process</i>	<i>966 643</i>	<i>1 138 395</i>	<i>1 236 054</i>	<i>1 276 531</i>	<i>1 324 947</i>	<i>1 361 475</i>
<i>Income from tuition fees</i>	<i>381 154</i>	<i>261 350</i>	<i>205 191</i>	<i>179 537</i>	<i>185 539</i>	<i>151 835</i>
Total income from the study process	1 347 797	1 399 745	1 441 245	1 456 068	1 510 486	1 513 310
<i>Student self-government funding ratio, %</i>	<i>0.52</i>	<i>0.51</i>	<i>0.52</i>	<i>0.51</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.53</i>

The financial base is sufficient for the implementation of study programmes, taking into account that the costs of implementing the study programmes are covered from various financial sources: project funding, State budget funds, ViA's own revenues. In recent years, ViA has attracted a large amount of funding from the EU structural funds for the development of infrastructure to modernize the laboratories, to renovate several study rooms. Within the framework of various projects, ViA also obtained funding for replenishing the library collection. ViA VRSTAO students are offered State-funded study places, as well as tuition fee-paying students are also admitted. For the professional development of lecturers, Erasmus+ funding is attracted. Since 2018, European Social Fund project "Development of Academic Staff and Human Resources of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences" (SAM 8.2.2) is being implemented providing lecturer training in the following areas: English language, digital technology, academic leadership, while internship opportunities at commercial companies contribute to closer cooperation with the industry.

Remuneration of academic staff

The remuneration of academic staff complies with the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No.445 "TRegulations Regarding Remuneration of Teachers" (05.07.2016.) and includes an incentive-based remuneration system developed by ViA and approved by the VIA Senate according to the workload of lecturers (*see Table 6*).

Table 6. *Compliance of remuneration of academic staff with the regulations on remuneration of teachers.*

Position	2020, EUR				2021, EUR			
	Monthly salary rate *	Minimum hourly rate **	ViA hourly rate ***	Compliance with the minimum hourly rate	Monthly salary rate *	Minimum hourly rate **	ViA hourly rate ***	Compliance with the minimum hourly rate
Professor	1569.00	15.69	15.69	complies	1754.00	17.54	17.54	complies
Associated professor	1256.00	12.56	12.56	complies	1404.00	14.04	14.04	complies
Assistant professor	1005.00	10.05	10.05	complies	1124.00	11.24	11.24	complies
Lecturer	805.00	8.05	8.05	complies	900.00	9.00	9.00	complies
Assistant	641.00	6.41	6.41	complies	717.00	7.17	7.17	complies

* - Cabinet Regulations No. 445 "Regulations Regarding Remuneration of Teachers" (05.07.2016)

** - calculation is done taking into account the maximum workload of academic staff - 1000 hours per

year (100 hours per month) laid down in the Cabinet Regulations No. 445 "Regulations Regarding Remuneration of Teachers" (05.07.2016)

*** - approved at the ViA Senate meeting

Calculation of the study programme costs

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences applies its own calculation methodology to calculate student costs, according to which costs are classified as follows:

1. Direct costs – direct costs of the study programme implementation:
 - Academic and research costs - remuneration of academic staff and remuneration of research staff during the study process,
 - other costs of the study process - costs of study materials, events, other direct costs related to the implementation of the study programme.
2. Semi-direct costs – direct costs of the study field and faculty:
 - research remuneration - remuneration of academic staff that is not directly related to the implementation of a study programme (e.g. remuneration of faculty lecturers for research work),
 - administrative work - the cost of administrative work in the field and at the faculty (remuneration of the dean, head of the field, senior specialist),
 - other administrative costs of the direction and the faculty - travel expenses of faculty staff, training, conference attendance, membership fees of organisations, stationery, reception and other expenses, development expenses (use of funds directly earmarked for the development of the faculty or direction),
 - cost carrier – the number of students per faculty (for transfer of direct costs of the faculty) or the number of students per study field (for transfer of direct costs of the study field).
3. Indirect costs – other costs of ViA:
 - remuneration - administrative, general and operational staff,
 - Other administrative costs - travel expenses, general costs of organising the study process, technology costs, library costs, marketing, PR and event organisation costs, other administrative costs.
 - building management costs - infrastructure maintenance and operating expenses,
 - loan repayment expenses,
 - capital expenditure - books, equipment,
 - cost carrier - number of students in the programme (for transfer of remuneration, administrative and capital costs) or number of contact hours per year of courses delivered within the programme (for transfer of building management costs).

Information on costs per student indicates **the items included in the cost calculation**, as well as funding breakdown (in percentage) ([see Table 7](#)).

Table 7. Breakdown of funding (%) for costs per student (EUR).

Costs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Direct costs						

Costs of academic and scientific work (study process)	33.9	32.6	33.7	37.2	36.3	39.8
Other costs of the study process	1.2	0.8	0.8	1.8	1.1	0.9
Semi-direct costs (transfer of the direct costs of the study field, faculty)						
Remuneration for scientific work (academic leave + scientific work)	4.7	5.8	1.5	3.7	7.8	4.7
Administrative work	7.2	8.6	9.4	7.6	7.5	8
Other administrative costs	2.7	0.3	0.9	2.3	1.1	1.4
Total direct costs (direct + semi-direct)	49.7	48.1	46.3	52.6	53.8	54.8
Indirect costs (transfer of other ViA costs)	50.3	51.9	53.7	47.4	46.2	45.2
Remuneration	28.1	30.6	33.3	28.2	27.8	26.9
Other administrative expenses	10.8	10.4	10.3	9.1	8.5	8.1
Loan repayment (including, interest payments)	2.6	2.4	2.1	1.6	1.6	1.5
Capital expenditure	0.5	0.9	1	1	0.6	0.9
Building management costs	8.3	7.6	7	7.5	7.7	7.8
Costs per 1 student	100	100	100	100	100	100

The cost calculation of the study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management* is currently not analyzed, as the first students are planned to be admitted to this study programme in September 2022.

2.3.2. Provide information on the infrastructure and the material and technical provisions required for the implementation of the study field and the relevant study programmes. Specify whether the required provision is available to the higher education institution/college, available to the students, and the teaching staff.

The infrastructural and material-technical supplies necessary for ensuring the study process, scientific, research and administrative activities of ViA are not divided among the study fields, because ViA is a small institution with small resources, which are planned and used in a coordinated manner for the implementation of all study fields.

ViA has two buildings in Valmiera, at Cēsu Street 4 and Tērbatas Street 10 for the study process, scientific, research and administrative activities with the total area of 71312 m², of which 2387 m² are used directly for the study and research process. The current study base consists of 38 lecture-rooms (total area of 1445 m²), including 3 computer classrooms with 90 workstations and the Internet connection (195 m²) and 12 laboratories: *Data Security Laboratory (Cyber Security Lab); Computer Networking Laboratory; Virtual Reality Laboratory; Multimedia laboratory (physical assets for the study management and technology research strand); Multimedia Laboratory (material assets for the Communication Ecosystems and Technologies research stream); Simulation Modelling and RFID Technology Laboratory; Mobile Technologies Laboratory; Energy Efficiency Laboratory; Mechatronics Laboratory; Electrical Engineering Laboratory; Civil Engineering Laboratory; Spatial Research Laboratory (total area 324 m²).*

The Spatial Research Laboratory and the Multimedia Laboratory which include technologies necessary for the VRSTAO study field and research direction are the most important laboratories for the VRSTAO study field. All computers are connected to the common network ensuring a unified circulation of information, as well as there is an access to the Internet and databases. A conference room (257 m²) is also used in the study process. There are also rooms for group work and individual studies (350 m²) in the study blocks. Taking into account the fact that classes for Master's programme students are held on Fridays and Saturdays, Master's programme students are provided with the opportunity to book a room in ViA hostel in advance by help of the electronic system.

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

The number of computers available: for students – 160 pcs, for academic staff – 45 pcs; for administrative staff – 60 pcs, the number of stationary computers in the lecture-rooms – 30 pcs (apart from computer classes); laptops – 60 pcs; multimedia projectors – 45 pcs.

2.3.3. Provide information on the system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of the methodological and informative provision. Description and assessment of the availability of the library and the databases to the students (including in digital environment) and their compliance with the needs of the study field by specifying whether the opening times of the library are appropriate for the students, as well as the number/area of the premises, their suitability for individual studies and research work, the services provided by the library, the available literature for the implementation of the study field, the databases available for the students in the respective field, the statistical data on their use, the procedures for the replenishment of the library stock, as well as the procedures and possibilities for the subscription to the databases.

The methodological basis of ViA ensures relevant and suitable resources for each study programme and their availability to students for knowledge acquisition. Students have access to the ViA e-study environment, which is an interactive student support environment, where study materials are uploaded; ViA e-study environment can be used for electronic document exchange and communication with lecturers, as well as for submitting and assessing tests. Since autumn 2017, [Moodle](#) has been used in the study process at ViA, as well as purchased a license for the use of the MS Teams study platform, which opens up much wider opportunities for the implementation of distance learning forms and the development of the so-called “blended learning” approach. In the Moodle environment, methodological and other materials related to the study process (e.g. regulations on the development of study papers, internship regulations, methodological guidelines for the development of study papers, etc.) are also available in English, taking into account that the study programme is also planned to be implemented in English. In order for ViA lecturers to make full use of the new technological opportunities, since 2018, the European Social Fund project “Development of Academic Staff and Human Resources of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences” (No. 8.2.2.0/18/A/012) is being implemented at ViA, within the framework of which lecturers are being trained to use various technological tools in the study process. Furthermore, equipment is purchased, for example, for filming lectures, as well as support for recording and processing of video lectures is available for lecturers. This is a direction that should be further developed within the higher education institution, taking into account the fact how rapidly technologies are developing. Students also have access to the room occupancy and booking system for booking lecture-

rooms and hostel rooms, thus it is possible to follow the schedule of lectures remotely, and promptly announce changes. There is an electronic booking system for computer equipment and multimedia equipment, which provides students with the opportunity to use the equipment available at ViA (video cameras, cameras, dictophones, etc.) to create multimedia content. Students can also book the multimedia laboratory to work there during specific hours. In 2020, ViA completed the creation of a mobile application, which offers access to the most important electronic resources: moodle environment, lecture schedule, e-mail, etc.

Library resources

The library is open to readers 51 hours per week, every weekday and on Saturdays during term time. ViA students and lecturers have remote access to databases and electronic catalogue 24/7. The library is also accessible for people with physical disabilities. The library provides all the traditional library services. Information about library opening hours and about resources and services available at the library can be found on Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences website under the section 'Library' <http://va.lv/lv/studentiem-un-darbiniekiem/biblioteka/par-biblioteku>. As for undergraduate students, the library's working hours are fully adequate, but as for postgraduate students, who stay at ViA on Friday afternoons and Saturdays, access to library resources is relatively restricted. Postgraduate students can book library resources in advance, it is possible to pre-order copies of the necessary book chapters, etc. Lecturers also prepare a set of course literature in digital form as part of the study courses.

On the 1st floor reading room (455.10m²) students have access to 130 units of periodicals in Latvian, Russian, English and German in a paper format of which 35 units are subscribed by ViA library. Fiction and archive of selected periodicals are also available. On the 2nd floor, there is a computerized reading room (67.80 m²) with 18 work stations, 4 more work stations are in the main room. The computers have also PSPP data processing programme. Furthermore, there are two reading rooms (14.50 m² each) for group work, four individual reading rooms (5.20 m² each) and a quiet reading room (79.20 m²) on the second floor. The area of the second floor library is 776.00 m². There one can find specialised literature, a collection of local history of Valmiera city and surrounding municipalities, as well as the European Commission information centre Europe Direct that provides information on the European Union, as well as the archive of the best scientific papers by ViA students.

All processes of ViA library are automated by means of the library information system ALISE. Since January 2006, there is i-library available providing for a possibility to order books from the electronic catalogue of Valmiera Integrated Library, to book those items that are already lent, to extend the lending period for books, to view data on the books lent/not returned on time/booked. Since spring 2015, the mobile version of the library information system ALISE is available. Thus, the electronic catalogue is also easily accessible from the mobile devices.

To provide high quality support to VIA education and scientific process, the library offers individual consultations, tours and group training to students, academic staff and other interested parties. Educational activities are organized by the specialists of both ViA Library and Valmiera Library. The goal of training is to introduce new students to Valmiera Integrated Library and its services, to show how to work with the library's electronic catalogue and subscribed online full-text electronic databases. It is possible to apply for a training session also electronically. In the academic year of 2019/2020, the first year students had introductory lectures on the library and its services, students got acquainted with the electronic catalogues and information search in the databases available in Valmiera Integrated Library and remotely accessible resources of the National Library of Latvia. The library offers an Interlibrary Loan Service (ILS) free of charge as it is provided in cooperation with Valmiera Library.

The total number of ViA Library documents (physical units) in August 2021 was 28830 units.

The total number of ViA Library documents (physical units):

Type of material	Quantity
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Books	21999
Electronic documents	352
Audiovisual documents	475
Cartographic documents	99
Serial publications	3000
Unpublished documents	2907

Subscribed databases

Full-text databases: EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science. Besides, Travelnews.lv, Lursoft, i-finances and i-law are also available. In collaboration with Valmiera Library, the following databases are available to the readers: Britannica Online Library Edition, EBSCO eBook Public Library Collection, LETA Archive, nozare.lv, Letonika, "Lursoft" newspaper archive, as well as a collection of DVDs. Mostly, databases are available from all computers operating in ViA data transmission network (students can also access academic databases remotely with authorization). Individual databases may be accessed only on-site at the library upon receiving a special permission (Lursoft, i-finances, i-law). The library actively participates in the testing of electronic resources and full-text databases offered by the State Agency "Culture Information Systems Centre". In the academic year of 2020/2021, there were five such databases.

During the spring semester of the Covid-19 pandemic, some academic publishers gave access to their electronic resources – SAGE, Proquest, Cambridge Core, ACM Digital library, etc. An updated list is available on <https://www.myloft.xyz/free-resources-for-covid-19/> After the pandemic period, there is access to the open access resources of these databases.

Since March 2020, remote access to some digital collections of the National Library of Latvia has also been opened.

Available statistics on the use of databases in the academic year of 2020/2021

EBSCO database – 25365 sessions, 100119 searches

Science Direct – 11933 searches, 12994 full text views

Web of Science – 952 sessions

Scopus – 3785 searches

LURSOFT – 969 requests

Procedure for developing library collection

The library collection corresponds to ViA study programmes and fields, and books published in Latvia are purchased in cooperation with Valmiera Library in small quantities each month. The library also accepts donations from individuals and legal entities to develop library collection with missing printed materials or those having insufficient number of copies, and other documents.

Books published outside Latvia are purchased at the request of academic staff in accordance with ViA Library book ordering and usage procedure. If it is a free access resource available on the web or in the databases subscribed by the library, a printed copy is rarely purchased.

Funding for ViA library collections is not divided by the study fields because during the study process the

library resources are often used by students of several study fields. The most important items within each course are renewed on a cyclic basis, while the most current items of additional literature are purchased on a regular basis.

In cases where the necessary books are not available in the library, a lecturer fills in a book ordering form for developing ViA Library collection and receives approval from the director of the study field. Upon receiving a request, the library makes sure whether the book has not been pre-ordered and conducts a price survey. The book order should be placed before the beginning of the course.

The staff of the library compiles information requests which were “turned down”, analyzes them, and advises the lecturer a possible solution (to purchase a newer book, another book, etc.).

Being aware of research interests of the lecturer, the library sends information about newly published books or other resources.

Database subscription procedure

Full-text databases are subscribed in cooperation with the State agency “Culture Information Systems Centre” within the programme “Electronic Publications for Latvian Libraries”, as well as in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science within the project “Academic Network”. A decision to subscribe or unsubscribe a database is made in the meeting where development, academic and scientific issues are discussed, upon agreement between the directors of the study programmes and scientific institutes.

Collection digitization level

The library does not digitalize its collections; it collects students’ diploma papers (Master papers, Qualification papers) that are already in a digital form. It is possible to access papers through library’s electronic catalogue under the section “ViA Student Papers”, access to the full text is for 431 student papers out of 2656 entries. A database of lecturer publications is being compiled in the library’s electronic main catalogue under the section “Publications by ViA lecturers”. The database contains 269 analytical descriptions of lecturer publications (monographs, edited and compiled books, studies, conference materials, etc.). If these materials are available on the Internet, links to their full text are provided in the descriptions.

Possibilities to renew and improve informative provision

From the planned library budget of VIA, also within various projects (SAM, ERDF), as well as in cooperation with Valmiera Library. During the academic year 2019/2020, 17 titles were purchased for the needs of the direction, 17 copies for the total amount of 634.48 euros.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, due to the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when higher education institutions had to switch to online studies, the ViA library provided a lot of support to both lecturers and students by scanning book chapters (respecting copyright), which were necessary for studies and scientific work, the library also provided advice on remote access to databases from computers which were not in the ViA network. In spring of 2022, a separate section was made on the Moodle system – information in times of crisis, and it also included tips and information about the possibilities of using the library collection for online studies. Appreciative comments have been received from the students about the support provided by the library.

Free access resources

In science and education, free access resources (publications and data) have become more dominant – the number of scientific journals and repositories available in this way is growing very rapidly. More and more higher education institutions and grantors in the EU expect creation of free access content. As a result, high-quality content in various industries is increasingly available outside of libraries.

The library has already started purposefully working on raising student and lecturer awareness of free access academic resources by planning seminars for students and teaching staff. We are also working on a support material which summarizes free access resources in English and Latvian languages. It is also planned to organize seminars for students on digitized and subscribed e-resources and databases of the National Library of Latvia. For lecturers, ViA library offers individual and small group consultations on free resources, on the process of searching for information in databases, as well as on resources of the National Library of Latvia.

Cooperation between the VRSTAO study field and the library

Since 30 January 2003, ViA library has been the depository library of the World Tourism Organization. It gives ViA students and teaching staff the opportunity to get to know the latest research and statistical data of the industry.

The lecturers of the tourism study field are very actively involved in the compilation of industry literature: they inform about the books published by local governments, which should be purchased; supplements the collection with conference materials, journals published abroad.

For the needs of the tourism study field, the library collects not only the latest industry literature, but also various historical materials (maps, guides, travel descriptions, etc.).

In order to popularize research for tourism industry specialists carried out by ViA students, full texts of the best papers are available under the section "ViA student papers" of the library's electronic general catalogue (from 2012). In cooperation with lecturers of the tourism study field, thematic exhibitions are organized in the library, where interested persons can find information about studies on a particular topic of the tourism industry, as well as books on this topic available in the ViA library.

2.3.4. Provide a description and assessment of information and communication technology solutions used in the study process (e.g., MOODLE). If the study programmes within the study field are implemented in distance learning, the tools specially adapted for this form of study must also be indicated.

The VRSTAO study field is included in the common set of information and communication technology solution tools used by ViA for the purposes of ensuring the study process.

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 and the corresponding transition to the online studies fully confirmed that ViA is ready to adapt to the changing situation, and the infrastructural base is fully suitable for it. From the first day of online studies in March 2020, lecturers are held on the webex platform, besides the moodle system and the e-mail system fully support the exchange of information, notification of news, announcing changes between the lecturers and students.

Currently, information and communication technology solutions are updated and improved. During the study process, the following is actively used: the possibilities provided by moodle.va.lv (study management system) – the study electronic environment, in which the materials necessary for studies, lecture presentations are stored, where information exchange takes place, and where students upload their presentations and homework within the framework of each study course. Furthermore, online lectures, e-mail system, calendar, etc. are provided using MS365, which includes such communication tools as Teams, Outlook, OneDrive, Sharepoint, and other possibilities. ViA also uses the ViAapp mobile app, as well as the lecture/lecture-room scheduling system (You can download the ViAapp app via GooglePlay: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=lv.via.vidzemes_augstskola&hl=en&gl=US). For the needs of students, ViA has also created a tuition fee discount calculator. Likewise, [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) can be mentioned as another important tool (e.g., introductory lectures, various live broadcasts,

conferences, etc.)

An important tool that is used especially for ensuring the study process for students of the VRSTAO study field is the geospatial information system app [ArcGis](#), which is provided to students in cooperation with ViA HESPI.

2.3.5. Provide information on the procedures for attracting and/or employing the teaching staff (including the call for vacancies, employment, election procedure, etc.), and the assessment of their transparency.

ViA has developed the Regulations “On Election to Academic and Scientific Positions at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences” which regulate the procedure for announcing vacancies, assessing applicants and deciding on approval for academic or scientific positions. Vacancies are advertised by announcing a competition on the official website of “Latvijas Vēstnesis”, as well as by publishing information on the [ViA website](#). The principles of openness and access to information are complied with throughout the entire recruitment process. Individuals are elected for academic positions as a result of an open competition. Scientific, pedagogical and organizational qualifications of an applicant for the position of a professor or an associate professor are assessed by the Council of Professors in accordance with the procedures specified by the Cabinet. The scientific and pedagogical qualifications of the applicant for the position of an assistant professor, lecturer or assistant are assessed by the council of the study field referring the matter to the relevant assembly of the faculty.

Refer to the annex for the “Regulations on Election to Academic Positions at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences” (see Annex 13).

Refer to the annex for the ViA Remuneration Regulations (see Annex 14).

Refer to the annex for the work content and duties of ViA lecturers (see Annex 15).

2.3.6. Specify whether there are common procedures for ensuring the qualification of the academic staff members and the work quality in place and provide the respective assessment thereof. Specify the options for all teaching staff members to improve their qualifications (including the information on the involvement of the teaching staff in different activities, the incentives for their involvement, etc.). Provide the respective examples and specify the way the added value of the possibilities used for the implementation of the study process and the improvement of the study quality is evaluated.

ViA has established a common procedure for ensuring the qualification and performance quality of academic staff.

In order to ensure the qualification and performance quality of ViA academic staff, the **Study Quality Assurance Policy** is approved, which contributes to ViA’s internal quality culture and its continuous improvement, within the framework of which all internal parties take responsibility for ensuring the quality and are involved in quality assurance at all levels. ViA has certain measures in place to make sure and check whether lecturers who are working with students have the necessary qualifications and competence, namely, the requirements are defined in ViA **Regulations on**

Election to Academic Positions; ViA Remuneration Regulations contain the division of academic work, conditions for research work; the ViA Senate has approved the **lecturer job description and responsibilities**, which lay down requirements for academic performance, requirements for improvement of research, academic and scientific qualifications and also for administrative work.

In order to ensure the improvement of the qualifications, performance quality and professional development of ViA academic staff, lecturers are given the opportunity to supplement and improve their knowledge and professionalism by gaining international experience or by doing internship at higher education institutions / organizations abroad, as well as by participating in relevant seminars and conferences – within the framework of Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes.

The needs for improving the qualifications of lecturers are discussed at the level of study fields, appropriate funding is sought within the faculty, within the framework of various projects. It is possible for lecturers to participate in Erasmus+ mobility for qualification improvement. Funding from other sources is also used both for staff improvement visits and for participation in academic and professional conferences. Since 2018, European Social Fund project “Development of Academic Staff and Human Resources of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences” (SAM 8.2.2) is being implemented for the professional development of lecturers providing training in the following areas: English language, digital technology, academic leadership, while internship opportunities at commercial companies contribute to closer cooperation with the industry. For the long-term development of the higher education institution, it is planned to elect at least one international lecturer involved in the project in each study field and all participating doctoral students to academic positions.

All elected lecturers of the VRSTAO study field have participated in SAM 8.2.2 activities – they participated in academic leadership training and, if necessary, they improved their language or technological skills. Eight lecturers did internship with merchants within the framework of the project. During internship, the lecturers gained professional experience, got acquainted with the current developments in the industry, thus creating a connection with the industry.

Teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme is selected on the basis of the following criteria: direction of scientific activity and research interests, academic work experience and competence, knowledge in the fields related to the content of the study programme, scientific degree and qualification. A prerequisite for participation in the implementation of study programmes is a Master’s or doctoral degree, or the status of a doctoral degree candidate, studies in the later stages of doctoral studies, as well as English proficiency – at least B2 level, since the Master’s programme is implemented in English. The criteria for guest lecturers are as follows: a Master’s degree, as well as significant practical work experience in one of the business areas, foreign languages proficiency and experience in scientific work. The VRSTAO study field provides academic staff with the growth opportunities – lecturers having a doctorate degree are nominated for the positions of an assistant professor, associate professor and professor. During the accreditation period, the circle of academic personnel of the study field has been expanded, guest lecturers – excellent business practitioners from various fields of business – have been attracted.

The added value of the opportunities used for the implementation of the study process and ensuring the quality of the studies can be assessed through the fact that the composition of the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field meets the requirements for the implementation of an academic study programme at the Master’s level in English, as well as lecturers are actively involved in the implementation of international projects and preparation of new projects with international partners with whom cooperation is developed as a result of Erasmus+ mobility and exchange of lecturers.

2.3.7. Provide information on the number of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the relevant study programmes of the study field, as well as the analysis and assessment of the academic, administrative (if applicable) and research workload.

There are 35 lecturers working for the study field, of which 23 are elected and the rest are recruited as guest lecturers of which 13 have doctoral degrees. There are quite a few lecturers because some of them have part-time academic workloads, while guest lecturers teach only one study course. It is guest lecturers who are industry professionals or excellent specialists in their field and who ensure the connectivity of programmes with practice, which is objectively necessary for the acquisition of professional competences. Due to the above-mentioned circumstances, 9 lecturers combine their academic load with research at the Institute for Social, Economic and Humanitarian Studies (HESPI). Individual interviews with lecturers are also carried out each academic year to understand and analyse their teaching and research load, as well as their motivation to take on more or less workload. The research and administrative workload is regulated by individual lesson charts and load cards. Lecturers whose English language proficiency is below B2 will teach courses in Latvian. It should be noted that this is a self-assessment of language level, so most often lecturers at B2 level read scientific literature, write articles, but are not confident enough to communicate with large audiences.

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

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

It is important to emphasize that research conducted by the lecturers is integrated into the study process, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students are involved in research for conducting practical field studies and in projects in general.

In 2021, the VRSTAO study field has prepared and published more scientific publications (17) compared to other study fields of the higher education institution.

Information on the methodology of academic staff workload allocation and distribution is available in the ViA Remuneration Regulations.

Refer to the annex for basic information on teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field (see Annex 16).

Refer to the annex for Curriculum Vitae of academic staff (Curriculum Vitae in Europass format) (see Annex 17).

Refer to the annex for ViA Remuneration Regulations (see Annex 14).

2.3.8. Assessment of the support available for the students, including the support provided during the study process, as well as career and psychological support by specifying the support to be provided to specific student groups (for instance, students from abroad, part-time students, distance-learning students, students with special needs, etc.).

The director of the study field, study methodologists and the Administrative Department employees provide support for students during the study process. Regarding career support, in the autumn semester of 2019 ViA has renewed a service – career counselling and career planning support. This service is offered to students of all study programmes, without separating international students, taking into account their very small number at ViA. Support for students with special needs is planned depending on the specific health situation and needs of each student.

If necessary, there is an option to study in accordance with an individual plan. Those who are interested in ViA study courses, but cannot participate in full-time face-to-face studies, can use the opportunities provided by the Open University. Psychological support is especially important for the first-year students who have difficulty fitting into the ViA study process and starting an independent life away from home and family. ViA students have access also to support provided by psychological counselling on various problems and issues related to studies and personal life. Psychological counselling is a collaborative process that helps an individual deal with current life difficulties more successfully, get support in solving various issues, and identify different alternatives to a certain problem. No statistics are kept on students who have received career or psychological counselling, but in the academic year 2021/2022, 14 students sought career or psychological counselling.

Students can consult a psychologist about the following issues:

- Adapting to studies in the first year of studies – difficulties in coping with studies or settling into the student group;
- Study-related stress or anxiety; Time planning issues;
- Lack of motivation and difficulty concentrating on work; Relationship problems;
- Support in various crisis situations;
- Uncertainty or doubts about the right choice of studies or further career development.

In 2022, the “Student Journey” – a short and simple information scheme – was made to support the first-year students providing new students with information on what to do and who to turn to during the studies. Information is available at: <https://moodle.va.lv/course/view.php?id=775>

2.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

2.4.1. Description and assessment of the fields of scientific research and/or artistic creation in the study field, their compliance with the aims of the higher education institution/ college and the study field, and the development level of scientific research and artistic creation (provide a separate description of the role of the doctoral study programmes, if applicable).

ViA acquired the status of a scientific institution in 2015. Since then, the number of personnel elected to scientific positions has increased from seven to 25, and the funding attracted to scientific projects has

increased five times during this time period. The scientific activity of ViA is planned according to the “mission” principle, defining problems important to society, which cannot be solved within the framework of one scientific discipline. In this way, interdisciplinarity is promoted in scientific activity at ViA. ViA strategically focuses on attracting new talents within the framework of the post-doctoral programme, lecturers who are interested in the VRSTAO study field are also motivated to apply for this programme.

Since 2018, ViA has also been implementing the project “Support for effective participation of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences within the international scientific circles (ViA-Int)”, the goal of which is to promote the involvement of ViA research staff in international research projects, thus strengthening the capacity of researchers in the development of international projects, boosting researchers’ networking opportunities and foreign connections, as well as developing research opportunities within research sub-directions of ViA. It is expected that ViA lecturers (including from VRSTAO study field) as a result of the project, ViA will take part in preparing applications for at least seven ERDF supported projects as well as programmes marked above the quality threshold within the “Horizon 2020” and the EU’s 9th framework programme.

Research activities within the VRSTAO study field are mostly organized through the ViA HESPI Institute. Most of the teaching staff involved in the VRSTAO study programmes has joined together in the research sub-direction “Sustainable economy and knowledge society”. The development of this research sub-direction is closely related to the activity of the VRSTAO study field, in accordance with ViA’s strategic goals defined in the ViA Strategy for 2016 – 2020. Research activity is consistent most of all with the goal under the priority “Education”: to provide a modern and high-quality education offer based on research results meeting the demand and forecasts of the labour market and complying with good international practice. Scientific research has taken place within the study field during the current accreditation period thanks to the high activity of teaching staff in attracting research grants and funding of other projects. The strategic research direction of the study field is sustainable tourism development. Academic staff has been conducting research in the following topics: strategic development of tourism, monitoring of tourism, tourism in specially protected natural territories, interaction between tourism and the environment, history of Latvian tourism, museum communication, spatial and regional planning of tourism, documentary heritage, dark tourism, site marketing and branding, strategic processes of tourism, tourism mobility, impact of events and marketing, application of ICT in tourism research and public events, management of intellectual organizations in regard to organizing tourism and leisure, human resource development and self-sustainability, business games, research related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Spatial Research Laboratory (headed by I.Druva-Druvaskalne until 2021, and by associate professor A.Klepers from 2022) is very important, its purpose is to provide support for research of the national economic sectors, using geospatial data, with an emphasis on the tourism sector. The main precursors are as follows: the monitoring of the flow of visitors in specially protected natural territories; time, space and behaviour measurements of tourist mobility and the flow of visitors to public events, using geographic information systems (GIS) and various devices for measuring the flow of tourists and visitors.

Six lecturers of the VRSTAO study field are experts of the Latvian Council of Science: Prof. A. Līviņa (economics and management), Prof. J. Kalnačs (music, visual arts and architecture), Associate Professor L. Veliverronena (other social sciences, including interdisciplinary social sciences and military science), Prof. M. Leščevica (economics and entrepreneurship), Prof. S. Rozentāle (economics and entrepreneurship).

During the reporting period, the most important research projects in which the elected lecturers of the VRSTAO study field were involved are as follows:

- **State research programme projects:**
- “The importance of research of documentary heritage in creating synergies between research and society” (DMS) (No. VPP-IZM-2018/1-0022); 2018– 2021 (academic staff: L.Veliverronena,

- J.Smaļinskis, A.Līviņa, J.Kalnačs, I.Grīnfelde, A.Andersons; students A.Mežgaile, K.Grīnberga, Maļčjonoka, G.Salnits, G.Zariņa, S.Resne)
- “Sustainable management of land resources and landscapes: assessment of challenges, methodological solutions and proposals” (LandLat4Pol) VPP-VARAM-ITAZRI-2020/1 0002; (academic staff: A.Klepers, A.Līviņa, students A.Uzāriņa)
 - 2014-2017 EKOSOC-LV projects:
 - 2.2. Innovation and development of entrepreneurship in Latvia in accordance with the smart specialization strategy (M.Leščevica),
 - 2.3. Latvian rural and regional development processes and opportunities in the context of the knowledge economy. (S. Rozentāle, M. Ore, A. Andersons),
 - 2.8. Cultural environment development, preservation of environmental diversity and urbanization processes in the context of balanced development of Latvia (Teaching staff: A.Līviņa, L.Veliverronena, J.Smaļinskis, I.Grīnfelde, J.Kalnačs; students-graduates from the study programme *Strategic management of tourism* I.Smukā, R.Vasile).
 - 2.9. The impact of changes in social awareness on the sustainable provision of ecosystem services. (A.Klepers, I.Druva-Druvaskalne);
 - **Latvian Council of Science, Fundamental and Applied Research Projects** lzp-2019/1-0241. MemoTours – The complicated historical heritage in Latvia: Holocaust tourism sites within memorial culture, modern tourism demand and supply. Academic staff. A.van der Steina, associated professor.
 - In 2021, **the post-doctoral research support project** “Tourism Intelligence Latvia” was completed, which was implemented by Klepers (leading researcher, associated professor),
 - **LIFE integrated development project** “Optimization of the management and maintenance of the Natura 2000 protected territories” (LatViaNature) 2020-2027 (academic staff: A.Līviņa, A.Klepers, student A.Mežgaile)
 - Projects funded and supported by the **Latvian Environmental Protection Fund**:
 - Technological solutions for managing the flow of visitors in specially protected natural territories. From 01.06.2021 to 31.10.2022. Head of the project – leading researcher A. Klepers;
 - Monitoring of visitors to specially protected natural territories and digital solutions for more efficient visitor flow management. 04.2021 - 15.02.2022. Head of the project – leading researcher A. Klepers. Within the framework of this project, a visitor survey was conducted in 9 specially protected natural territories, both students and graduates were involved in data collection. The online environment *ArcGis online 123* is used for the survey.
 - Project “Youth to youth about environment”. Academic year of 2018/2019. Lead by I.Druva-Druvaskalne.
 - **Interreg and Baltic Sea region programme projects:**
 - INTERREG projects “Boosting Tourism Business Growth through Higher Professional Education”. 2016 - 2019; Academic staff: I.Grīnfelde, L.Veliverronena
 - Expert-examination research “Situational analysis of existing support instruments and development of conceptual proposals for improving tourism industry policy”
 - Baltic Sea region project “MAMBA” on transport solutions in rural areas co-financed by the European Union. 2017-2020. Academic staff: S.Rozentāle, A.Līviņa, S.Brigsa.
 - Tourism sector analysis. Drawing-up an action plan for the development of the tourism offer in Latvia. INTERREG Europe programme project BRANDTour. Ordered by the Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia. 2018-2019; Academic staff: A. van der Steina, L.Veliverronena, I.Grīnfelde, A.Klepers
 - Drawing-up the action plan for the development of the tourism offer in Latvia within the framework of the Interreg Europe programme project BRANDTour;
 - Implementation of activities of the project No. of CB688 “Explore the lakes / Lakesperience” of the Central Baltic Sea Region Programme for 2014 - 2020. 2018-2019. A.Klepers, I.Druva-Druvaskalne

- Interreg Europe cross-border programme project “Cult-RinG” – “Cultural routes as an investment for growth and employment” is implemented with the support of the European Regional Development Fund and Vidzeme Tourism Association. Academic staff: Z.Kudure, L.Veliverronena, A.Līviņa
- Interreg Europe programme project “Culture and Heritage for Responsible, Innovative and Sustainable Tourism Actions” – CHRISTA (project No. PGI00057). Development of Vidzeme tourism development strategy for 2018 - 2025. Academic staff: Veliverronena, I.Grīnfelde, A.Klepers, A.Līviņa
- **Research commissioned by the Ministry of Environment Protection and Regional Development** “HELCOM guidelines for sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism in the coastal zones of the Baltic Sea region”; 2020. Academic staff: A.Līviņa, A.Klepers, student A.Mežgaile
- **Research commissioned by the Ministry of Environment Protection and Regional Development** “Expert support for the Latvian-Russian cross-border cooperation programme for 2014-2020 for determining the initial value of the result indicator of the priority 2.1”. Academic staff: A.Līviņa
- **ERASMUS+** project “Development of skills in coastal tourism” (Skills 4CMT); 2020 – 2023
- Project Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions (E³UDRES²) of **ERASMUS+** programme initiative “European University”.
- **Municipal orders:**
 - Ludza partnership project “Tourist-friendly Latgale entrepreneur in the age of digitalization”. Project operation period October 2019 – November 2021. Academic staff: I.Druva-Druvaskalne, A.Līviņa, S.Rozentāle
 - Development of the administrative structure of the local government of the newly created Valmiera municipality. 2020-2021. Academic staff: Līviņa, S.Rozentāle, A.Andersons
 - Development of Ogre municipality tourism development strategy for 2022-2027. 2022 - now. Academic staff: Druva-Druvaskalne, I.Grīnfelde, A.Līviņa, a student.

The involvement of VRSTAO lecturers in the grant projects of Valmiera municipality is significant as it contributes to solving economic and entrepreneurial problems relevant to the region. During the previous reporting period, there were two such grant projects: “Possibilities and prerequisites for attracting human resources (including talents) to the city of Valmiera. Development of population attraction strategy for the city of Valmiera” and “Development of the administrative structure of the local government of the newly created Valmiera municipality”.

During the reporting period, elected lecturers and students of the VRSTAO study field were involved in the organization of some international conferences. The most important of them were as follows:

- “Biosphere reserve. Then. Now. From now on” (2017) (Latvia);
- “Boosting excellence in higher tourism education. Cooperation between educators and industry.” (2018) (Latvia);
- “How should we live in cultural diversity? Building sustainable communities in times of fear” (2019) (Latvia);
- “2nd and 3rd Joint International Conference on Tourism, Hospitality and Sustainable Development Goal” (2020, 2022) (India);
- 3rd International scientific conference Society. Technology. Solutions. (Latvia) 2022
- 11th International Conference on Monitoring and Management of Visitors in Recreational and Protected Areas (MMV11) (2022) (Latvia).

The involvement of VRSTAO lecturers in scientific research is subordinated to the priorities specified in the ViA Development Strategy for 2016 - 2020: in the field of education – to develop study programmes and study fields; in the field of science – to develop research which would be a proactive response to society’s challenges in accordance with study fields and external demand; in the field of knowledge

transfer and leadership of ideas – to implement the transfer of knowledge to cooperation partners, fulfilling the role of the intellectual leader of Vidzeme region in promoting the growth of the country and the region. Research activities carried out by the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field also comply with the specific strategic goals of studies set by the VRSTAO study field – to provide the content of internationally competitive higher education in the field of tourism and leisure, through research, to promote the VRSTAO study field as a centre for learning, popularizing and supporting entrepreneurship in Vidzeme. The scientific and research activity of the lecturers of the VRSTAO study field corresponds to the research goals – to develop the study field as a scientific research centre in the field of sustainable development of regional tourism and recreation, to promote the involvement of Master's and doctoral students in research.

2.4.2. The relation between scientific research and/or artistic creation and the study process, including the description and assessment of the use of the outcomes in the study process.

Scientific activities and preparation of publications both for academic editions and in a popular scientific format are carried out in connection with the content, goals and tasks of study programmes. Besides, joint research projects of lecturers and students are carried out within the framework of the Bachelor and Master papers in such areas as tourism monitoring, youth motivation, cultural history, research of different segments of travellers, dark tourism, availability of tourism infrastructure for different groups of travellers, etc., and since 2020 – also various studies related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following examples can be mentioned: Liene Lāce, the 4th year student of the Tourism Organization and Management programme (since February 2020 – a graduate), during May - June 2020 wrote an international scientific publication in English “The inclusion of foreign journeys and works of Latvian Creative Travellers in the 1920s and 1930s in the tourism industry” on the basis of research conducted within the framework of her Bachelor paper (supervisor, professor J. Kalnačs) and by support of the State research programme DMS a publication in Latvian about her Bachelor paper research for the professional magazine “Domuzīme”.

Various results of the projects listed in paragraph 2.4.1 are integrated into the lecture content of study courses at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, publications written within the framework of lecturers' projects are included in the list of mandatory or additional literature of study courses. By regularly attending and speaking at both local and international scientific conferences, lecturers keep up with the developments within the industry and current research directions. In this way, the content of the study courses is improved, and the latest scientific findings and research results are included in the study courses.

During the accreditation period, a qualitative and quantitative leap in scientific research has taken place in the VRSTAO study field, which has ensured the integration of the latest theoretical findings and entrepreneurial practice examples into the study content, thereby updating and improving the study content in accordance with the current developments of the national economy and the industry.

2.4.3. Description and assessment of the international cooperation in the field of scientific research and/or artistic creation by specifying any joint projects, researches, etc. Specify those study programmes, which benefit from this cooperation. Specify the future plans for

the development of international cooperation in the field of scientific research and/or artistic creation.

The limited funding for science in higher education forces to focus on project-based research, which is also observed in the VRSTAO study field. All elected lecturers are involved in scientific projects at a national or international level.

Since 2019, every year the Nordplus Newelra intensive course programme is prepared and implemented together with our cooperation partners from Finland and Lithuania; both students and 2 accompanying lecturers participate in the programme. The topics covered are as follows: "Story Telling as Contributor for Development in Rural Area Tourism", "Spa & Wellness in rural areas" and "Product development workshop to create new tourism products in Rural Areas". In 2022, the intensive course was held in Latvia and cooperation partners met in our country.

Furthermore, since 2012, the Nordplus project application is prepared together with our cooperation partners from Estonia and Lithuania, and students within the course "Field trip" together with the students of the partner higher education institution go on a self-organized field-trip to one of the cooperation partner countries. As a result of the project, the theoretical knowledge in excursion management and planning was put into practice, students' intercultural experience and communication skills were enriched, and knowledge about the specifics of the tourism and leisure sector in the partner countries was broadened.

The ERASMUS+ project "Development of Skills in Coastal Tourism" (Skills 4CMT) is being implemented; 2020 - 2023 (I. Grīnfelde, L. Veliverronena), expanding the range of elective courses available to students and the internationalisation of studies.

By help of the VRSTAO lecturers, an important cross-border cooperation promotion project of small and medium businesses "EDU-SMEs: Curriculum alignment and cross-border cooperation with SMEs", Interreg, Central Baltic (2015-2017) was implemented where the project manager on the part of Latvia was M. Lešceviča, participants A.Andersons, I.Grīnfelde. The implementation of the NatureBizz project "Promotion of entrepreneurship within the framework of green economy growth" (2018-2020) (M.Lešceviča, A.Andersons. I.Grīnfelde) has also been completed; this project aimed to improve *entrepreneurial skills* and develop the competitiveness of green entrepreneurship in the central region of the Baltic Sea.

A significant contribution is made to the following projects: Interreg BOOSTED (2016-2019), INTERREG CENTRAL BALTIC programme - project "Boosting Tourism Business Growth through Higher Professional Education" (I.Grīnfelde, L.Veliverronena, A.Andersons) (*The BOOSTED project involved an international study of the needs of the tourism labour market and the introduction of topical courses in the study programme*) L.Veliverronena participated as a researcher in the project CHRISTA, INTERREG (2017-2018) and in the project Cult-RingG, INTERREG (2018), in which she conducted research on the development of the tourism industry in the context of strategic planning. A. Līviņa participated in the networking of the Nordplus programme "Network Circular Economy Future" (2017-2018) and "Baltic - Nordic Network for Creating New Earning Logics in Rural Areas". Each of these projects has a direct or indirect positive impact on the offer of tourism studies - new topical themes are included in study courses, cooperation with the tourism industry and partner universities is strengthened.

Various projects are being prepared within the framework of the project Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions (E³UDRES²) of Erasmus+ initiative "European University"; several intentions currently are related to tourism projects.

VRSTAO has also been a co-organizer of the "Joint International Conference on Tourism, Hospitality and Sustainable Development Goal" in India for two years, fostering cooperation with the country, both in

terms of exchanges of teaching experience and teaching and research. Moreover, scientific publications and/or book chapters are prepared every year in cooperation with our international partners.

VRSTAO is also a member of various international networks such as ITEM – the International Tourism Master Network (provides for the opportunity for the Master's degree programmes in tourism to cooperate, promoting student publication opportunities, conference visits, etc.), as well as the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research (ATLAS) with the goal of developing international education and research initiatives in the field of tourism and leisure. The ATLAS is a forum that promotes staff and student exchange, international research, as well as development of curriculum and professional skills. Currently, the ATLAS has members in approximately 50 countries.

In general, international cooperation specifically in research is one of the directions that must be further developed, because currently a good level has been reached in the field of studies and academic work (VRSTAO lecturers go on international teaching visits on a regular basis, guest lecturers from international higher education institutions are attracted every year), however, in science the intensity of cooperation could be higher. At the end of 2019, the development of ViA Scientific Activity Strategy for the next 10 years was commenced, which is currently ongoing and the development of international cooperation in science is one of the priority goals to be achieved. This can be done by identifying more precisely and communicating the “niche” scientific fields of ViA to possible partners, as well as by activating the network of partners, working purposefully to attract funding, changing the focus from competing for funding available on a national scale to attracting resources from the European Commission, and other financial sources.

2.4.4. Specify the way how the higher education institution/ college promotes the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research and/or artistic creation. Provide the description and assessment of the activities carried out by the academic staff in the field of scientific research and/or artistic creation relevant to the study field by providing examples.

Research activities within the VRSTAO study field are mainly organized through the ViA HESPI institute (including the VIA HESPI UNESCO department “Human and Biosphere”), where several lecturers are elected: Prof. J. Kalnačs, Associate Prof. A. Klepers, Prof. M. Rozentāle, Prof. M. Lešceviča, Prof. A. Līviņa, Assistant Professor L. Veliverronena, lecturer Aigars Andersons, lecturer I. Grīnfelde, lecturer J. Smaļinskis, lecturer L. Ločmele, Associated Professor V. Silkāne, lecturer A. Andersons. The lecturers involved in the study field operate under the HESPI research direction “Sustainable national economy and knowledge society”, engaging in research under one of the four sub-directions. Research topics cover aspects of the national and regional economy, environment and management. A. Andersons has obtained a Master's degree in social systems modelling, and therefore represents also another research direction – Sociotechnical system modelling technologies, which is one of the research directions at the SSII scientific institute. Involvement in research is also stimulated by the activities of the HESPI Institute, attracting funding and commissioned research.

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

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

Participation in conferences is funded by the budget for scientific projects, and in such cases participation is related to the execution of the tasks planned within the project. In case when a conference is attended outside scientific projects, such expenses can be covered from Erasmus+ funding. Since ViA is implementing the project “Support for effective participation of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences within the international scientific circles (ViA-Int)” (2018-2022), the conference expenses can also be covered from the funding for this project. It should be emphasized that the central priority of ViA is the preparation of high-level publications for academic journals, therefore no specific goals are set for attending conferences by ViA lecturers outside scientific projects.

Rather significant number of lecturers involved in the VRSTAO study field obtained a doctoral degree in the areas corresponding to the study field during the previous accreditation period. The topics of the doctoral theses reflect the lecturers’ extensive expertise in the tourism and leisure industry and in research conducted in the particular field. The topics of their theses and information about the year of defence are summarized in the table below (see Table 8), besides, there is also added information of the topics of the doctoral theses of the doctoral students who are elected lecturers and involved in the implementation of the programmes of the study field.

Table 8. *The doctoral theses which are defended and planned to be defended by the lecturers involved in the VRSTAO study field.*

Lecturer's name, surname	Scientific degree and academic position	Topic of the doctoral thesis	Year of defence
Linda Veliverronena	PhD, Assistant Professor	<i>Conceptualizing Engagement Modes: Understanding Museum-Audience Relationships in Latvian Museums (Tartu University)</i>	2016
Vineta Silkāne	Dr.psych, Mg.math., Assistant Professor	<i>Correlation of Procrastination, Discounting and Personality Traits with Health Behaviour (University of Latvia)</i>	2018
<i>Liene Ločmele</i>	Doctoral degree candidate, lecturer	Construction of Latvian Identity in the Economic Emigration Discourse	<i>Planned</i>
<i>Aigars Andersons</i>	<i>Doctoral programme “Sociotechnical system modelling”, lecturer</i>	<i>Integrated Service-Oriented Business Model in Digitally Transformable Ecosystems</i>	<i>Planned</i>
<i>Gaļina Bukovska</i>	<i>Doctoral programme “Economics and Entrepreneurship”, guest lecturer</i>	<i>Business and Event Tourism Industry in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia: Tendencies and Development Opportunities</i>	<i>Planned in 2023</i>
<i>Santa Lemša</i>	<i>Doctoral programme “Economics and Entrepreneurship”, guest lecturer</i>	<i>Challenges of Complex Analytics Adaptation in Latvian Organizations</i>	<i>Planned in 2023</i>

It should be emphasized that lecturers are also involved in various activities (they are conducting courses, seminars, providing counselling, developing strategic planning documents for the private and public sector, and providing other practical involvement and support for the tourism and leisure

industry), which are not scientific activities, however, they provide a very important support for the private and public sector, contribute to raising the level of public awareness and understanding.

In addition to the indexed publications, it is necessary to highlight another aspect of scientific activity: research activities that have resulted in diverse content such as scientific articles and popular scientific publications in various media, radio and TV interviews, media criticism and commentaries/opinion articles on the current developments in the tourism and leisure industry.

During the previous accreditation period, lecturers of the VRSTAO study field actively participated in Vidzeme region pupils' scientific research activities (PSRA) by counselling pupils during the process of writing their papers, by organizing conferences, reviewing and evaluating papers.

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

During the reporting period, lecturers involved in VRSTAO's study field programs have around 200 scientific publications. The lecturers have been involved in more than 30 different projects, of which more than 10 have been international projects.

Analyzing the scientific research situation in the VRSTAO study field, it can be concluded that there is a wide spectrum of research topics, however, basically research is related to the tourism entrepreneurship sector, development of regional tourism, tourism monitoring.

Refer to the annex for the summary of scientific publications (see Annex 19).

2.4.5. Specify how the involvement of the students in scientific research and/ or applied research and/or artistic creation activities is promoted. Provide the assessment and description of the involvement of the students of all-level study programmes in the relevant study field in scientific research and/ or applied research and/or artistic creation activities by giving examples of the opportunities offered to and used by the students.

An important emphasis in organizing ViA research activities is on the involvement of students in scientific research. Since 2007, ViA student research conference plays an important role in building and development of student research skills. The purpose of the conference is to promote students' involvement in science and research, to boost the development of creative abilities and students' professional growth, supplementing their knowledge, as well as to identify the best and most successful research authors in various branches of science.

Students are also involved in the preparation of scientific publications, for example, within the framework of the State Research Programme's (SRP) project "The importance of documentary heritage research, creating synergies between research and society", a scientific article was published as a result of collaboration among the professor, Master's students and a scientific consultant from the USA: Līviņa A., Mežgaile A., Grīnberga K., Singh N. – [A Study on Youth Behaviour towards the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve in Latvia. Published in: Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism, Vol 12 No 5 \(2021\)](#), and Arklina A., Grinberga K., Singh N., Livina A. – Influence of Cognitive and Emotional Advertisements on Biosphere Reserve Image and Visitation Intention for Youth. Published in: Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism, [S.l.], v. 11, n. 6, p. 1391 - 1399, Sep. 2020

Students are involved in the activities of various research projects, for example:

- Latvian Environmental Protection Fund – project “Youth to youth about environment”. Academic year of 2018/2019. Students of the programme *Tourism Organization and Management* were involved in research within the study course Tourism Geography (I.Druva-Druvaskalne), they did field research in the territory of the Northern Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve, interviewing local residents and surveying tourist facilities. In spring of 2019, a scientific publication on this topic was prepared and published.
- Postgraduate students S. Resne, G. Zariņa and Z. Maļčjonoka were involved in the State Research Programme’s (SRP) project “The importance of research of documentary heritage, creating synergies between research and society” and wrote their Master papers within the framework of this project, exploring topics such as the use of reliable resources in planning senior tourism, documentary heritage in the creation of a tourism product, environmental objects and exploration of documentary heritage. Master’s programme graduate (January 2021) G. Salnits also wrote his Master paper within the framework of this project and continued his work on the development of the idea “Smart Travel School” and its approbation in autumn of 2021. The initiative of such a school was also supported by the local government of Valmiera municipality with EUR 1000 co-financing.
- It is a common practice to integrate research or creative projects into the VRSTAO study courses, field trips and integrated field internship. For instance, one of such projects is Cēsis region rural partnership project “Study of target groups (visitor behaviour) of the National Parks”. The project was led by the researcher I.Bērziņa. In June and September of 2018, during the Visitor Days of Slītere National Park and Gauja National Park, 2nd year students of the study programmes “Tourist guide – travel and event organizer” and “Tourism organization and management” of the study field *Tourism Organization Management* were involved in surveying visitors and interviewing entrepreneurs.

Student involvement in research is also boosted by encouraging them to apply to the “Competition of Student Scientific Research Papers” announced by the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia. Every year student research papers get award-winning places, for example in 2020 second place was won by Anita Vaikule, a student of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, who wrote her Bachelor paper “Development of Promotion Tool – Digital Map “Sēlija Bicycle Routes” – for Sēlija Bicycle Tourism Destination”. Supervisor: Iveta Druva-Druvaskalne. Third place in the competition was won by Liene Lāce from the Faculty of Social Sciences of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, she wrote her Bachelor paper “The inclusion of foreign journeys and works of Latvian Creative Travellers in the 1920s and 1930s in the tourism industry”. Supervisor: Jānis Kalnačs. Furthermore, in 2021, all three prize-winning places were won by students of the VRSTAO study programmes: Amanda Valtere, the author of the Bachelor paper “Development of a Long-Distance Pedestrian Route in Latgale” (supervisor: Iveta Druva-Druvaskalne, Mg. geogr.), won the first place and the main prize. Second place was won by Māra Šilausa, the author of the paper “Abandoned Tourism in Latvia. How to Sell it?” Supervisor: Professor, Dr.art., Jānis Kalnačs. Third place was won by Madara Stukmane, the author of the Bachelor paper “Travel Habits of Vegetarians in the Context of Lifestyle”. Supervisor: lecturer Mg.sc.soc. Ilze Grīnfelde.

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences received the International Green Flag which was awarded to ViA for the academic year of 2021/2022. ViA is the only higher education institution in Latvia that won the Green Flag award this year. The head of the eco-council is Professor A. Līviņa. VRSTAO students V. Bišofe, P. Zvirbule and J. Kalinčuka, as well as lecturer I. Druva-Druvaskalne are also actively involved in the activities of the council.

2.4.6. Provide a brief description and assessment of the forms of innovation (for instance, product, process, marketing, and organisational innovation) generally used in the higher education institution, especially in study field subject to the assessment, by giving the

respective examples and assessing their impact on the study process.

During the reporting period, the VRSTAO study field mainly focused on the development of a product – a competitive study offer – innovation. Several national and international projects and initiatives related to the tourism industry have been implemented (*more information in paragraph 2.4.1 of the Self-Assessment Report*), as a result of which presenting of current and innovative study course content has been promoted, attracting also international professionals.

In cooperation with the ViA Knowledge and Technology Centre and Valmiera Business Incubator, a pre-incubation platform has been developed to support new tourism entrepreneurs. There is an opportunity to get ready for entrepreneurial activities and start a business already during studies, the platform provides for the opportunities to work in three laboratories. The Business Trial Laboratory (B-LAB) was established to support and assess ViA students' business ideas before starting entrepreneurial activities, providing the necessary advisory and infrastructure support. The innovation laboratory (I_LAB) is a place for solving cooperation challenges of students – entrepreneurs – organizations, using a creative and innovative approach, there is an opportunity to work on real and innovative products/services for the needs of a specific company. The Student Internship Laboratory (S-LAB) offers an opportunity for students to do study internship or to gain practical experience working in one of ViA's laboratories and developing products and services for various institutions and organizations, the opportunity to practically develop a project within the academic year or in a shorter period of time; students are provided with mentors (lecturers, entrepreneurs) and the necessary training.

Currently, the project “Vidzeme Innovation Programme for Students – VIPS” No. 1.1.1.3/21/A/009 is implemented. Within the programme, teams of the most capable and ambitious young people solve the challenges of companies and institutions in Vidzeme and Latvia. Bold business ideas of young people are supported. By participating in the programme, young people can receive scholarships, grants for the development of their ideas, and the best teams or individual participants also receive cash prizes. This programme is open to any student, senior secondary school or technical school pupil, as the work is mostly done in interdisciplinary teams.

A study approach focused on problem-based learning plays an important role in the VRSTAO study field. For example, the intensive course “Problem-based learning project” is held every year, where solutions are sought for real-life challenges or for process improvement of tourism entrepreneurs. In autumn of 2022, it is planned to integrate this course together with the project Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions (E³UDRES²) of Erasmus+ initiative “European University” – promoting internationality and interdisciplinarity.

Such innovations enrich the study content, ensure improvement of training quality, as well as help students to adjust their way of thinking and set future goals for the tourism and recreation organization and management.

Process innovations also played an important role. Processes and information circulation were improved, new ICT solutions were introduced for internal information circulation and mobilization, as well as for work with students (Moodle, MS365). A very important innovation block is technological innovation, investments in the expansion of ICT opportunities. Since autumn of 2020, lecturers have also access to a modernly equipped multimedia studio, where it is possible to record lectures, as well as to conduct online studies using a light board. There is also an equipped classroom, where it is possible to organize small group work, project-based study process. These

improvements were made within the project “Next Generation Micro Cities of Europe” in cooperation with Valmiera Municipality, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, and other partners.

Pedagogical innovations are one of the cross-cutting themes of the European Social Fund project “Development of Academic Staff and Human Resources of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences” (SAM 8.2.2.), implemented since 2018, within the framework of which lecturers observe colleagues’ lectures, discuss what has been observed, and opportunities for professional development. Within the framework of this project, a new form of cooperation with industry companies is also being tested – opportunities for lecturers to do internship at merchant companies, thus contributing to closer cooperation with the industry.

The impact of innovations on the study process can be assessed as high – lecturers have modernized their study methods, their professionalism has improved, as a result lecturers have expanded their range of teaching methods; links established with industry companies within the internship programme have also expanded the opportunities to attract guest lecturers. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, several lecturers also taught online using the TV studio and the equipment of the Multimedia Laboratory.

2.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

2.5.1. Provide the assessment as to how the cooperation with different institutions from Latvia (higher education institutions/ colleges, employers, employers’ organisations, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, scientific institutes, etc.) within the study field contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field. Specify the criteria by which the cooperation partners for the study field and the relevant study programmes are selected and how the cooperation is organised by describing the cooperation with employers. In addition, specify the mechanism for the attraction of the cooperation partners.

The cooperation implemented in the VRSTAO study field is subordinate to the achievement of the strategic goals and results of the study field. The main criteria for starting cooperation: opportunities for improving and organizing study programme content to ensure competitiveness; positioning of the study field in the higher education market; opportunities for attracting international students; expanding the network of cooperation partners at the national and international level; gaining international experience; opportunities to develop the study field’s scientific research and increase its capacity, opportunities for student involvement in research; deepening cooperation with entrepreneurs of the region and the public sector in order to improve the study content, assessment of student professional competences, and implementation of innovative solutions of the industry.

The focus on cooperation with various tourism industry partners is the most important competitiveness advantage compared to other study programmes. Direct cooperation and impact on the processes taking place in the industry create relevant content of the study courses and at the same time help find a practical connection between students and employers.

The ViA VRSTAO study field is represented in the professional network through involvement in the operation of such organizations as: the Association of Latvian Travel Agents and Operators, the Association of Hotels and Restaurants of Latvia, Vidzeme Tourism Association, Latvian Convention

Bureau. There is also a regular and versatile cooperation with the Tourism Department of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, the Nature Conservation Agency, the Tourism Association of Gauja National Park, the Latvian Country Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs”, guide associations, and the tourism advisory council of Valmiera and its surroundings.

The [Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 \(Only in Latvian\)](#) of Vidzeme Region defines leisure and tourism as smart specialization with high development potential, and ViA is positioned as a cornerstone in the region’s “Knowledge Triangle” (higher education institution, entrepreneurs and municipalities). The lecturers of the study field have established good cooperation with the administration of Vidzeme planning region, where students conducted research on issues important to local governments and did internship. Within the framework of cooperation, information is exchanged on a regular basis, students are involved in research, and internship places are provided.

The ViA VRSTAO study field actively participates in the improvement of sites and development of the destination management network. The initiation of the Gauja National Park Tourism Cluster initiative and the leading role in the strategy development, strategic counselling, and market research are especially noteworthy. Furthermore, there is cooperation between VIA HESPI’s UNESCO Department “Biosphere and Human” and the Nature Conservation Agency in regard to the Northern Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve strategic development and research issues. Also, the study field is involved in the development of a joint cooperation model between local governments of Vidzeme and surrounding municipalities, strategic counselling, as well as in the development of methodology for conducting the largest Latvian tourism export market research, etc. Also, in the context of destination management and applied projects, cooperation with Vidzeme Planning Region is worth highlighting. For example, the book “Tourism in Latvia through the centuries. History, development and perspective” can be mentioned. The following lecturers of the study field are among the authors of the book: Juris Smaļinskis, Agita Liviņa and Andris Klepers, Aija van der Steina. Published by Turība University and LIAA. The book is available at the following website: <https://www.liaa.gov.lv/lv/media/5759/download> (Only in Latvian).

VRSTAO lecturers are actively involved in advising, further educating and informing not only students, but also graduates and other industry professionals about the latest studies in the hospitality, leisure and tourism industry. In cooperation with municipalities, several lecturers from the VRSTAO study field are actively involved in organizing tourist guide training and conducting classes, sharing the accumulated know-how of ViA and at the same time creating feedback and further cooperation within the study process.

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

Within the framework of SAM 8.2.2 project, lecturers of the study field do internship at the companies of the industry, thus their professionalism is improved, and a circle of cooperation partners is expanded. One of the ways to build cooperation with the industry is to involve graduates in the study process of the study field and extracurricular activities through ViA ALUMNI movement, which should be activated in the future.

The main criteria for cooperation with employers (employers for our graduates are the municipality, their departments (Tourism information centres), state institutions such as Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA), industry non-governmental organisations (NGO). Hence, the existing cooperation refers to employers in different fields, not only to the narrow private sector): the need to cooperate with the industry in order to understand its current developments for the purpose of improving the quality of studies, to involve high-level professionals in teaching and improving the study process, to involve students in applied research at companies, to develop a stable network of internships, to promote student employment after graduation. Upon choosing cooperation partners, the interest and openness on the part of the employers are also an important factor.

The attraction of employers takes place through the ViA Advisory Board and the advisory councils established in the study field, and through the attraction of professionals as guest lecturers, and their involvement in the work of the State examination commissions, while lecturers take part in the professional organizations of the industry, cooperate with municipalities and business associations, do internship at companies (lecturer I. Druva-Druvaskalne – at SIA “Karšu izdevniecība Jāņu sēta”, Associate Professor A. Klepers – at SIA “Envirotech”, Professor A. Līviņa – at SIA “Baltic Travel Group”, lecturer I. Ābols – at SIA “Baltic Travel Group” and “TLG Hotell Latvija”, lecturers I. Gīnfelde and A. Lutere – at SIA “Valmiermuižas pils”), as well as through the ViA Alumni movement activities.

Within the framework of the VRSTAO study field, the cooperation with various Latvian and international institutions are fully subordinated to and directed towards the achievement of the study field’s strategic goals and study outcomes in education, research, knowledge transfer and leadership of ideas, ensuring internationally competitive higher professional education in the field of tourism and recreation in the country, developing the study field as scientific research centre in the area of sustainable development of regional tourism and leisure and as a platform for starting a tourism business, generation and approbation of innovative solutions, promoting the commercialization of knowledge.

Refer to the annex for the list of cooperation agreements (see Annex 20).

2.5.2. Provide the assessment as to how the cooperation with different institutions from abroad (higher education institutions/ colleges, employers, employers’ organisations, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, scientific institutes, etc.) within the study field contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field. Specify the criteria by which the cooperation partners suitable for the study field and the relevant study programmes are selected and how the cooperation is organised by describing the cooperation with employers. In addition, specify the mechanism for the attraction of the cooperation partners.

In general, ViA provides various opportunities for cooperation abroad: student and staff mobility within the Erasmus+ programme, inter-university cooperation within the framework of cooperation agreements (apart from Erasmus+), cooperation within international organizations/partner networks, cooperation with international companies, municipalities, governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The internationalization of the study field includes two directions of activity: within the European Union (EU) and outside the EU. ViA has entered into approximately 80 agreements regarding cooperation with international higher education institutions. It allows successful implementation of cooperation activities with various ViA partners, such as exchange of students and lecturers, exchange of experience, joint projects, courses, seminars, guest lectures, research and conferences, receiving feedback for assessing the quality of studies.

Internationalization and cooperation with the industry is an integral part of the VRSTAO study field, without which the existence and further development of the study field is impossible. That is why internationalization and cooperation within study courses and internships are perceived as a self-evident norm. One of the undefined standards of the VRSTAO study field is purposeful studies or internship completion abroad for at least one study semester. International cooperation partners are strategically selected for the thematic directions of VRSTAO within the context of students’ professional career development opportunities or international research promotion opportunities. Close internationalization contacts are built with the countries of the Baltic Sea region, as well as with the countries that are priority export markets for Latvian tourism.

Up to now, the proportion of VRSTAO graduates who have studied or have done internship abroad

exceeds 50%; currently, due to Nordplus project activities, it is already approaching 100%.

The main emphases of the ViA VRSTAO study field in the international environment are related to the following:

- ViA VRSTAO is a member of the international tourism and recreation academic education association ATLAS – the only one in the Baltics <http://www.atlas-euro.org/members/tabid/58/language/en-US/Default.aspx#Latvia>;
- In 2019, ViA became a member of the World Cultural Tourism Association;
- In 2020, the Department of Tourism and Leisure Studies became a member of the International Tourism Master Network (ITMN);
- Support mechanisms for international study initiatives in the context of the international activities of the VRSTAO lecturers for the promotion of cooperation networks and targeted international activities of ViA: exchange studies, internships abroad, guest lecturers, field trips and other activities that promote internationalization; lecturer private initiatives in connection with representation in the professional sector;
- Mandatory elective courses in English with exchange students;
- Long-term cooperation with the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, resulting in a possibility to learn Chinese (a teacher from China every year, teaching materials);
- ViA library is the depository library of the UN World Tourism Organization – the only one in the Baltic States <http://publications.unwto.org/depositary-libraries?page=1>;
- In 2019, ViA established the UNESCO Department “Biosphere and Human”, which indicates an internationally recognized trust in sustainability work;
- ViA lecturers participate in international fundamental and applied projects in cooperation with academic and professional organizations.

Within the framework of SAM 8.2.2 project, some courses were taught by a doctoral student from India, Mahender Reddy Galvinolla, and a lecturer from Belarus, Ilona Beļitskaja, and Sanna-Mari Reinfors from Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK), Finland. SAMK is one of the closest cooperation partners of the VRSTAO study field – ViA and SAMK implement not only experience exchange visits and teaching visits on a regular basis, but also have implemented several joint cooperation projects (within ERASMUS+, INTERREG) and have prepared project applications that are currently under review, as well as together have developed a Master's study programme. The VRSTAO study field strategically selects proven cooperation partners and builds very close cooperation in various aspects. Here we can mention the project Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions (E³UDRES²) of the Erasmus+ initiative “European University”, which is a long-term strategic cooperation network, as well as the close cooperation with Tartu University's Pärnu College in implementing various projects, as well as Nordplus initiatives.

On 11 June 2021, the book *“Tourism Destinations in a Post Pandemic Context: Global Issues and Destination Management Solutions”* was launched. The lecturers of VRSTAO (Professor A. Līviņa, guest lecturer and doctoral student G. Bukovska, and lecturer I. Ābols) participated in the writing of the chapter *“The Recovery Tactics of Tourism Industry amid COVID19 Pandemic Conditions in the Baltic States”*.

2.5.3. Specify the system or mechanisms, which are used to attract the students and the teaching staff from abroad. Provide the assessment of the incoming and outgoing mobility of the teaching staff in the reporting period, the mobility dynamics, and the issues which the higher education institution/ college faces with regard to the mobility of the teaching staff.

Support mechanisms for international study initiatives operate in the context of the international activities of VRSTAO lecturers for the promotion of cooperation networks and targeted international activities of ViA. These are as follows: exchange studies, internship abroad, guest lecturers, field trips and other activities that promote internationalization. International mobility for students is ensured through ERASMUS, NORDPLUS, HESP, Erasmus Mundus programmes and related activities.

ViA is a member of the Education Export Association of Latvia, and since 2019 has been participating in the association's joint activities to attract international students. At the end of 2020, an assistance initiative was established with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, within the framework of which scholarships were provided for Belarusian students to study in Latvia. Five students started their studies in the study field of ICS.

Opportunities for student incoming and outgoing mobility

- Mechanisms for attracting international students:
- Information on the "study portals" – FindAMansters, topuniversities.com; Digital Marketing on Facebook;
- Exhibitions in target countries to promote higher education opportunities at ViA; Brochures in electronic and paper formats.

Mechanisms for attracting international lecturers:

- Personal contact of ViA academic staff; Participation in conferences;
- Advertisements.

International students have access to all information electronically, besides, there is a handbook to support them. All international students are provided with a place in student dormitories. Visa related assistance is provided if necessary. All international students have the same rights as local students.

Lecturers are provided with access to infrastructure to the same extent as local staff. If necessary, visa related assistance is provided.

The most important source of financial support for lecturer mobility in the long term is Erasmus+. Within its framework, since 2013, ViA academic staff has implemented more than 160 mobilities in 45 countries, a large part of which was teaching mobility. Since 2017, ViA has been actively cooperating and attracting funding for mobilities outside the European Union. Mobility within the framework of Erasmus+ is regulated by the internal regulatory document "Procedure according to which teaching visits are organized at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences". In general, there are no significant obstacles for ViA teaching staff to engage in Erasmus+ mobility, funding is sufficient, lecturers' language skills are adequate, ViA international cooperation specialists provide support regarding planning and organizing visits if necessary. Mobility of lecturers is provided also by using other sources of funding – Nordplus, funding from various international projects.

Until now, lecturers of the VRSTAO study field have actively visited partner higher education institutions, however, it must be admitted that the visits planned in 2021 were prevented due to restrictions of Covid-19. The VRSTAO study field has entered into bilateral agreements on teaching visits, experience exchange visits, student exchange with 51 higher education institutions (37 in the EU + 14 outside the EU) in more than 31 countries. During the accreditation period, elected lecturers of the study field have used Erasmus+ funding and made a total of 45 visits, of which 27 were teaching visits and 10 staff teaching and staff training visits. Lecturers visited higher education institutions and companies in 10 EU countries, and 8 higher education institutions outside the EU. The highest activity was observed in the academic year of 2018/2019 (23 visits) and in 2017/2018 (10 visits). Although ViA provides sufficient Erasmus+ funding, not all lecturers are involved in mobility due to family circumstances, as well as due to lack of confidence in English language skills. Within the framework of the European Social Fund project "Development of Academic Staff and Human Resources of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences" (SAM 8.2.2.), lecturers can improve their English language skills, which, in turn, could

contribute to increased mobility of teaching staff.

Lecturer mobility is also provided by using other sources of funding – Nordplus, funding from various international projects. Starting from 2018, SAM 8.2.1 funding is also available for lecturers who participate in the development of study programmes to be established within the project. Within the SAM 8.2.2 project, the courses were taught by a doctoral student from India, Mahender Reddy Galvinolla, and a lecturer from Belarus, Ilona Beljitskaja.

Statistics of incoming mobility are collected at ViA in general, it is not collected separately by the study fields. International lecturers come for teaching and staff training visits, as well as to carry out research work. Visiting professors conduct courses for students of several study programmes and exchange programmes. During the reporting period, ViA had 144 incoming visits. Incoming mobility has increased in recent years, there is an interest from teaching staff working at higher education institutions in countries outside the EU (Moldova, Albania, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan). It should be noted that in 2020/2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual visits were also provided.

Incoming students at the undergraduate level mainly are Erasmus+ exchange students. Statistics by faculties/study fields are not collected, as students take courses from the unified offer “International Study Module” (except for students from ESME Sudria, who study a specialized programme at the Faculty of IF). The study courses which are included in the module can be seen here: <https://va.lv/en/study-here/exchange-opportunities/courses-exchange-students>. Every year, study courses from the VRSTAO study field are included in the module. In the academic year of 2020/2021, 20 exchange students took VRSTAO undergraduate level study courses. Five students studied throughout the year, 14 students studied in the autumn semester, 1 student – in the spring semester. Exchange students were from France, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Armenia. Thus, international students study their individual programme together with VRSTAO students.

Seven undergraduate students went to five countries for Erasmus+ exchange studies: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Portugal, Netherlands and Spain. One student went to Estonia for exchange studies at the postgraduate level. Three graduates from the *Toursim Organization Management* programme did internship abroad within the framework of graduate internships, while 15 undergraduate students did internship as part of their studies. Internship countries: Spain, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Albania, Moldova, Armenia.

Refer to the annex for the information on the mobility of students and academic staff of the field of study (see Annex 21).

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

2.6.1. Assessment of the fulfilment of the plan regarding the implementation of the recommendations provided by the experts during the previous accreditation of the study field, as well as the assessment of the impact of the given recommendations on the study quality or the improvement of the study process within the study field and the relevant study programmes.

In 2016, the bachelor study programme of the study direction participated in the international evaluation and, on the basis of the experts' evaluation, by the decision No 31-A of the Study Accreditation Commission of 10 April 2017, received accreditation (accreditation sheet No 32) for the maximum period - 6 years, until 10 April 2023.

In 2016, the Bachelor study program in Tourism and Recreation participated in the international evaluation and, based on the assessment given by experts, with the Study Accreditation Commission on 10.04.2017. decision no. 31-A, received accreditation (accreditation page No. 32) for a maximum period of 6 years, until 10.04.2023.

Recommendations were taken into account, and measures were taken to implement them:

- The number of internal information platforms is reduced from five to three;
- Cooperation between ViA and industry representatives is improved by establishing the VRSTAO advisory board; ViA has become a member of Vidzeme Tourism Association and Latvia Convention Bureau, industry professionals are involved in the work of the State Examination Commissions; within the framework of the project SAM 8.2.2, lecturers have completed internships at industry companies;
- Informal cooperation with the industry is reduced by establishing the VRSTAO advisory board of 12 industry professionals;
- The advisory council of the study field has been established, in which both students and teaching staff participate;
- The qualifications of lecturers has been improved within the project SAM 8.2.2;
- Lecturers of the study course were replaced in order to improve the acquisition of the study course and the topic.

The impact of recommendations on the quality of studies was high as the study programmes were improved in accordance with the development tendencies of the industry.

Refer to the annex for the information about the implementation of recommendations stated in the previous accreditation of the study field (see Annex 22).

2.6.2. Implementation of the recommendations given by the experts during the evaluation of the changes to the study programmes in the respective study field or licensed study programmes over the reporting period or recommendations received during the procedure for the inclusion of the study programme on the accreditation form of the study field (if applicable).

By the decision of the Study Quality Commission No.2021/42-L of 27 October 2021, ViA was granted the right to implement the academic master's study programme "Strategic Management of Tourism for Competitiveness" (license No.04031-28, 10.11.2021.)

In the context of the recommendations plan, it is important to point out that during the licensing process of the Master's study programme, ViA was not given a possibility to object or comment on the recommendations, therefore the commission's report also includes a number of recommendations that, according to ViA, cannot be perceived as deficiencies that would require improvement.

Short-term recommendations before the implementation of the study programme.

1. To eliminate duplication of evaluation of independent work in the study courses "Master paper I" and "Master paper II" – the descriptions of the study courses have been adjusted in accordance with the recommendation.
2. To ensure more informative materials in English on the "Moodle" system used by ViA. At the time of preparing the report, the study programme has not yet started, however, work on the improvement of Moodle in various aspects is ongoing. International students will have access to Moodle in a foreign language upon starting the study programme.

Short-term recommendation No. 3 & Long-term recommendation No. 9.

To improve Latvian language *proficiency* of the study course implementers (academic staff) or to attract teaching staff with relevant language *proficiency*, if the study course is planned in Latvian & to enter into employment contracts with SAMK lecturers who will be involved in the implementation of the ViA study programme, so that different understandings of the implementation of the study programme do not arise – both of these recommendations should be assessed in context. In other words, ViA does not have resources or tools to ensure acquisition of Latvian by the representatives of the cooperation higher education institution, likewise, there are no financial resources to enter into employment contracts and pay for the work of the lecturers of the cooperation partner in accordance with the Finnish salary level from the ViA budget. Taking into account the above, SAMK lecturers have been replaced by local teaching staff.

Long-term recommendations for the improvement of the study programme, which have to be implemented before the study field accreditation

1. To assess potential solutions to the risk, if there is a need to replace lecturers involved in the study programme with equivalent lecturers – the need for the specific recommendation is refuted in the recommendation plan submitted by ViA.
2. To assess a wider range of opportunities for study mobility apart from SAMK, for example, opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme – the need for a specific recommendation was refuted in the recommendation plan submitted by ViA.
3. To attract long-term stable additional funding in order to provide financial support to cover travel and accommodation expenses for students going to SAMK during the intensive study week – ViA annually prepares the Erasmus+ (2021 - 2027 planning period) Blended Intensive Programme application. When it will be planned to implement the study programme in English with the involvement of our cooperation partner, funding will be provided for the mobility and accommodation needs of the students of the specific study programme, but so far this has not been necessary.
4. Taking into account the close connection of the study programme with the Finnish higher education institution SAMK, the experts recommend assessing a possibility of creating the study programme to be licensed as a joint study programme – following the recommendation, ViA promised to assess the results and progress of the first semester and to repeatedly discuss the cooperation format of the study programme with the partner. Currently, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical and economic upheavals, SAMK has postponed the implementation of the programme, therefore the specific recommendation is not relevant.
5. To involve employers of the industry more in the improvement of the study programme (on an annual basis and while preparing for the next accreditation) – there is both formal and informal communication with the industry on a regular basis.
6. To attract alternative project funding for the improvement of the programme in order to ensure a sufficient budget for the study field, thus ensuring the progress and development of the study programme in future – the need for the specific recommendation was refuted in the recommendation plan submitted by ViA.
7. To provide stable funding for professional development activities of lecturers – regular professional development of teaching staff is ensured by using funds from the basic budget of ViA and by attracting project funding.
8. To ensure digitization of library resources so that materials are more easily accessible remotely – ViA library has already started working on this issue before this recommendation and continues to work on providing digital services, raising awareness of students and lecturers of free access resources. The activities mentioned in the recommendation plan have been implemented, and further work in this direction is underway.
9. To compare the ViA study programme and the study programme implemented by SAMK – SAMK has not yet implemented the study programme and has given up the idea of introducing it in the

near future, therefore a comparison with this study programme is not relevant.

Annexes

I - Information on the Higher Education Institution/ College		
Information on the implementation of the study field in the branches of the higher education institution/ college (if applicable)		
List of the governing regulatory enactments and regulations of the higher education institution/ college	4P-VIA-normativie-akti_Normatives-2022FEB-red31102022.zip	4P-VIA-normativie-akti_Normatives-2022FEB-red31102022.zip
The management structure of the higher education institution/ college	3P_VIA_structure.pdf	3P-VIA_struktura_paplasinata_pec_18032020.pdf
II - Description of the Study Field - 2.1. Management of the Study Field		
Plan for the development of the study field (if applicable)	6P-VRSTAO_Attistibas_plans-Development plan-28102022.docx	6P-VRSTAO_Attistibas_plans-Development plan-28102022.docx
The management structure of the study field	7P-SV-parvaldibas-struktura_SF-management-structure.pdf	7P-SV-parvaldibas-struktura_SF-management-structure.pdf
A document certifying that the higher education institution or college will provide students with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution/ college (agreement with another accredited higher education institution or college) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.	20P-VRSTAO-Sadarbibas-stud-turp-ligumi.zip	20P-VRSTAO-Sadarbibas-stud-turp-ligumi.zip
A document certifying that the higher education institution or college guarantees compensation for losses to students if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme license is revoked due to actions (actions or omissions) of the higher education institution or college and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.	18P-Studiju-ligums-t.sk.-2.8.p.-KOMPENSACIJA_Study-agreement-also-2.8.p.-COMPENSATION.zip	18P-Studiju-ligums-t.sk.-2.8.p.-KOMPENSACIJA_Study-agreement-also-2.8.p.-COMPENSATION.zip
Standard sample of study agreement	18P-Studiju-ligums-t.sk.-2.8.p.-KOMPENSACIJA_Study-agreement-also-2.8.p.-COMPENSATION.zip	18P-Studiju-ligums-t.sk.-2.8.p.-KOMPENSACIJA_Study-agreement-also-2.8.p.-COMPENSATION.zip
II - Description of the Study Field - 2.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System		
Analysis of the results of surveys of students, graduates and employers	12P-Aptauju rezultatu analize_Analysis of Survey results.docx	12P-Aptauju rezultatu analize_Analysis of Survey results.docx
II - Description of the Study Field - 2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field		
Basic information on the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field	16P-VRSTAO-docētāju-saraksts-2022_LV-List-of-lecturers-ENG-red02112022.xlsx	16P-VRSTAO-docētāju-saraksts-2022_LV-List-of-lecturers-ENG-red02112022.xlsx
Biographies of the teaching staff members (Curriculum Vitae in Europass format)	17P-KTSV_TPDU-CV-2022.zip	17P-KTSV_TPDU-CV-2022.zip
A statement signed by the rector, director, head of the study programme or field that the knowledge of the state language of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programmes within the study field complies with the regulations on the state language knowledge and state language proficiency test for professional and official duties.	Aplicinajums-VRSTAO-valsts-valoda.edoc	Aplicinajums-VRSTAO-valsts-valoda.edoc
A statement of the higher education institution/ college on the respective foreign language skills of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme at least at B2 level according to the European Language Proficiency Assessment levels (level distribution is available on the website www.europass.lv, if the study programme or part thereof is implemented)	Aplicinajums-VRSTAO-anglu-valoda.edoc	Aplicinajums-VRSTAO-anglu-valoda.edoc
II - Description of the Study Field - 2.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation		
Summary of quantitative data on scientific and/ or applied research and / or artistic creation activities corresponding to the study field in the reporting period.	19P-Publikācijas-Publications_TOV_TSV-red-02112022.docx	19P-Publikācijas-Publications_TOV_TSV-red-02112022.docx
List of the publications, patents, and artistic creations of the teaching staff over the reporting period.	19P-Publikācijas-Publications_TOV_TSV.docx	19P-Publikācijas-Publications_TOV_TSV.docx
II - Description of the Study Field - 2.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation		
List of cooperation agreements, including the agreements for providing internship	VRSTAO_sad_ligumi_ar_LV_org-31082022-en.docx	VRSTAO_sad_ligumi_ar_LV_org-31082022.docx
Statistical data on the teaching staff and the students from abroad	21P-Mobilitāte-studenti-Akad.pers._Mobility-students-Acad.pers.zip	21P-Mobilitāte-studenti-Akad.pers._Mobility-students-Acad.pers.zip
Statistical data on the incoming and outgoing mobility of students (by specifying the study programmes)	21P-Mobilitāte-studenti-Akad.pers._Mobility-students-Acad.pers-labots-28102022.zip	21P-Mobilitāte-studenti-Akad.pers._Mobility-students-Acad.pers-labots-28102022.zip
Statistical data on the incoming and outgoing mobility of the teaching staff	21P-Mobilitāte-studenti-Akad.pers._Mobility-students-Acad.pers-labots-28102022.zip	21P-Mobilitāte-studenti-Akad.pers._Mobility-students-Acad.pers-labots-28102022.zip
II - Description of the Study Field - 2.6. Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures		
Report on the implementation of the recommendations received both in the previous accreditation and in the licensing and/ or change assessment procedures and/ or the procedures for the inclusion of the study programme on the accreditation form of the study field.	22P-VRSTAO_Recommendations-ENG.docx	22P-VRSTAO_Rekomendācijas.docx
An application for the evaluation of the study field signed with a secure electronic signature	00-AIC-iesniegums-VRSTAO-VIRZIENS-eparaksts-ENG-corrected-02112022.edoc	00-AIC-iesniegums-VRSTAO-VIRZIENS-eparaksts-labots-02112022.edoc
III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme		
Sample of the diploma and its supplement to be issued for completing the study programme		
For academic study programmes - Opinion of the Council of Higher Education in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)		
Compliance of the joint study programme with the provisions of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (table) (if applicable)		
Statistics on the students in the reporting period		
III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof		
Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard		
Compliance of the qualification to be acquired upon completion of the study programme with the professional standard or the requirements for professional qualification (if applicable)		
Compliance of the study programme with the specific regulatory framework applicable to the relevant field (if applicable)		
Mapping of the study courses/ modules for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme	28P-Kartejums-Mapping-TPDU.xlsx	28P-Kartejums-Mapping-TPDU.xlsx
The curriculum of the study programme (for each type and form of the implementation of the study programme)	32P-Studiju_plans_TSVK_2022.docx	
Descriptions of the study courses/ modules		
Description of the organisation of the internship of the students (if applicable)		
III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.4. Teaching Staff		
Confirmation that the academic staff of the doctoral study programme includes not less than five doctors, of which at least three are experts approved by the Latvian Council of Science in the branch or sub-branch of science in which the study programme intends to award a scientific degree (if applicable)		
Confirmation that the academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)		

Other annexes

Name of document	Document
2P-Studentu-statistika-2010-2021-AIKA-isi-StudentStatistics.xlsx	2P-Studentu-statistika-2010-2021-AIKA-isi-StudentStatistics.xlsx
5P-ViA_Studiju-kvalitates-nodrosinasanas-politika-APST-31012020-LV.pdf	5P-ViA_Studiju-kvalitates-nodrosinasanas-politika-APST-31012020-LV.pdf
5P-ViA_Study-quality-assurance-policy-APPR-31012020-ENG.pdf	5P-ViA_Study-quality-assurance-policy-APPR-31012020-ENG.pdf
8P-Uznemsanas_noteikumi_2022-2023_APST_27102021-ar-groz-24112021.pdf	8P-Uznemsanas_noteikumi_2022-2023_APST_27102021-ar-groz-24112021.pdf
8P-Admission Regulations-2022_2023.docx	8P-Admission Regulations-2022_2023.docx
9P-Studiju-rezultatu-atzisanas-nolikums-APST-28082019.pdf	9P-Studiju-rezultatu-atzisanas-nolikums-APST-28082019.pdf
9P-Study-results-recognition-regulations-APPROVED-28082019.pdf	9P-Study-results-recognition-regulations-APPROVED-28082019.pdf
10P-ViA_Studiju_nolikums_APST-ar-ped- groz-27012021.pdf	10P-ViA_Studiju_nolikums_APST-ar-ped- groz-27012021.pdf
10P-ViA_Study-regulations_APST-ar-ped- groz-27012021-ENG.pdf	10P-ViA_Study-regulations_APST-ar-ped- groz-27012021-ENG.pdf
11P-ViA_Etikas_nolikums_26042017.pdf	11P-ViA_Etikas_nolikums_26042017.pdf
11P-Ētikas pārkāpumu izskatīšanas procedūra_shēma.pdf	11P-Ētikas pārkāpumu izskatīšanas procedūra_shēma.pdf
11P-Regulations-of-ethics-26042017-ENG.pdf	11P-Regulations-of-ethics-26042017-ENG.pdf
11P-Ethical Infringement Procedure Scheme.pdf	11P-Ethical Infringement Procedure Scheme.pdf
11P-ViA_Etikas_nolikums_26042017.pdf	11P-ViA_Etikas_nolikums_26042017.pdf
11P-Ētikas pārkāpumu izskatīšanas procedūra_shēma.pdf	11P-Ētikas pārkāpumu izskatīšanas procedūra_shēma.pdf
11P-Regulations-of-ethics-26042017-ENG.pdf	11P-Regulations-of-ethics-26042017-ENG.pdf
11P-Ethical Infringement Procedure Scheme.pdf	11P-Ethical Infringement Procedure Scheme.pdf
13P-Nolikums-par-velesanam-akad-amatos-APST-ViA-26012022.doc	13P-Nolikums-par-velesanam-akad-amatos-APST-ViA-26012022.doc
13P-Nolikums-par-velesanam-akad-amatos-APST-ViA-26012022-ENG.doc	13P-Nolikums-par-velesanam-akad-amatos-APST-ViA-26012022-ENG.doc
14P-Darba_samaksas_nolikums_20210224-latvian-only.zip	14P-Darba_samaksas_nolikums_20210224-latvian-only.zip
15P-ViA Docetaju darba saturs un pienākumi 28.05.2014.doc	15P-ViA Docetaju darba saturs un pienākumi 28.05.2014.doc
15P-ViA Content and Duties of Lecturer's Work 28.05.2014.doc	15P-ViA Content and Duties of Lecturer's Work 28.05.2014.doc
1P-ViA-SP-akreditācijas-dati-red2021NOV.xls	1P-ViA-SP-akreditācijas-dati-red2021NOV.xls
1P-ViA-study-programms-red2021NOV.xls	1P-ViA-study-programms-red2021NOV.xls
19P-Publikācijas-Publications_TOV_TSV.docx	19P-Publikācijas-Publications_TOV_TSV.docx
APSTIPRINATS_ViA_Padomes_nolikums_20220818_grozījumi_20220909_Nr-14-2-1.docx	APSTIPRINATS_ViA_Padomes_nolikums_20220818_grozījumi_20220909_Nr-14-2-1.docx
Satversme_25.05.2022.docx	Satversme_25.05.2022.docx
Stratēģija / Strategy (LV)	ViA_strategija_papildinats_30052017.docx
Senāta nolikums / Senate bylaw (LV)	APSTIPRINATS_20210825_Senata_nolikums.doc.docx
Revīzijas komisijas nolikums / Audit Commission bylaw (LV)	Revizijas_komisijas_nolikums_20101606_0.pdf
Akadēmiskās šķīrējtiesas nolikums / The academic Arbitration Court bylaw (LV)	Skirejtiesas_nolikums_20101606_0.pdf
Nolikums par Vidzemes Augstskolas studentu studijām un praksēm ārvalstīs un to rezultātu akadēmisko atzīšanu	02_ViA_studiju_praksu_nolikums-ped-groz2017.pdf
Nolikums par akadēmiskā un vispārējā personāla, kā arī ārvalstu organizāciju pārstāvju mobilitāti Erasmus+ programmas ietvaros	Nolikums par akadēmiskā un vispārējā personāla, kā arī ārvalstu organizāciju pārstāvju mobilitāti Erasmus+ programmas ietvaros (24.02.2016.).docx
Vidzemes Augstskolas Stipendiju piešķiršanas nolikums	ViA_Stipendiju_nolikums_APST-ar-ped-groz-28092022.pdf

Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship (42812)

Study field	<i>Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation</i>
ProcedureStudyProgram.Name	<i>Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship</i>
Education classification code	<i>42812</i>
Type of the study programme	<i>Professional bachelor study programme</i>
Name of the study programme director	<i>Agita</i>
Surname of the study programme director	<i>Šmitiņa</i>
E-mail of the study programme director	<i>agita.smitina@va.lv</i>
Title of the study programme director	<i>Dr.sc.administr.</i>
Phone of the study programme director	<i>26182255</i>
Goal of the study programme	<i>To prepare highly qualified specialists for the tourism and recreation industry in order to promote the sustainable development of the industry and territories.</i>
Tasks of the study programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• To provide students with the basic knowledge and in-depth understanding of tourism and leisure as an industry of the national economy and its connection with sustainable national development, emphasizing the activity of tourism merchants and tourist service managers in the overall tourism system and communication with people, as well as the necessary knowledge in social and natural sciences. To develop cooperation with the parties involved in the development of the tourism industry and tourism education in Latvia and internationally in order to increase the quality of the study process.</i> <i>• To develop students' skills and abilities in accordance with the goals and professional standard, choosing proper educational methods, emphasizing the acquisition of applied knowledge and developing research skills, to improve the ability to communicate in various foreign languages, to cooperate in a team, the ability to use technological solutions and digital tools for everyday information and communication, the ability of critical thinking, the ability to analyze problems, assume responsibility, a great emphasis is put on improving communication skills, developing public speaking skills and the ability to substantiate one's own point of view.</i> <i>• To promote students' motivation for further education and personal development; to promote the development of a student as an independent, socially responsible, erudite, creative person who respects the nature and cultural values, who is able to set up his or her own company.</i> <i>• To promote the raising of the qualifications of VRSTAO's academic staff, supplementing the staff with experienced practitioners of their field, attracting teaching staff from other ViA structural units and other higher education institutions in Latvia and abroad; to maintain the material and technical base of ViA and to promote its developing and improvement to ensure high-quality study opportunities, to put into practice the values emphasized in the ViA strategy, especially emphasizing in this programme an individual approach to students and an environment that promotes frequent discussion and communication.</i>

Results of the study programme	<p><i>Knowledge:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Knowledge of tourism and leisure resources and sustainable tourism services; knowledge of legal, financial, quality assurance and psychological aspects related to company development, its operational planning, organization management, consumer segmentation, cross-cultural differences;</i> <i>2. Knowledge of information acquisition, selection and processing, project development and implementation, creativity and research issues;</i> <i>3. Knowledge of the role and application of information and communication technologies and digital tools in the process of managing tourism and leisure services;</i> <i>4. Knowledge and understanding of the industry's binding regulatory enactments, standards and operating principles of the professional environment;</i> <i>5. Understanding of professional ethics, corporate social responsibility and the impact of the implementation of industry projects on the environment and society.</i> <p><i>Skills:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Ability to assess tourism and leisure resources and tendencies in practice, to analyze and assess the environment of the industry, to plan, organize and assess economic development indicators of the company's activity, to draw-up development plans and draft projects in accordance with the goals and market situation;</i> <i>2. Ability to apply binding regulatory enactments and standards, civil and environmental protection requirements and to organize work in accordance with changes to the regulatory enactments;</i> <i>3. Ability to reasonably explain the professional issues of the industry to specialists and the general public, ability to debate with the general public; knowledge of terminology and the ability to communicate in a foreign language;</i> <i>4. Self-motivation for self-education, ability to plan and implement independent work and group work in professional activities, to observe norms of communication culture and professional ethics;</i> <i>5. Ability to conduct independent research in the industry, using diverse research methods, to use IT technologies and digital tools.</i> <p><i>Competences:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Ability to critically analyze a situation and business environment of the tourism and leisure industry, ability to start business activities, to plan and manage operations and processes, to evaluate available tourism and leisure resources and development directions;</i> <i>2. Ability to conduct research and to develop concepts in the industry, ability to present them publicly in the professional environment and to non-specialists, to create a social dialogue with society and to participate in building the company's reputation;</i> <i>3. Ability to acquire further education independently, to creatively solve professional problems, ability to respond effectively to novelties in the industry and to requirements of the changing professional environment;</i> <i>4. Understanding of the basic issues of professional and academic ethics and ability to assess one's responsibility for the impact of professional or academic activities on society and the environment.</i>
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Final examination upon the completion of the study programme	<i>Bachelor's Thesis</i>
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Study programme forms

Full time studies - 4 years - latvian

Study type and form	<i>Full time studies</i>
Duration in full years	<i>4</i>
Duration in month	<i>0</i>
Language	<i>latvian</i>
Amount (CP)	<i>160</i>
Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Secondary Education</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Professional Bachelor degree in Tourism Management</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	<i>Manager of Tourism Services</i>

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

Full time studies - 4 years - english

Study type and form	<i>Full time studies</i>
Duration in full years	<i>4</i>
Duration in month	<i>0</i>
Language	<i>english</i>
Amount (CP)	<i>160</i>
Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Secondary Education; level of English language proficiency at least B2 level</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Professional Bachelor degree in Tourism Management</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	<i>Manager of Tourism Services</i>

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

Part time extramural studies - 5 years - latvian

Study type and form	<i>Part time extramural studies</i>
Duration in full years	<i>5</i>
Duration in month	<i>0</i>
Language	<i>latvian</i>
Amount (CP)	<i>160</i>
Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Secondary Education</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Professional Bachelor degree in Tourism Management</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	<i>Manager of Tourism Services</i>

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

Part time extramural studies - 5 years - english

Study type and form	<i>Part time extramural studies</i>
Duration in full years	<i>5</i>
Duration in month	<i>0</i>
Language	<i>english</i>
Amount (CP)	<i>160</i>
Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Secondary Education; level of English language proficiency at least B2 level</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Professional Bachelor degree in Tourism Management</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	<i>Manager of Tourism Services</i>

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

3.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

3.1.1. Description and analysis of changes in the parameters of the study programme made since the issuance of the previous accreditation form of the study field or issuance of the study programme license, if the study programme is not included on the accreditation form of the study field, including changes planned within the evaluation procedure of the study field evaluation procedure.

Changes made from 2016 to 2022 to the programme Tourism Organization and Management (TOM)

In 2016, the Bachelor's programme of the VRSTAO study field underwent an international assessment, and, based on the expert evaluation, in accordance with the decision No. 31-A of the accreditation commission of the Ministry of Education and Culture of 4 October 2017 accreditation was granted for a maximum period of 6 years, until 4 October 2023 (accreditation form No. 32).

In accordance with the recommendations received during the previous assessment, taking into account industry developments, graduate surveys and student suggestions, there were new study courses included in the programme such as "Introduction to studies", "Sales skills", and "Creativity and proactivity".

The amount of credit points were changed for such courses as "Introduction to entrepreneurship", "Research methodology in tourism and leisure", "Tourism and environmental protection", "Integrated field internship", "Study internship - field trip".

In accordance with the study programme consolidation and development plan of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, the professional Bachelor's study programme *Tourist Guide - Travel and Event Organizer* (43812) was closed on 30 June 2021, (Decision of the Senate No. 3.1.1 of 28.04.2021), as a result of which adjustments were made to the existing Bachelor's programme *Tourism Organization and Management* by integrating the best examples. Despite the fact that there is a real shortage of guides in the industry and guides are highly demanded, there is a prevailing opinion that a tourist guide career is not a well-thought-out and sustainable option. Specialization (internship included) and Part B courses after the second year will allow to include the skills necessary for a tourist guide in the undergraduate programme *Tourism Organization and Management*, thus preserving an option for students to choose and postpone the decision-making until the time when they have already got to know specifics of various professions of the tourism industry in more detail. Thus, the programme offers two specializations – *Smart Tourism Entrepreneurship* and *Tourism and Event Experience Designer* – one of them has to be chosen after the second year of studies. Specialization is emphasised and carried out mainly through internships at organizations and companies. An adapted internship programme is developed for internship of each specialization, for example, internship in *Smart Tourism Entrepreneurship* is more related to the analysis of company operations and financial flow, while internship in the specialization *Tourism and Event Designer* is related to event organization, tour and group guide competencies and skills with an emphasis on interaction directly with clients. An emphasis was also put on the Part B courses (see Table 9). The changes have been harmonized with the VRSTAO Advisory Board and the Student Advisory Council.

Table 9. Specialization courses of the undergraduate programme *Tourism Organization and Management*

Smart Tourism Entrepreneurship 14 CP	Tourism and Event Experience Designer 14 CP
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Part B – compulsory courses 6 CP: Information and communication technologies in tourism 2 CP Investment and risk management 4 CP	Part B – compulsory courses: Tour guiding methodology 4 CP Event scenario and direction 2 CP
Part B – group elective courses: 8 CP MICE tourism 2 CP Introduction to accounting 2 CP Multimedia communication 4 CP Tourism product promotion 2 CP Dark tourism 2 CP + other industry courses, as well as courses offered by international guest lecturers	Part B – group elective courses: 8 CP Event management 2 CP Communication skills training 4 CP Business etiquette and communication 2 CP European history 4 CP Sources of information and interpretation 2 CP Latvian traditional culture 2 CP + other industry courses, as well as courses offered by international guest lecturers

It is important to point out that by 2019 the programme was under the professional standard Company Manager / Deputy Manager (Profession: MANAGER of a tourism and leisure organization). However, the new professional standard does not include the profession of a manager of a tourism and leisure organization. The State Education Development Agency, together with its four cooperation partners – the Employers’ Confederation of Latvia, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the National Centre for Education, and the State Education Quality Service – upon implementing the ESF project “Improvement of the sectoral qualification system for the development of vocational education and quality assurance” (SAM 8.5.2 project), in order to solve the problems of education in the industry and to organize conferring of professional qualifications in higher education in tourism, proposed to develop, within the framework of the project, a professional standard “**Tourism service manager**” with the specialization in the management of a tourism organization by 31 October 2022 (the final date for approval of the standard is not yet known).

Planned changes to the accreditation form of the study field.

While preparing for the assessment procedure of the study field, the content of the study programme was reviewed and adjusted to the latest and most current tendencies in the tourism and leisure industry. Firstly, the title of the planned study programme has been changed from "Tourism Organisation and Management" to "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship", which better reflects the content of the new programme, its emphasis on the importance of entrepreneurial skills, and its emphasis on the current concept of tourism experience.

Furthermore, a new study course and programme content was developed taking into account recent events (Covid-19 pandemic, military operations in Ukraine) and changeability of the specifics and skills necessary for the tourism and leisure industry, as well as focusing on and following the necessary skills of future professionals, the three main directions of which are as follows: the development of the student’s personality (e.g. self-development, decision making skills, etc.) personal skills related to the development of organizations (e.g., communication and collaboration skills, ability to create added value, etc.), and personal skills related to the goal (e.g., digital skills, design thinking skills, innovation competence, etc.). The above skills are also highlighted and emphasized in the Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions (E³UDRES²) network of the ERASMUS+ initiative “European University”.

The new study content covers 5 blocks: destination, entrepreneurship, experience design, digital skills and general intelligence. Several courses having a large number of credit points are included in the study content, thus creating a module system and providing students with an opportunity to gain wider experience, as the course will be taught by several lecturers. Refer to Paragraph 3.2 of Part III of the Self-Assessment Report for more information about the planned changes and study courses.

Changes to the study programme content and plan were made with the goal of integrating into the studies the latest theoretical findings of the industry, information technology tools, practical training for developing creativity and innovation, and digital skills. The courses focus on regional tourism and leisure

and business aspects, taking into account the recommendations of tourism and leisure professionals in their content and design. In order to accommodate international students, the programme is also offered in English and, in line with current demand, also for distance students. Therefore, the following types of programme will be implemented: full-time full-time (FTE) in Latvian, part-time part-time (NLN) in Latvian, full-time full-time (FTE) in English, part-time part-time (NLN) in English.)

In accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the duration of studies is also changed from 3.5 years to 4 years (5 years for part-time studies).

3.1.2. Analysis and assessment of the study programme compliance with the study field. Analysis of the interrelation between the code of the study programme, the degree, professional qualification/professional qualification requirements or the degree and professional qualification to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and the admission requirements. Description of the duration and scope of the implementation of the study programme (including different options of the study programme implementation) and evaluation of its usefulness.

During the preparation of the programme and in the following years, a constant revision of the programme description has been carried out to ensure that the name of the programme, the degree to be obtained and the professional qualification are kept in line. During each accreditation period, an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the programme objectives and the planned outcomes was carried out to ensure that the objectives and outcomes were consistent with each other and that the content of the study programme was improved in line with the development trends in the field. The descriptions of the programme aims and objectives were used in the mapping of the study courses. The relevance and coherence between the results of the study programme and the results of specific study courses are assessed annually through a self-assessment report. Information on the progress of the study programme implementation and the achievement of the set objectives is also evaluated every academic year at meetings with students, at meetings of the study field council and at meetings of the study field lecturers. In this way, consistency between the results of the study programme and the results of specific study courses is achieved.

The main implementation goal of the professional Bachelor's programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" is to prepare highly qualified specialists for the tourism and leisure industry in order to promote the sustainable development of the industry and territories. Upon completing the study programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship", the following is awarded: a professional Bachelor's degree in tourism management and the qualification of a manager of a tourism and leisure organization (Classification of Occupations of the Republic of Latvia, code No. 1431 08). The content of the study programme is aimed at acquiring knowledge and developing attitudes and skills necessary for the manager of the organization in the tourism and leisure sector, emphasizing the role of managing integrated and sustainable development.

The amount of the programme is 160 credit points (full-time - 4 years, 8 semesters; part-time - 5 years, 10 semesters).

The tasks of the study programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" are as follows:

- To provide students with the basic knowledge and in-depth understanding of tourism and leisure as an industry of the national economy and its connection with sustainable national development, emphasizing the activity of tourism merchants and tourist service managers in the overall tourism system and communication with people, as well as the necessary knowledge in social and natural sciences. To develop cooperation with the parties involved in the development of the tourism

industry and tourism education in Latvia and internationally in order to increase the quality of the study process.

- To develop students' skills and abilities in accordance with the goals and professional standard, choosing proper educational methods, emphasizing the acquisition of applied knowledge and developing research skills, to improve the ability to communicate in various foreign languages, to cooperate in a team, the ability to use technological solutions and digital tools for everyday information and communication, the ability of critical thinking, the ability to analyze problems, assume responsibility, a great emphasis is put on improving communication skills, developing public speaking skills and the ability to substantiate one's own point of view.
- To promote students' motivation for further education and personal development; to promote the development of a student as an independent, socially responsible, erudite, creative person who respects the nature and cultural values, who is able to set up his or her own company.
- To promote the raising of the qualifications of VRSTAO's academic staff, supplementing the staff with experienced practitioners of their field, attracting teaching staff from other ViA structural units and other higher education institutions in Latvia and abroad; to maintain the material and technical base of ViA and to promote its developing and improvement to ensure high-quality study opportunities, to put into practice the values emphasized in the ViA strategy, especially emphasizing in this programme an individual approach to students and an environment that promotes frequent discussion and communication.

Study outcomes to be achieved in the study programme:

Knowledge:

1. Knowledge of tourism and leisure resources and sustainable tourism services; knowledge of legal, financial, quality assurance and psychological aspects related to company development, its operational planning, organization management, consumer segmentation, cross-cultural differences;
2. Knowledge of information acquisition, selection and processing, project development and implementation, creativity and research issues;
3. Knowledge of the role and application of information and communication technologies and digital tools in the process of managing tourism and leisure services;
4. Knowledge and understanding of the industry's binding regulatory enactments, standards and operating principles of the professional environment;
5. Understanding of professional ethics, corporate social responsibility and the impact of the implementation of industry projects on the environment and society.

Skills:

1. Ability to assess tourism and leisure resources and tendencies in practice, to analyze and assess the environment of the industry, to plan, organize and assess economic development indicators of the company's activity, to draw-up development plans and draft projects in accordance with the goals and market situation;
2. Ability to apply binding regulatory enactments and standards, civil and environmental protection requirements and to organize work in accordance with changes to the regulatory enactments;
3. Ability to reasonably explain the professional issues of the industry to specialists and the general public, ability to debate with the general public; knowledge of terminology and the ability to communicate in a foreign language;
4. Self-motivation for self-education, ability to plan and implement independent work and group work in professional activities, to observe norms of communication culture and professional ethics;
5. Ability to conduct independent research in the industry, using diverse research methods, to use IT technologies and digital tools.

Competences:

1. Ability to critically analyze a situation and business environment of the tourism and leisure industry, ability to start business activities, to plan and manage operations and processes, to evaluate available tourism and leisure resources and development directions;
2. Ability to conduct research and to develop concepts in the industry, ability to present them publicly in the professional environment and to non-specialists, to create a social dialogue with society and to participate in building the company's reputation;
3. Ability to acquire further education independently, to creatively solve professional problems, ability to respond effectively to novelties in the industry and to requirements of the changing professional environment;
4. Understanding of the basic issues of professional and academic ethics and ability to assess one's responsibility for the impact of professional or academic activities on society and the environment.

Both in the process of developing the study programme and later in the following years, the content of the study programme was constantly reviewed to maintain the compliance of the name of the programme with the degree to be awarded and the professional qualification. In each accreditation period, an in-depth analysis of the connectivity between the programme's tasks and the planned outcomes is carried out in order to ensure mutual relevance between tasks and outcomes, as well as improvement of the study programme content in accordance with the development tendencies of the industry. Descriptions of the programme goals and tasks are used in the study course mapping. Correspondence and coherence between outcomes of the study programme and results of the specific study courses are assessed annually upon preparing a self-assessment report. Likewise, information about the progress of the study programme and the achievement of the tasks is assessed every academic year during the meetings with students, also at the meetings of the council of the study field, at the meetings of the lecturers of the study field. In this way, harmony is achieved between outcomes of the study programme and results of the specific study courses. Admission rules of the study programme are defined in such a way as to attract students who are capable and interested in working in the information and communication environment (results of the centralized examinations in Latvian and English), who are willing to have a good knowledge of the events in Latvia and the world, to work with information and communication technologies, to plan and manage their work, as well as to plan and manage various resources needed for professional activities. Taking into account the fact that research conducted by students is also an important component of the study programme, those who have shown good results in the student scientific research paper competitions have advantages during admission.

The programme is essential for the link-up with the research projects implemented within the study field in accordance with the research sub-direction specified in the ViA Strategy for 2016-2020: nature and cultural heritage research. The Spatial Research Laboratory of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences has been collecting tourism monitoring data for several years and developing a geospatial data platform for tourism development planning. It is a qualitative addition to the interpretation of the analytical results of big data and business intelligence solutions, helping predicting the development of tourism in different destinations.

The admission requirements for the applicants of the programme are specified in the ViA Admission Rules for undergraduate and higher level study programmes, which, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions, are approved by November 1 of the current year and published on the ViA website. In order to commence studies, the applicant must have completed at least the secondary education level. As a mandatory requirement for the admission competition is a certificate certifying that the centralized examinations were successfully taken in Latvian, mathematics and one of the foreign languages. Likewise, for the calculation of the competition result, ViA takes into account the grades in Latvian, English, mathematics (or algebra and geometry), history of Latvia and world history, and information sciences of the certificates of general secondary education. The following applicants are admitted outside the competition: 1st - 3rd place winners (during the last 2 years) of the school subject

Olympiads at the national and international level; 1st place winner of the competition Junior Achievement Latvia "The best student company of the year" within Vidzeme region; 1st - 3rd place winners – the laureate of the leadership award of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences; 1st place winner of Vidzeme's School of Young Geographers (overall assessment) (during the last 2 years).

Refer to the annex for the Sample of Study Agreement (see Annex 18).

Refer to the annex for the Sample of the diploma and its supplement to be issued for mastering the study program (see Annex 23).

3.1.3. Economic and/ or social substantiation of the study programme, analysis of graduates' employment.

Upon assessing the economic and social justification of the study programme, it is necessary to point out the difficult situation which tourism and recreation organizations are currently experiencing. On the one hand, there is no doubt that in the current changing circumstances, the importance of high-quality tourism education has increased, as the environment has become more complex and unpredictable. Innovations, creativity and technologies in all stages of the tourism value chain – traveller information, marketing, sales, product development, customer management, financial management – become more and more important in tourism-related organizations in order to maintain, recover or develop operation. At the same time, it should be emphasized that crisis situations are also an opportunity for the transformation of companies and destinations in the tourism and hospitality industry – ensuring their ability to quickly adapt to crises or rapid changes, introducing innovations, digital solutions, strengthening sustainability and cooperation. In order to implement the management of tourism organizations and destinations in these new circumstances, it is necessary to strengthen several groups of competences – the ability to implement innovations and digital solutions, sustainability management, the introduction of new business models, including using modern tools and data for forecasting and development of possible development scenarios. Taking into account the above-mentioned significant direct and indirect impact of tourism on the national economy, the higher education in tourism is essential, as it provides skills for the management of tourism organizations and destinations in circumstances of particularly high competition and uncertainty, and promotes a more sustainable and flexible approach to the management of tourism and recreation organizations and sites.

The importance of the higher education is also emphasized by the paradigm shift in tourism – due to the impact of the pandemic, the understanding of the development of tourism has been reassessed – if previously the dominant growth criterion was the increase in the number of tourists, because it generates higher profit, now the development goals are more related to higher sustainability indicators in terms of the management of destinations, as well as to such management of organizations which enables them to recover faster after crises because they are not focused only on making a profit.

On the other hand, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, employment in the tourism sector was often not considered as an attractive field in which to pursue a career – most likely this is due to the fact that employment in tourism is more associated with service work in the hospitality sector than the less visible broad career opportunities in various levels of management positions in one of the many tourism and leisure related industries. The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns, closures, and downsizing of companies in the industry caused a large outflow of employees from the industry, which, upon recovering of the industry, causes significant problems in attracting human resources. At the moment, the industry experiences a problematic situation – human resources are needed to restore the industry, but potential employees are not interested in working in the industry. The war in Ukraine has caused even greater uncertainty, which makes some international tourists consider the Baltic States as an unsafe destination. Therefore, on the one hand, tourism is an area with a high multiplier effect and thus

important for the economy of Latvia, on the other hand, the economic potential of the industry is prevented from being used by the lack of qualified labour force, which limits development and endangers the quality of services. Higher education in tourism – it is currently necessary, however, it does not seem like an attractive and safe career. Industry organizations are currently in critical need of additional human resources, and one of the ways to provide for this need is to offer attractive, up-to-date educational programmes.

Tourism and recreation are included among the fields of smart specialization of Vidzeme planning region in the long term, justifying the need for qualified and educated specialists in this field. Tourism as a strategic development priority is mentioned in the long-term strategy documents of all municipalities of the region.

The socio-economic justification for the development of the study field can be found in the government's economic policy documents: the "Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030" (approved by the Saeima on 10 June 2010) defines Latvia's long-term development priorities and recommends solutions for efficient and sustainable use of the cultural, natural, economic and social capital at our disposal, highlighting in particular Latvia's core value - human capital.

"Latvia's National Reform Programme for the implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy (Latvia's NRP), as well as the 2022 Progress Report, sets qualitatively new requirements for higher education, including in the field of business. "The EU 2020 Strategy is based on the idea of building a sustainable social market economy, where prosperity is promoted through innovation and efficient use of resources, with a focus on knowledge. "Smart growth is one of the key priorities of the EU 2020 strategy, which must be delivered on the basis of value creation through knowledge (education and research, innovation and creativity), and sustainable growth and inclusive growth cannot be achieved without the training and involvement of business professionals, entrepreneurs and the self-employed who are fit for the labour market.

The "Action Plan for Improving the Business Environment 2019-2022" (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on 22.05.2019), in turn, builds on the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS), which benchmarks innovation performance across European Member States, regions and beyond, highlighting the importance of entrepreneurship and high-level managers in several areas, thus also justifying the relevance of training high-level entrepreneurship specialists - masters and PhDs.

The Vidzeme Planning Region Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 defines the region's priority economic objectives: to promote the production of higher value-added products (including niche products) in the region's traditional sectors; to diversify the region's economy by developing entrepreneurship in areas related to existing specialisation; to develop new business areas in the knowledge economy sectors. The programmes implemented by the tourism strand contribute to these objectives and are in line with the Vidzeme region's smart specialisation areas.

National planning documents envisage a new approach to the development of science and innovation policy as key factors in ensuring economic growth and sustainable development: a system of science, technology development and innovation in synergy with organisations involved in knowledge and technology transfer - public institutions at political and administrative level, research and knowledge transfer institutions, enterprises and infrastructure support instruments. One of the action lines is to develop research, innovation, higher education. Education should be of high quality, lifelong and foster creativity.

The programmes of the VRSTAO are in line with the priority long-term task of reforming and improving the education system, ensuring access to quality higher and vocational education, and dramatically increasing the supply of highly qualified specialists for the labour market.

The EU's most recent developments in higher education are reflected in the Paris Ministerial Conference (2018), which concluded that, in a globalised world, higher education has a key role to play in the EU's future prosperity, peace and progress. Higher education strategies need to foster innovation,

internationalisation and digitalisation to enable citizens to thrive in an increasingly competitive and knowledge-based economy and to ensure Europe's global competitiveness. The European Commission will take initiatives to create a Single European Education Area by 2025. The Rome Ministerial Conference (2020) (http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf) sets the creation of a socially inclusive, innovative and interconnected European Higher Education Area as a key action by 2030. The content and delivery of the bachelor and master programmes of the strand are based on the higher education priorities identified in these strategic documents.

The programmes of the VRSTAO are in line with the long-term priority task of reforming and improving the education system, ensuring access to quality higher and vocational education, and dramatically increasing the supply of highly qualified specialists for the labour market. The Vidzeme Planning Region Development Programme 2022-2027 foresees that sustainable coastal and marine tourism will also contribute to the economic transformation of the region. + the importance of tourism and recreation in creating a quality living environment, especially in rural areas, as well as the high multiplier effect of tourism entrepreneurship.

Refer to Paragraph 2.2.4 of Part II for graduate employment.

3.1.4. Statistical data on the students of the respective study programme, the dynamics of the number of the students, and the factors affecting the changes to the number of the students. The analysis shall be broken down into different study forms, types, and languages.

Statistical data on students (*see Annex 2*) reflect both the impact of economic development processes and the general demographic situation of Latvia – the total number of students has decreased during the reporting period.

In 2020 and 2021, the number of students admitted to the higher education institution has significantly decreased, which can be explained by the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on pursuing career in tourism and leisure. However, compared to 2019, there is a lower student dropout rate. In 2021, the dropout rate of the total number of exmatriculated students at ViA was 7.4%, which is the third lowest among the ViA's professional Bachelor's study programmes.

Before termination of studies or exmatriculation, discussions are held with each student, trying to find out the main reasons for leaving the higher education institution or for not being able to fulfil the study plan. The main reason basically is finances – the financial provision and support provided by students' families are insufficient, so students start working, however, it is not easy to combine work and studies, and students usually give priority to their work. It should be emphasized that employers are also often not flexible and do not support studies. During internship, companies often offer students to continue cooperation by starting officially working for the company (such proposals are also a big temptation for students). Vidzeme region is economically active, the labour shortage is becoming increasingly apparent, so it is easy for students to find a job. Paradoxically, entrepreneurs want high-quality specialists, but at the same time, in order to keep employees, they support the termination of studies. In recent years, the majority of dropouts appear in the first semesters of studies, which is associated with the inability to acquire the study programme at a sufficient level (there is high internal competition in the study programme) due to insufficient level of knowledge and learning skills acquired during the stage of secondary education.

Increasingly, students want to terminate their studies due to health problems. In such situations, an opportunity to study according to an individual plan is always offered. Those who resume their studies after an academic break also study according to an individual plan. The academic break is mostly used

to prevent health problems and take care of the child.

Within the framework of the study programme, individual work is carried out with each student who is exmatriculated due to academic debts or who is excluded as having completed the theoretical programme without defending a Bachelor paper. These students are contacted about possibilities to resume studies in order to complete studies. A lot of students take advantage of this opportunity several years after completing the theoretical study course, successfully passing the State examination and obtaining a Bachelor's degree.

Refer to the annex for student number dynamics during the assessment period (see Annex 2).

3.1.5. Substantiation of the development of the joint study programme and description and evaluation of the choice of partner universities, including information on the development and implementation of the joint study programme (if applicable).

3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

3.2.1. Analysis of the content of the study programme. Assessment of the interrelation between the information included in the study courses/ modules, the intended learning outcomes, the set aims and other indicators with the aims of the study course/ module and the aims and intended outcomes of the study programme. Assessment of the relevance of the content of the study courses/ modules and compliance with the needs of the relevant industry, labour market and with the trends in science on how and whether the content of the study courses/ modules is updated in line with the development trends of the relevant industry, labour market, and science.

The Covid-19 pandemic, as well as geopolitical upheavals largely determine the current tendencies in the behaviour of travellers and, accordingly, in the management of tourism and leisure organizations, in the management of destinations, however, changes were observed in the industry even before these crises, for example, the tendency of digitalization, climate change and sustainability issues, which remain significant in the long term. The content of the study programme is developed to train tourism professionals for the work in a rapidly changing environment and in crisis situations, where mutual competition between tourism organizations and destinations has intensified.

The study programme is improved every year, based on the recommendations of students, graduates and employers. Criticism and suggestions of students are reflected in the surveys at the end of each study course, the information provided in the graduate surveys helps significantly improve the programme, because the effectiveness and results of the programme can be objectively assessed in professional activities. According to entrepreneurs, comprehensively prepared graduates are needed, who could adapt flexibly to organizations and to the changing needs and situations of the tourism and leisure industry. Industry professionals emphasized the need for digital skills, foreign languages and knowledge, pointed out to the demand for marketing specialists, emphasized the following as an advantage in the labour market: financial understanding and management skills, critical thinking, as well as the ability to solve innovative problems.

The information included in the study courses and outcomes to be achieved are reviewed every year, the lecturers take into account both the tendencies of the industry and student feedback about the study courses. Besides, the collection of literature used in the studies is supplemented every year. Furthermore, every year, upon preparing the self-assessment report, the wording of the tasks of the study programme, as well as the methods used in the study process are reviewed in relation to the study content, and if necessary adjusted, information, if needed, is included in accordance with the development tendencies of the industry (for example, digital tools, sustainability, sales skills, creativity and proactivity, design thinking).

Industry is also involved in the development/updating of course content and programme implementation, through the annual convention, bi-annual course evaluations, joint industry-related projects and employer participation in bachelor's and master's thesis defence committees.

Professional elective courses allow students to have in-depth knowledge of the aspects of the tourism and leisure industry of their interest, ensuring more effective achievement of professional standards and programme outcomes. On the basis of this analysis, outcomes of the study courses are mapped, thus checking the compliance of each individual course with the goals and tasks set in the study programme. The mapping of the study programme courses is attached *in the Annex*, reflecting how individual study courses contribute to the achievement of study programme outcomes.

Upon planning the study programme, the following was taken into consideration: the study courses should provide certain knowledge and also develop certain skills and/or competence in accordance with outcomes of the study programme. Upon planning the study courses, lecturers paid attention to the planning of student individual and group work in such a way to allow students to consolidate or test the knowledge acquired by the help of practical assignments – case studies, study assignments in cooperation with industry companies. Such an approach corresponds to the general tendency in tourism education – to offer an integrated approach for training young professionals. The study programme content is specifically interdisciplinary, as such an approach provides students with the knowledge and understanding, as well as prepares them for professional work in various sectors of the tourism industry. The programme content responds to the challenges and tendencies that characterize the tourism industry – the need for innovation and creativity, the growing importance of technology in various aspects of the operation of tourism organizations – from product development to smart site management, from organization management to sales processes. Also, in particular, the programme emphasizes the knowledge and competence related to crisis and risk management, the introduction of new business models, the possibility of restructuring tourism and leisure industry companies and destinations – ensuring their ability to quickly adapt to the circumstances of future crises or rapid changes. The programme focuses on several groups of competences related to sustainability management, which is one of the stable tendencies typical of tourism development.

Upon developing the courses of the programme, student recommendations, international examples of tourism education and the latest studies on tourism education in the context of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic are taken into account.

Refer to the annex for Informative report on the compliance of the study program with the state education standard (see Annex 24).

Refer to the annex for Informative report on the compliance of the qualification obtained in the study program with the professional standard (see Annex 25).

Refer to the annex for Study program plan (see Annex 26).

Refer to the annex for Descriptions of study courses of the study program (see Annex 27).

Refer to the annex for Mapping of study courses to achieve the study results of the study program (see Annex 28).

3.2.2. In the case of master's and doctoral study programmes, specify and provide the justification as to whether the degrees are awarded in view of the developments and findings in the field of science or artistic creation. In the case of a doctoral study programme, provide a description of the main research roadmaps and the impact of the study programme on research and other education levels (if applicable).

3.2.3. Assessment of the study programme including the study course/ module implementation methods by indicating what the methods are, and how they contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study courses and the aims of the study programme. In the case of a joint study programme, or in case the study programme is implemented in a foreign language or in the form of distance learning, describe in detail the methods used to deliver such a study programme. Provide an explanation of how the student-centred principles are taken into account in the implementation of the study process.

Various study forms such as lectures, seminars, discussions, practical classes, use of online resources, social simulations, role play, literature studies, applied games, individual and group consultations, study visits, hiking, outdoor life internship, integrated field internship, field trips, case analysis, students' independent practical work (individually and in groups), presentations and conferences on the MS Teams platform are used to implement the study programme. Modern information technologies are widely used in the study process. During classes, lecturers and students have the opportunity to use the computer classrooms, the Spatial Research Laboratory, the mobile technology laboratory, the multimedia laboratory and the student workshop (where various tools, a CNC milling machine, modelling and 3D printing equipment are available).

During the study process, possibilities provided by the internal system are actively used: moodle.va.lv – study electronic environment, where, within the framework of each study course, materials necessary for studies and lecture presentations are stored, information exchanged, and where students upload their presentations and homework; e-mail, social media. Students studying or doing internship abroad can defend annual projects and internship remotely on the MS Teams platform.

During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, both the WebEx and MS Teams platforms were used for remote studies, examinations, defence of papers, including also the defence of the State examination – Bachelor paper. The process was successful – both lecturers and students learned new digital skills, looked for new ways of communication, teaching staff acquired new teaching methods suitable for a digital environment.

Within one credit point, a student should learn an average of 50-100 pages of scientific text. Within of each study course, at least two independent papers must be written, as well as tests must be taken. At the end of the course, each student must take a written or oral examination, the assessment criteria of which are specified in the course description. The final grade for the study course is mostly calculated by applying a cumulative method, i.e., to calculate the final grade a lecturer takes into account not only the examination grade, but all the marks which student has got during the study course. Such a diverse range of study methods and technological tools ensures a high quality of studies – students acquire and consolidate both academic knowledge and also skills to apply the knowledge practically during their studies. In this way, a diverse, attractive and engaging study process is ensured, which also provides an authentic experience, as a result of which students are properly prepared for professional business

activities.

It is important to have connection between theory and practical activities which students carry out both in outdoor life internship during the field trips, and during integrated field internship, when students spend 10 days in a particular municipality, as well as by consolidating knowledge during internship at the company. Internships of the study programme are planned in accordance with the specifics of the industry during the active tourism season in summer. To help students to successfully fit in the internship companies, hospitality service internship, for example, is planned in spring before students do internship at the company. Hospitality service internship is implemented in cooperation with Valmiera Technical School, using technical school's equipment.

Methods applied by the lecturers of the Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship study programme are diverse, besides, interactive teaching methods prevail enabling active and conscious participation of students in the study process. It should be emphasized that lecturers widely use case analysis based on practice. Practical experience of the lecturers in tourism and leisure, entrepreneurship or in their own industry ensures synergy of theoretical knowledge and practical experience, which, by help of a diverse teaching methodology, fully ensures the achievement of study outcomes and study goals. Frequent field research and active experimentation in a real work environment are integrated in the methods applied in the study process. Such approaches are effective, they have a long-term effect, however, it should be noted that such methods also require more effort, knowledge and skills on the part of lecturers.

A student-centred approach is implemented in the study field, i.e., a student as an active participant is involved in the study process and objective self-assessment. This is ensured by the use of active teaching methods, appropriate communication techniques, openness in cooperation with students.

The following techniques are used to promote a dialogue with students: studies in small groups, which encourage students' involvement in the study process; application of interactive study methods; assessing and discussing independent work and research papers with the authors; annual projects, their review and public defence; consultations; a cumulative assessment system; student surveys to find out their opinion about the study course. Work with students is based on a student-centred approach, both in the study process and daily interactions. Individual communication between a lecturer and a student (outside the class setting, seminars and lectures) is possible during individual consultations, via electronic communication (e-mails) and by help of MS Teams.

3.2.4. If the study programme envisages an internship, describe the internship opportunities offered to students, provision and work organization, including whether the higher education institution/ college helps students to find an internship place. If the study programme is implemented in a foreign language, provide information on how internship opportunities are provided in a foreign language, including for foreign students. To provide analysis and evaluation of the connection of the tasks set for students during the internship included in the study programme with the learning outcomes of the study programme (if applicable).

An important part of the study process is annual internship in cooperation with the tourism and leisure industry. The following internships are planned: Hospitality service internship – 1 CP, Integrated field internship – 4CP, Field trip – 1 CP, which are included in the spring semesters in accordance with the lecture schedule, and Internship at company I in the amount of 6 CP, and Internship at company II in the amount of 8 CP during the summer period due to specifics of the tourism and leisure industry.

Study internship is subject to and harmonized with the study courses to be taken by the students during the relevant period. Internship is done at the enterprises, governmental and municipal institutions and companies under the guidance of experienced specialists. The purpose of internship is to provide students with an opportunity to gain work experience and to develop practical work skills at the tourism-related organizations; to get to know the directions of tourism organization operations and the tasks to be performed as much as possible. To find a connection between theoretical knowledge and real operations, thus consolidating theoretical knowledge acquired with its practical application. Internships help achieve outcomes related to the acquisition of practical skills planned in the study programme and approbate theoretical knowledge during practical activities. Likewise, internships help students develop a connection with the labour market already during the studies.

Taking into account the fact that the study field VRSTAO of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences has a good reputation among industry professionals, industry organizations request interns on a regular basis, as well as cooperation agreements with internship providers are entered into – long-term operation in tourism education and connectivity with the industry made it possible to make a database of employers. In spring of 2022, the demand for interns exceeded the total number of students, and it should be also taken into account that some students did internship within the ERASMUS+ programme to gain international experience.

Previous experience shows that students basically look for internship providers themselves because in this way they can choose the company according to the field of their professional interest; besides the location of the internship provider is often important for financial reasons (low transport costs, close to their place of residence and family). Internship is often done at the student's workplace, thus providing for an opportunity of an in-depth study of the organization and providing feedback for companies that appreciate it and use it in practice. If necessary, the programme management provides support in providing a place of internship.

Students apply for internship places every year by filling out the application form, ViA assigns students for internship, supervises them during internship and maintains communication with the internship provider, if necessary. Before internship, the student and the internship supervisor agree on specific tasks to be performed during internship in accordance with the Internship Regulations. As part of internship, students prepare an internship report, as well as assess their experience and knowledge acquired. The internship supervisor (from the organization) also gives his or her assessment in writing. At the end of internship, students defend their internship reports in-person presenting the tasks they have done and discussing the progress of internship, observations, reflecting on their performance, and also providing feedback on how the knowledge acquired during the studies has helped in the performance of internship tasks. Within the framework of the internship defence, ideas on how to change the process of study courses within the study programme (for example, the need to reschedule certain courses to earlier study stages), as well as which topics should be added to the content of the study programme have been formulated more than once.

3.2.5. Evaluation and description of the promotion opportunities and the promotion process provided to the students of the doctoral study programme (if applicable).

3.2.6. Analysis and assessment of the topics of the final theses of the students, their relevance in the respective field, including the labour market, and the marks of the final theses.

Within the study programme, it is planned to write three annual projects and the Bachelor paper, thus helping students apply and integrate the theoretical and practical knowledge and develop skills and abilities for conducting research. The “Methodological Guide for the Preparation and Defence of Annual Projects and Bachelor Papers in the Department of Tourism and Leisure Studies of the Faculty of Social Sciences of ViA” is written and published for undergraduate students providing them with the instructions on the content of the annual project and Bachelor paper, research methods, formatting principles, assessment criteria and procedure.

Research papers cover a wide and varied thematic circle of the tourism and leisure industry and entrepreneurship. Topics of the Bachelor papers conform to the ViA research direction *Sustainable development of the national economy and knowledge society*. Graduation papers written by the students of the study field VRSTAO are recognized and highly valued among industry professionals, as evidenced by the awards won in competitions (see [Paragraph 2.4.5 of Part II](#)). Also, several graduation papers are implemented in the real life.

Below, there are some topics of the Bachelor papers written by the students of the study programme *Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship* between 2017 and 2022.

Changes to the tourism and leisure industry, new tendencies in the industry:

1. Tourism information management in Latvia. Valmiera municipality example
2. Non-traditional tourist accommodation. An example of the concept of a new tourist accommodation for the movie park “Cinevilla”
3. The importance of creative blocks of Riga in tourism
4. Assessment of the marked cycling routes on the right bank of the Daugava within a distance of 50 km
5. Implementation of main zero-waste principles in tourist accommodation. Cēsis example
6. Free Riga projects and their integration in the development of the tourism industry
7. Travel insurance in Latvia – description of the current situation
8. Involvement of industrial zones of Līvāni municipality in tourism
9. Use of industrial tourism resources in the tourism offer of Valmiera city
10. Significance of the Latvian tourism destination brand in the context of business tourism
11. Use of borders in tourism
12. Operation of tourism information providers in Latvia and their current problems
13. Understanding “local taste” in modern society in the restaurants of the Gauja region
14. The use of the alternative office model in tourism in Latvia
15. Representation of Latvia as a tourist destination on the Instagram platform
16. Offer of houses, flats and apartments on the Airbnb portal in the tourism accommodation sector of Latvia
17. Fruit and berry wine tourism in Latvia

Historical development of tourism and leisure and dark tourism:

1. Tourism in Valmiera circuit from 1924 to 1940
2. The history of Jūrmala’s health resort
3. Heritage of the USSR as a tourist attraction
4. The inclusion of foreign journeys and works of Latvian Creative Travellers in the 1920s and 1930s in the tourism industry

5. Use of the cultural and historical heritage of Riga Dome Square in tourism
6. The importance and offer of Alūksne municipality historical repositories in the context of local tourism
7. 18th and 19th century manor houses in Riga. Their use in tourism
8. Development of tourism in Liepāja during the period from the regaining of State's independence to the accession to the EU

Business environment and market research, setting up and planning business, creation of new products (including digital solutions):

1. Gastronomic heritage of "Home Cafe Days"
2. Development of game content for the Valmiera version of the mobile app "Roadgames"
3. Assessment of the exportable tourist attractions of Jelgava and its surroundings
4. Wellness tourism offers in 4-star and 5-star spa hotels in Riga and Jūrmala
5. Development of a long-distance pedestrian route in Latgale (<https://latgale.travel/ezertaka/>)
6. Development of the tourism product "Aizkraukle Manor House Suņu Annas sēta".
7. Public procurement for corporate travel in Latvia
8. Natural heritage within private properties and sustainable tourism business opportunities
9. Development plan for camping "Ezerdzelme".
10. Development of a thematic tourism product for pedestrians as part of "The Balts Road" cultural tourism route
11. Plan for the creation of a tourist accommodation in the forest and business development, Gulbene municipality example.
12. Development of a tourism product in the context of the destination of Vidzeme highland and the cooperation network of entrepreneurs
13. Application of QR codes in the development of a prototype of a cultural tourism route. Jēkabpils Pasta Street example
14. Service design in the creation of guest apartments. Matīši example
15. Development of Promotion Tool – Digital Map "Sēlija Bicycle Routes" – for Sēlija Bicycle Tourism Destination
16. Creation of new tourism products in Zilais kalns rural territory and its surroundings
17. Development of the content of the mobile app "Pēdspriedums" for observing wildlife.
18. Assessment of the indicators of the sustainable development profile of the Northern Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve
19. Map of small breweries of Vidzeme and Riga planning regions and offers for tourists
20. Synergy of science and art in Ceriņu Park tourism products
21. Analysis of the tourism offer of protected landscape areas in Latvia
22. Development possibilities of guest house "Ausmas"
23. Sport event – car rally as a tourism product of Latvia

Marketing, strategic planning of marketing, marketing communication, guidelines:

1. Guidelines for the development of new services for guest houses in rural areas. Example: Skangaļi Manor House
2. The attractiveness of the site in the context of tourism from the point of view of local residents. Mazsalaca example
3. Basic principles and guidelines for successful hotel management
4. Development of a long-distance hiking route management model. An example of the Latvian section of "Jūrtakas"
5. Possibilities of attracting cruise tourists to the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia
6. Preparing storytellers for a brewery, Valmiermuiža example
7. An example of a car rally in Gulbene municipality and proposals for the development of its

concept

8. Tourism development plan for Lielvārde city and municipality
9. Rating of international tourists published by TripAdvisor on the quality of catering service in Riga restaurants included in "Riga – Gauja Region 2017" in the summer season
10. Virtual and augmented reality in tourism, development of an app for the amusement park "Labirinti"
11. Tourism development scenarios for Aknīste municipality
12. Possibilities of tourism industry development and cooperation in Jaunpiebalga municipality
13. Existing tourism resources and tourism development opportunities in Ādaži municipality
14. Tourism market research of non-accredited municipal museums in Vidzeme
15. The importance of the Marks Rotko Art Centre in promoting Daugavpils' tourism image and attracting tourists
16. Event tourism in Valmiera – analysis of the current situation and development opportunities

International cooperation, cross-cultural differences:

1. Assessment of internship experience gained by the students of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences abroad from the perspective of cross-cultural communication
2. Assessment of hiking offers offered by Latvian tourism agencies and operators abroad
3. Attracting Chinese students to Latvian higher education institutions
4. Valmiera tourist destination for Estonian travellers: analysis of visitor flow and development opportunities
5. The importance of internationalization in European marathons. Analysis of examples of good practice for the development of Riga Marathon in the context of marathon tourism
6. Opportunities for cooperation between Salacgrīva municipality and Pärnu County in the field of tourism
7. Analysis of the offer of conference tourism in the capitals of the Baltic States
8. Assessment of tourism-related projects of the cross-border cooperation programme of Estonia and Latvia
9. Motivation of international students in choosing Latvia as a study destination

Traveller segmentation and consumer behaviour:

1. Leisure habits and pastimes of Jelgava city and municipality residents
2. Behavioural habits of visitors in national parks in Latvia
3. Travel habits of vegetarians in a lifestyle context
4. Environmentally friendly travel habits among Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences students

Evaluations of the graduation papers (Bachelor papers) in the reporting period 2017 - 2022 are stable (a total of 112 graduation papers were defended), (*see Table 10*). In 2022, there is a decrease in the grades, which can be explained by the fact that graduation papers were defended by several students who were matriculated after a long break (even up to 10 years), thus it was difficult for them to fit into the existing process, and they got lower grades due to shortcomings in the layout and formatting of the paper, etc.

Table 10. *Evaluation report of the graduation papers from 2017 to 2022.*

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Average grade	7.1	7.1	6.7	7.2	7.1	6.3

In general, the stability of grades is ensured by the student support system during the process of writing

the graduation paper – students choose the topic of the paper at the end of the 6th semester, submit the topic and structure of the paper for the approval to scientific supervisor, start literature studies and data collection. In the middle of the 8th semester, there is a pre-defence of the graduation papers – students present the data collected and the first conclusions resulting from the data analysis to the commission. In this way, it is ensured that graduation papers are written in a timely manner, and the progress of writing is monitored at the level of the study field, possible problems are identified much earlier, students are more motivated to actively consult with the supervisors in a timely manner. All graduation papers (including annual projects) that got grade “7” or a higher grade are publicly available in the library of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (provided student consent is obtained) (in an electronic format, full texts).

3.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

3.3.1. Assessment of the compliance of the resources and provision (study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision) with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the learning outcomes to be achieved by providing the respective examples.

ViA does not divide infrastructure by study programmes, resources are assessed for the entire higher education institution as a whole. The base available for the implementation of the study programme *Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship* (lecture-rooms, computer classes, laboratory, and library resources) is fully sufficient.

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 and the corresponding transition to online studies fully proved that ViA is ready to adapt to the changing situation, and its infrastructure is fully suitable for it. Already from the first day of online studies in March 2020, lectures were held on the Cisco webex platform (currently, if necessary, on MS Teams), the Moodle system and the e-mail system fully support the exchange of information between lecturers and students, announcement of news and changes.

Information about the provision of resources for the study programme is available in Paragraphs 2.3.1-2.3.3 of Chapter 3 of Part II of the Report.

3.3.2. Assessment of the study provision and scientific base support, including the resources provided within the framework of cooperation with other science institutes and higher education institutions (applicable to doctoral study programmes) (if applicable).

3.3.3. Indicate data on the available funding for the corresponding study programme, its funding sources and their use for the development of the study programme. Provide information on the costs per one student within this study programme, indicating the

items included in the cost calculation and the percentage distribution of funding between the specified items. The minimum number of students in the study programme in order to ensure the profitability of the study programme (indicating separately the information on each language, type and form of the study programme implementation).

Refer to Part II, Chapter 2.3., Sub-chapter 2.3.1.

3.4. Teaching Staff

3.4.1. Assessment of the compliance of the qualification of the teaching staff members (academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants) involved in the implementation of the study programme with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments. Provide information on how the qualification of the teaching staff members contributes to the achievement of the learning outcomes.

The study programme is conceptually developed based on the current needs of the labour market and industry tendencies, rather on the availability of the lecturers at the study field. This is also one of the reasons why several guest lecturers have been attracted to the programme; to ensure the adequacy of the lecturers' competence, teaching staff was sought outside the study field and ViA.

It is essential to combine academic knowledge with practical experience and internship, therefore, elected ViA academic staff and guest lecturers with practical experience in the industry are involved in the implementation of the study programme. Lecturers are selected on the basis of the following criteria: competence and knowledge accumulated in academic work (preparation of study courses) in the fields related to the content of the programme, direction of scientific activity and topics of previous research, scientific degree and qualification, as well as practical experience. Preference is given to lecturers who have a doctorate degree, who are doctoral candidates, and to those who are studying in a doctorate degree programme. In order to participate in international research projects, mobility activities, lecturers need a sufficient level of knowledge of a foreign language (level B2). Preference is given to lecturers with English language skills that can be improved at ViA. In 2019-2020, some of the elected ViA lecturers improved their foreign language skills by taking English language classes within the framework of the European Social Fund project "Development of Academic Staff and Human Resources of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences" (SAM 8.2.2). The interdisciplinary nature of the study programme determines the wide range of scientific fields (geography, biology, communication, law, psychology, entrepreneurship, information and communication technologies, foreign languages) represented by attracted teaching staff.

The lecturers involved in the implementation of the study programme are recognized scientists, industry experts. Six lecturers are experts of the Latvian Council of Science (A. Līviņa, L. Veliverronen, S. Rozentāle, M. Leščevica, J. Kalnačs, V. Silkāne).

The choice of guest lecturers is basically determined by their recognition in the professional environment, practical experience in the tourism and leisure industry, and in the business environment in Latvia and abroad, thus it significantly helps ensure connectivity with the current developments within the industry. Some of the guest lecturers are specialists in a certain field, for example in a certain type of tourism, jurisprudence, marketing, civil defence, thus they can help students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills.

The qualifications of the elected personnel involved in the programme comply with requirements specified in Section 39 *Academic Staff of Vocational Study Programmes* of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. There are 26 elected representatives of academic staff in the programme (74% of the total number of those involved), of which 11 have a doctorate degree; the other lecturers have professional Master's degrees in social sciences (economics and entrepreneurship), political science (public management, administration and management), humanities and arts, biology, geography.

The qualification of academic staff, involvement in scientific research, international cooperation and work experience, combined with the guest lecturers – recognized professionals of their field having local, national and international experience and a global view on theoretical and practical aspects of the tourism and leisure industry – ensure the achievement of the study programme goals.

In general, the qualifications of lecturers, involvement in scientific work, knowledge of foreign languages, pedagogical experience meet the requirements for the implementation of the professional Bachelor's study programme. As for the offer of elective courses of the programme, it is possible to attract lecturers from ViA cooperation networks, in particular from the E³UDRES² project of the European University Alliance, where courses are taught to international student groups in cooperation with teaching staff of several partner institutions.

Information on the involvement of academic staff in scientific research, both at the national and international level, is available in *Paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 of the Report*.

3.4.2. Analysis and assessment of the changes to the composition of the teaching staff over the reporting period and their impact on the study quality.

Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship is a professional study programme, therefore a lot of attention is always paid to cooperation with industry professionals. There are 32 lecturers involved in the implementation of the study programme.

Quite a few study courses are taught by elected lecturers who cooperate with guest lecturers. In this way, there is a good balance between the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and its approbation, as well as current developments of the industry are integrated in the study process.

Since the doctoral study programme "Economics and Entrepreneurship" has been implemented at ViA, several of its students (G.Bukovska, S.Lemša, A.Mežgaile) have been involved in teaching study courses, including those who have practical work experience in tourism and related industries, but now also scientific competence is being added - a combination that is especially valuable for teaching study courses in the practical field of tourism. In 2022, Dr Aija van der Stein has been elected as As.Prof. in the VRSTAO study area.

3.4.3. Information on the number of the scientific publications of the academic staff

members, involved in the implementation of doctoral study programme, as published during the reporting period by listing the most significant publications published in Scopus or WoS CC indexed journals. As for the social sciences, humanitarian sciences, and the science of art, the scientific publications published in ERIH+ indexed journals or peer-reviewed monographs may be additionally specified. Information on the teaching staff included in the database of experts of the Latvian Council of Science in the relevant field of science (total number, name of the lecturer, field of science in which the teaching staff has the status of an expert and expiration date of the Latvian Council of Science expert) (if applicable).

3.4.4. Information on the participation of the academic staff, involved in the implementation of the doctoral study programme, in scientific projects as project managers or prime contractors/ subproject managers/ leading researchers by specifying the name of the relevant project, as well as the source and the amount of the funding. Provide information on the reporting period (if applicable).

3.4.5. Assessment of the cooperation between the teaching staff members by specifying the mechanisms used to promote the cooperation and ensure the interrelation between the study programme and study courses/ modules. Specify also the proportion of the number of the students and the teaching staff within the study programme (at the moment of the submission of the Self-Assessment Report).

Lecturers, upon planning and implementing study courses, pay a lot of attention to the planning of students' individual assignments and group work to provide such formats that allow students to consolidate or test the knowledge acquired by the help of practical assignments – simulation of problem situations, modelling, strategic games in which students of several study programmes participate, and the content of the task is jointly developed by lecturers of several study courses. In this way, the acquisition and approbation of knowledge is promoted in an integrated way. Experience gained during modelling and simulation of industry problem situations is analyzed from different perspectives within the framework of several study courses. Such an approach corresponds to the common tendency at the higher education institutions in Europe – to offer an integrated approach in preparing young professionals focusing on the development of entrepreneurial mindset, process management, and operational activity.

Within the study field, the lecturers communicate on a regular basis during the study field meetings (where current study issues are regularly considered and discussed and where decisions are made on aspects of study content and process improvement), as well as during the programme lecturer meetings, they have also meetings with the programme director. Lecturers use electronic communication, the MS Teams platform to ensure communication and cooperation. An additional communication tool for the programme lecturers is the Lecturer Handbook for internal use, which emphasizes the concepts to be integrated into the study courses, the importance of connectivity

with the industry, and various forms of how it can be implemented, as well as there is an emphasis on a student-centred approach. In order to increase the quality of the lecturers' performance and the benefit students can gain from the courses, several study courses are taught by two or even three lecturers who mutually collaborate, besides, one of the lecturers assumes the role of a coordinator for the course planning and organization, including coordination of the issues related to the guest lecturers. Such courses promote the cooperation among the lecturers for ensuring an interdisciplinary approach; besides, students are more interested in the course and acquire it more successfully.

Once during the reporting period, an audit of the study courses of the study programme *Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship* is carried out; it has a very versatile mechanism of action in promoting the cooperation of lecturers and improving the quality of studies: there is an exchange of experience regarding the development of curriculum and the application of methods; current developments of the industry are identified; overlapping of course content is avoided; the lecturers of the field build deeper relationships, the internal microclimate of the study field is improved.

In general, lecturers, upon planning and implementing study courses, pay a lot of attention to the planning of students' individual assignments and group work to provide such formats that allow students to consolidate and/or test the knowledge acquired by the help of practical assignments – for example, case studies, solving problem situations of real companies – starting from the field work and data collection to solution presentation. In this way, the acquisition and approbation of knowledge is promoted in an integrated way. Specific cases can be analyzed from the perspective of several courses (e.g., marketing, strategic management, financial management). Such an approach corresponds to the common tendency at the higher education institutions in Europe – to offer an integrated approach that focuses on the development of entrepreneurial mindset, process management, and operational activity.

The EU Structural Fund project SAM 8.2.2, implemented by ViA, has made a great contribution to the improvement of mutual communication and the study process; joint training for lecturers to improve their digital and pedagogical competence has been organized within the framework of the project. Training became a tool for uniting colleagues and promoting cooperation, especially in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic.

On 1 October 2021, there were 79 students, and 30 lecturers were involved in the implementation of the study programme (2.6 students per lecturer).

Annexes

III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme		
Sample of the diploma and its supplement to be issued for completing the study programme	23P-Diploma-paraugs-TPDU-red-02112022.zip	23P-Diploma-paraugs-TPDU-red-02112022.zip
For academic study programmes - Opinion of the Council of Higher Education in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)		
Compliance of the joint study programme with the provisions of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (table) (if applicable)		
Statistics on the students in the reporting period	2P-Studentu-statistika-2010-2021-AIKA-visi-StudentStatistics-red22112022.xlsx	2P-Studentu-statistika-2010-2021-AIKA-visi-StudentStatistics-red22112022.xlsx
III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof		
Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard	24P-TPDU_Atbalstiba_MK_noteikum-Compliance to regul_LV-ENG-red02112022.docx	24P-TPDU_Atbalstiba_MK_noteikum-Compliance to regul_LV-ENG-red02112022.docx
Compliance of the qualification to be acquired upon completion of the study programme with the professional standard or the requirements for professional qualification (if applicable)	25P-TPDU-atbalstiba_profesijas_standartam-Compliance to prof.stand..docx	25P-TPDU-atbalstiba_profesijas_standartam-Compliance to prof.stand..docx
Compliance of the study programme with the specific regulatory framework applicable to the relevant field (if applicable)		
Mapping of the study courses/ modules for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme	Kartejums-Mapping-TPDU-02112022.xlsx	Kartejums-Mapping-TPDU-02112022.xlsx
The curriculum of the study programme (for each type and form of the implementation of the study programme)	26P-TPDU-PL-NL-Studiju_plans-Study-Plan_LV-ENG-red-02112022.xlsx	26P-TPDU-PL-NL-Studiju_plans-Study-Plan_LV-ENG-red-02112022.xlsx
Descriptions of the study courses/ modules	27P-Kursa apraksti TPDU.zip	27P-Kursa apraksti TPDU.zip
Description of the organisation of the internship of the students (if applicable)	27P.1-TPDU-Prakses-Internships.zip	27P.1-TPDU-Prakses-Internships.zip
III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.4. Teaching Staff		
Confirmation that the academic staff of the doctoral study programme includes not less than five doctors, of which at least three are experts approved by the Latvian Council of Science in the branch or sub-branch of science in which the study programme intends to award a scientific degree (if applicable)		
Confirmation that the academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)		

Tourism Competitiveness Management (45812)

Study field	<i>Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation</i>
ProcedureStudyProgram.Name	<i>Tourism Competitiveness Management</i>
Education classification code	<i>45812</i>
Type of the study programme	<i>Academic master study programme</i>
Name of the study programme director	<i>Linda</i>
Surname of the study programme director	<i>Veliverronena</i>
E-mail of the study programme director	<i>linda.veliverronena@va.lv</i>
Title of the study programme director	<i>PhD</i>
Phone of the study programme director	<i>26182255</i>
Goal of the study programme	<i>To provide internationally competitive tourism education to prepare highly educated professionals for work in the public, non-governmental and private sectors.</i>

Tasks of the study programme	<p><i>i. In-depth acquisition of management science theories in the context of current theories of other social sciences – sustainability , economics and entrepreneurship, psychology, thereby promoting the development of interdisciplinary higher education content;</i></p> <p><i>ii. Acquisition of specialized knowledge on strategic development planning, management and assessment processes, including strategic marketing, financial management, crisis and risk management, at the level of both organizations and destinations;</i></p> <p><i>iii. Raising comprehensive awareness of the regularities of the international economy, social development trends, changes in people's habits and of other broader changes in the external environment, and their impact on the tourism industry;</i></p> <p><i>iv. Development of skills for the synthesis of the theoretical knowledge needed in the industry, and for the creation and application of innovations in changing socio-economic conditions;</i></p> <p><i>v. Improvement of skills for the use of modern information technologies for the management and development of products, organizations and destinations, as well as for the performance of other professional activities, including the protection of one's own and customer data in the environment of smart technologies;</i></p> <p><i>vi. Promotion of entrepreneurial mindset, development of personality, as well as leadership and managerial skills;</i></p> <p><i>vii. Development of skills necessary for information analysis, critical thinking, and reasoning, as well as improvement of self-reflection skills;</i></p> <p><i>viii. Involvement of students in research and promotion of the development of the tourism industry, destinations and operation of the organizations;</i></p> <p><i>ix. Development of scientific research and analytical skills for individual research, promotion of modern, including technology-based, data collection skills, and student involvement in research projects, thus preparing students for independent research in fields of activity corresponding to the professional needs, as well as for further studies at the doctoral level;</i></p> <p><i>x. Adaptation of modern study methods in the study programme – case studies, field trips (including virtual ones), etc., integrating theoretical knowledge and practical application of the knowledge to solve various tourism-related problems in the environment of changing and unpredictable conditions, thus ensuring a deeper understanding of the industry's problematic issues, closer connection of studies with current developments in the industry sectors, effective development of cooperation skills and higher readiness to work in tourism.</i></p>
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Results of the study programme	<p>KNOWLEDGE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of the current theories in economics and entrepreneurship, psychology (consumer behaviour) and other fields of sciences related to tourism. - Knowledge of strategic planning, management, assessment, and implementation processes (including marketing, financial management, etc.) within organizations and destinations, and the tools, methods and technologies used in these processes. - Knowledge of the regularities of the international economy and factors (including crises and risks) affecting the tourism industry at the international and national level, and knowledge of possibilities to predict the impact of these changes on the destinations or entrepreneurship. <p>SKILLS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills to plan and implement professional activities both individually and in a team in accordance with the development trends of the tourism industry and factors influencing the development of the industry. - Skills to use modern technological opportunities for commencing and/or developing entrepreneurship, including for collecting necessary data and their analysis, management processes, product solutions and/or promotion of destination development, as well as for ensuring data protection process. - Skills to explain one's own point of view based on arguments and to defend ideas before different target audiences, and to create a dialogue with industry professionals. <p>COMPETENCE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competence to apply theoretical knowledge acquired during studies for the purposes of management and promotion of the development of destinations and organizations in the circumstances of high uncertainty, as well as for problem solving in an integrated, innovative way, thus improving competitiveness of organizations/destinations and their steady development. - Abilities to predict changes in the market and demand, to implement a competitive product policy, as well as effective organization's marketing and revenue management in accordance with its strategic goals. - Abilities to independently promote one's own personal development and improvement of knowledge and entrepreneurial mindset, and to fully understand the consequences of the impact of one's own professional activities, as well as abilities to cooperate with various stakeholders, to show initiative and leadership in the management of one's own organization and the organizations uniting the industry. - Abilities to independently carry out research by collecting and critically analyzing data, applying the knowledge of research methods acquired during studies in order to explore business commencement possibilities, and for the purposes of the development of organizations and destinations.
Final examination upon the completion of the study programme	Master's Thesis

Study programme forms

Full time studies - 1 years, 6 months - latvian

Study type and form	<i>Full time studies</i>
Duration in full years	<i>1</i>
Duration in month	<i>6</i>
Language	<i>latvian</i>
Amount (CP)	<i>60</i>
Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Profession bachelor's degree in social and human sciences, business and administration or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management or equivalent education</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Master of social sciences in tourism and leisure organization</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	-

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

Full time studies - 1 years, 6 months - english

Study type and form	<i>Full time studies</i>
Duration in full years	<i>1</i>
Duration in month	<i>6</i>
Language	<i>english</i>
Amount (CP)	<i>60</i>
Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Professional bachelor's degree in social and humanities, business and administration or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management or equivalent education; level of English language proficiency at least B2 level</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Master of social sciences in tourism and leisure organization</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	-

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

Full time studies - 2 years - latvian

Study type and form	<i>Full time studies</i>
Duration in full years	<i>2</i>
Duration in month	<i>0</i>
Language	<i>latvian</i>
Amount (CP)	<i>80</i>

Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Academic bachelor's degree in social and human sciences, business and administration or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management or equivalent education</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Master of social sciences in tourism and leisure organization</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	-

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

Full time studies - 2 years - english

Study type and form	<i>Full time studies</i>
Duration in full years	2
Duration in month	0
Language	<i>english</i>
Amount (CP)	80
Admission requirements (in English)	<i>Academic bachelor's degree in social and human sciences, business and administration or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management or equivalent education; level of English language proficiency at least B2 level</i>
Degree to be acquired or professional qualification, or degree to be acquired and professional qualification (in english)	<i>Master of social sciences in tourism and leisure organization</i>
Qualification to be obtained (in english)	-

Places of implementation

Place name	City	Address
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	VALMIERA	CĒSU IELA 4, VALMIERA, VALMIERAS NOVADS, LV-4201

3.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

3.1.1. Description and analysis of changes in the parameters of the study programme made since the issuance of the previous accreditation form of the study field or issuance of the study programme license, if the study programme is not included on the accreditation form of the study field, including changes planned within the evaluation procedure of the study field evaluation procedure.

The changes in the study program are related to the decision of cooperation partner SAMK not to start the implementation of the program at the moment, therefore some of optional courses in the program has decreased. Study courses - Digital transformation, Sustainable tourism management, Management of organizations and human resources are excluded from the study plan, which has no impact on students' ability to complete the required credits. On the other hand, for the study courses Self-Management and Sales Management in the tourism sector, the course lecturer has been replaced. Students still have a wide range of optional courses, and the offer of optional courses is also regularly supplemented through thematically appropriate occasional courses that are implemented within the framework of projects. The Methodological instructions for the development of a master's thesis have been clarified, providing that the processes of developing and defending the master's thesis can be implemented independently by ViA without the involvement of a cooperation partner.

In accordance with the legislation, the study plan includes one free choice course in the amount of 2 CP. It should be noted that since the study program has not yet been implemented, the above-mentioned changes have taken place formally.

3.1.2. Analysis and assessment of the study programme compliance with the study field. Analysis of the interrelation between the code of the study programme, the degree, professional qualification/professional qualification requirements or the degree and professional qualification to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and the admission requirements. Description of the duration and scope of the implementation of the study programme (including different options of the study programme implementation) and evaluation of its usefulness.

The academic Master's study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management* ensures the continuity of the Bachelor's study programme implemented by the study field Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Leisure Organization (hereinafter referred to as VRSTAO) and opportunities for those who have completed the Bachelor's study programme to continue tourism education. Enriched by good practice and experience, the study programme is the successor of the Master's study programmes "Strategic Management of Tourism" and "International Tourism Event Management" (a joint study programme implemented together with Klaipeda University, Lithuania) – both of them were closed as part of the programme consolidation plan (in accordance with the specific support objective 8.2.1 of the European Social Fund operational programme "Growth and Employment"). Due to the consolidation, the *Tourism Competitiveness Management* remains the only programme of the study field which provides those who have completed the Bachelor's study programme in tourism with the possibility to continue their education in tourism at the Master's level. The programme is also an intermediate stage of the full cycle education, which Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences implements in social sciences in

cooperation with Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and Rezekne Academy of Technologies, offering a joint doctoral programme “Economics and Entrepreneurship”.

The programme is essential for the link-up with the research projects implemented within the study field in accordance with the research sub-direction specified in the ViA Strategy for 2016-2020: nature and cultural heritage research. The Spatial Research Laboratory of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences has been collecting tourism monitoring data for several years and developing a geospatial data platform for tourism development planning. It is a qualitative addition to the interpretation of the analytical results of big data and business intelligence solutions, helping predicting the development of tourism in different destinations [http://va.lv/sites/default/files/via_strategija_papildinats_30052017.pdf]

The goal of the study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management* complies with the strategic goals defined in the ViA Strategy for 2016 – 2020, and especially with the goal under the priority “Education”: to provide a modern and high-quality education offer based on research results meeting the demand and forecasts of the labour market and complying with good international practice. In a direct way, the study programme helps develop in all strategic directions of operation – human resources and infrastructure, and especially in the field of international cooperation because the programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management* was created within the framework of the cooperation agreement with Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (Finland, Pori). The Master’s study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management* supports the ViA mission – to promote the sustainable development of the knowledge society at the regional and national level, providing the private and public sector with high-level tourism industry professionals, as well as to conduct research to solve socially relevant problems.

The goal of the study programme

The goal of the study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management* is to provide internationally competitive tourism education in order to prepare highly educated professionals for the work in the public, non-governmental and private sectors.

In accordance with the State academic education standard, the content of the study programme provides a set of knowledge, skills and competences in compliance with those specified in the LQF Level 7 of the Latvian education classification [http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/LKI_limenu_aprakstu_tabula_2017.pdf]. The content of the study programme offers students in-depth theoretical knowledge, acquisition and development of research skills, thus providing for the possibilities to develop a successful professional career, to run a business, as well as to continue studies at a doctoral study programme.

Study programme objectives

1. In-depth acquisition of management science theories in the context of current theories of other social sciences – sustainability [<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg02791>], economics and entrepreneurship, psychology, thereby promoting the development of interdisciplinary higher education content;
2. Acquisition of specialized knowledge on strategic development planning, management and assessment processes, including strategic marketing, financial management, crisis and risk management, at the level of both organizations and destinations;
3. Raising comprehensive awareness of the regularities of the international economy, social development trends, changes in people’s habits and of other broader changes in the external environment, and their impact on the tourism industry;
4. Development of skills for the synthesis of the theoretical knowledge needed in the industry, and for the creation and application of innovations in changing socio-economic conditions;
5. Improvement of skills for the use of modern information technologies for the management and development of products, organizations and destinations, as well as for the performance of other

- professional activities, including the protection of one's own and customer data in the environment of smart technologies;
6. Promotion of entrepreneurial mindset, development of personality, as well as leadership and managerial skills;
 7. Development of skills necessary for information analysis, critical thinking, and reasoning, as well as improvement of self-reflection skills;
 8. Involvement of students in research and promotion of the development of the tourism industry, destinations and operation of the organizations;
 9. Development of scientific research and analytical skills for individual research, promotion of modern, including technology-based, data collection skills, and student involvement in research projects, thus preparing students for independent research in fields of activity corresponding to the professional needs, as well as for further studies at the doctoral level;
 10. Adaptation of modern study methods in the study programme – case studies, field trips (including virtual ones), etc., integrating theoretical knowledge and practical application of the knowledge to solve various tourism-related problems in the environment of changing and unpredictable conditions, thus ensuring a deeper understanding of the industry's problematic issues, closer connection of studies with current developments in the industry sectors, effective development of cooperation skills and higher readiness to work in tourism.

Outcomes to be achieved in the study programme and their connectivity with the goal and objectives of the programme

As a result of acquisition of the study programme, highly qualified professionals in tourism, recreation and other leisure service sectors will be trained, who will be able to successfully compete in both the local and international labour market thanks to the high level of knowledge, skills and competence required for strategic, sustainable management of organizations and destinations in the circumstances of uncertainty and rapidly changing economic and social environment. Graduates will also be able to commence and conduct entrepreneurship in tourism and related fields. [Table 11](#) provides an overview of the outcomes of the study programme: knowledge, skills and competence in accordance with the LQF Level 7.

Table 11. *An overview of the outcomes to be achieved in the study programme and their connectivity with the specific objectives defined in the study programme.*

		Corresponding objectives of the study programme
KNOWLEDGE	Knowledge of the current theories in economics and entrepreneurship, psychology (consumer behaviour) and other fields of sciences related to tourism.	1, 2, 3
	Knowledge of strategic planning, management, assessment, and implementation processes (including marketing, financial management, etc.) within organizations and destinations, and the tools, methods and technologies used in these processes.	2, 5
	Knowledge of the regularities of the international economy and factors (including crises and risks) affecting the tourism industry at the international and national level, and knowledge of possibilities to predict the impact of these changes on the destinations or entrepreneurship.	3, 5

SKILLS	Skills to plan and implement professional activities both individually and in a team in accordance with the development trends of the tourism industry and factors influencing the development of the industry.	6, 7, 8, 10
	Skills to use modern technological opportunities for commencing and/or developing entrepreneurship, including for collecting necessary data and their analysis, management processes, product solutions and/or promotion of destination development, as well as for ensuring data protection process.	2, 5, 9, 10
	Skills to explain one's own point of view based on arguments and to defend ideas before different target audiences, and to create a dialogue with industry professionals.	7, 10
COMPETENCE	Competence to apply theoretical knowledge acquired during studies for the purposes of management and promotion of the development of destinations and organizations in the circumstances of high uncertainty, as well as for problem solving in an integrated, innovative way, thus improving competitiveness of organizations/destinations and their steady development.	1-10
	Abilities to predict changes in the market and demand, to implement a competitive product policy, as well as effective organization's marketing and revenue management in accordance with its strategic goals.	2,3, 5, 7, 10
	Abilities to independently promote one's own personal development and improvement of knowledge and entrepreneurial mindset, and to fully understand the consequences of the impact of one's own professional activities, as well as abilities to cooperate with various stakeholders, to show initiative and leadership in the management of one's own organization and the organizations uniting the industry.	6, 7, 10
	Abilities to independently carry out research by collecting and critically analyzing data, applying the knowledge of research methods acquired during studies in order to explore business commencement possibilities, and for the purposes of the development of organizations and destinations.	1, 7, 9

Upon completion of the study programme, a *Master's degree of Social Sciences in Tourism and Leisure Organization* is awarded. In accordance with the Latvian education classification, the code of the study programme is 45812. Taking into account the specifics of tourism, the programme is included in the educational thematic group "Services" of the educational programme group "Tourism organization and management".

The programme volume is either 60 credits (3 semesters) or 80 credits (4 semesters). In order to enrol in the 60 CP study programme, the applicant must have a professional Bachelor's degree in social and human behavioural sciences, commercial sciences and administration, or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management or equivalent education. In order to enrol in the 80 CP study programme, the applicant must have an academic Bachelor's degree in social and human behavioural sciences, commercial sciences and administration, or tourism and leisure organization, cultural management, or equivalent education. For those who have previously acquired academic education, the study programme additionally includes internship, the purpose of which is to deepen the understanding of the tourism industry in practice, as well as to approbate the knowledge acquired during studies, thus better preparing them for the process of writing the Master's paper.

Upon entering the study programme, the English language skills and the understanding of the tourism industry of all applicants are assessed.

Refer to the annex for the Sample of the diploma and its supplement to be issued for mastering the study program (see Annex 29).

Refer to the annex for the The opinion of the Council of Higher Education in accordance with the second part of Article 55 of the Higher Education Law can be viewed in the appendix of the report (see Annex 30).

3.1.3. Economic and/ or social substantiation of the study programme, analysis of graduates' employment.

The implementation of the study programme has not yet started as of the time of preparation of the report, therefore there are no programme graduates and, accordingly, no information about the employment of the graduates.

Upon assessing the economic and social justification of the study programme, it is necessary to point out the difficult situation which tourism and recreation organizations are currently experiencing. On the one hand, there is no doubt that in the current changing circumstances, the importance of high-quality tourism education has increased, as the environment has become more complex and unpredictable. In order to maintain, recover or develop operation, innovations, creativity and technologies in all stages of the tourism value chain become more and more important in tourism-related organizations – traveller information, marketing, sales, product development, customer management, financial management. At the same time, it should be emphasized that crisis situations are also an opportunity for the transformation of companies and destinations in the tourism and hospitality industry – ensuring their ability to quickly adapt to crises or rapid changes, introducing innovations, digital solutions, strengthening sustainability and cooperation. In order to implement the management of tourism organizations and destinations in these new circumstances, it is necessary to strengthen several groups of competences – the ability to implement innovations and digital solutions, sustainability management, the introduction of new business models[1], including using modern tools and data for forecasting and development of possible development scenarios. Taking into account the above-mentioned significant direct and indirect impact of tourism on the national economy, the higher education in tourism is essential, as it provides skills for the management of tourism organizations and destinations in circumstances of particularly high competition and uncertainty, and promotes a more sustainable and flexible approach to the management of tourism and recreation organizations and sites.

The importance of the higher education is also emphasized by the paradigm shift in tourism – due to the impact of the pandemic, the understanding of the development of tourism has been reassessed – if previously the dominant growth criterion was the increase in the number of tourists, because it generates higher profit, now the development goals are more related to higher sustainability indicators in terms of the management of destinations, as well as to such management of organizations which enables them to recover faster after crises because they are not focused only on making a profit[2].

On the other hand, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, employment in the tourism sector was often not considered as an attractive field in which to build a career – most likely this is due to the fact that employment in tourism is more associated with service work in the hospitality sector than the less visible broad career opportunities in various levels of management positions in one of the many tourism and leisure related industries. The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns, closures, and downsizing of companies in the industry caused a large outflow of employees from the industry, which, upon recovering of the industry, causes significant problems in attracting human resources. At the moment, the industry experiences a problematic situation – human resources are needed to restore the industry, but potential employees are not interested in working in the industry. The war in Ukraine has caused even greater uncertainty, which makes some international tourists consider the Baltic States as an unsafe destination. Therefore, on the one hand, tourism is an area with a high multiplier effect and thus important for the economy of Latvia[3], on the other

hand, the economic potential of the industry is prevented from being used by the lack of qualified labour force, which limits development and endangers the quality of services.[4] Higher education in tourism – it is currently necessary, however, it does not seem like an attractive and safe area of career. Industry organizations are currently in critical need of additional human resources, and one of the ways to provide for this need is to offer attractive, up-to-date educational programmes.

[1] European Parliament (2017). Briefing. Major challenges for EU tourism and policy responses. Available at: <https://aer.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Major-challenges-for-EU-tourism-and-policy-response.pdf>

[2] Stefan Gössling, Daniel Scott & C. Michael Hall (2020): Pandemics, tourism and global change: a rapid assessment of COVID-19, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*

[3] In accordance with the data of the Central Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Latvia, the share of industries related to tourism in Latvia generates ~2.2% of income and provides work for 4.2% of all employees, and the combination of the direct and indirect contribution of the industry determines its high added value. The ability of the industry to create jobs is emphasized by a study of the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the World Travel and Tourism Council, specifying that every 2.7% increase in the flow of travellers will result in a million jobs. (United Nations (2020). Policy Brief. Covid-19 and Transforming Tourism. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_tourism_august_2020.pdf)

[4] Tourism is one of the catalysts for Europe's economic recovery due to its ability to provide an income flow to the economy, both directly and indirectly, and it promotes activity and provides income to many other sectors as well, such as trade, transport, arts, entertainment and leisure event organizers, medical service providers, etc.

3.1.4. Statistical data on the students of the respective study programme, the dynamics of the number of the students, and the factors affecting the changes to the number of the students. The analysis shall be broken down into different study forms, types, and languages.

As the programme received its licence at the end of 2021, the first nine full-time students were admitted for the academic year 2022/2023. For the first students, the study programme is delivered in Latvian, but in order to facilitate international experience, part of the study programme is also delivered in English (up to 20% of the credits, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Latvia).

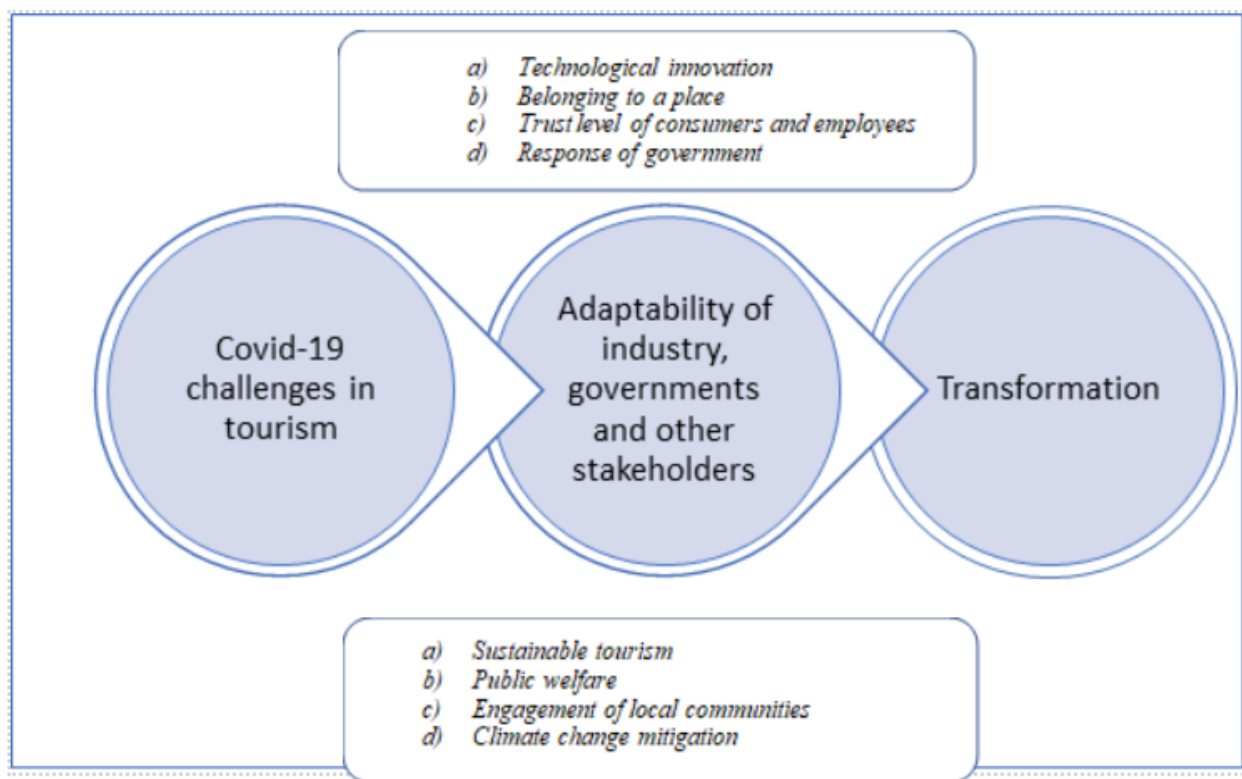
3.1.5. Substantiation of the development of the joint study programme and description and evaluation of the choice of partner universities, including information on the development and implementation of the joint study programme (if applicable).

3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

3.2.1. Analysis of the content of the study programme. Assessment of the interrelation between the information included in the study courses/ modules, the intended learning outcomes, the set aims and other indicators with the aims of the study course/ module and the aims and intended outcomes of the study programme. Assessment of the relevance of the content of the study courses/ modules and compliance with the needs of the relevant industry, labour market and with the trends in science on how and whether the content of the study courses/ modules is updated in line with the development trends of the relevant industry, labour market, and science.

The Covid-19 pandemic, as well as geopolitical upheavals largely determine the current trends in the behaviour of travellers and, accordingly, in the management of tourism and leisure organizations, in the management of destinations, however, changes were observed in the industry even before these crises, for example, the trend of digitalization, climate change and sustainability issues, which remain significant in the long term. The content of the study programme is developed to train professionals in the tourism industry for the work in a rapidly changing environment and in crisis situations, where mutual competition between tourism organizations and destinations has intensified.

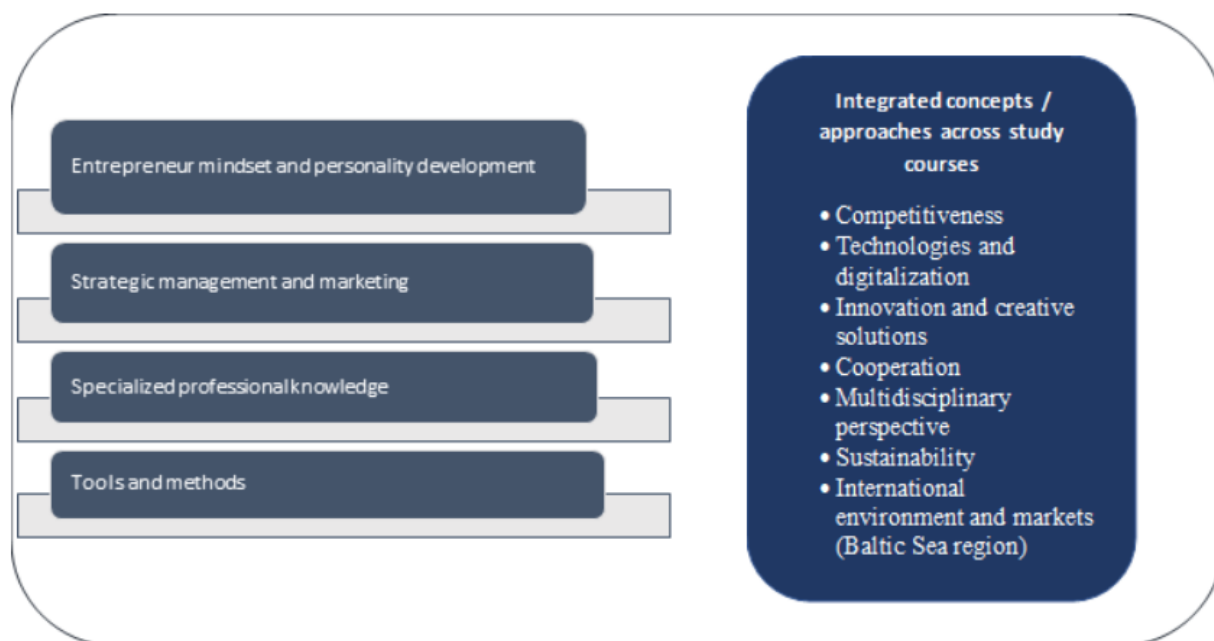
Figure 1. *An adaptation-oriented model of the new economy in the context of tourism.*



Source: Sharma et al. 2020[1]

Based on the previous research results and recommendations for higher education in tourism,[2] lecturer experience, study courses previously implemented within the framework of ViA Master's study programmes in tourism and student feedback, both the study course themes and the multiskill topics that are to be integrated into the study programme are identified. The study programme, in general, provides the knowledge, skills and competence necessary to overcome the global challenges of tourism development and to meet the development needs of Latvia, the Baltic and Nordic countries as tourism destinations (see Figure 2). Therefore, it also contributes to increasing the competitiveness of Latvia as a tourist destination.

Figure 2. Content of the study programme “Tourism Competitiveness Management”.



The study programme includes the courses that: (a) focus on personality development; (b) explains the macro level and provides knowledge of the wider context; (c) explains the (micro) level of organization/destination management. Under these different levels, several thematic blocks of courses providing in-depth knowledge can be distinguished. The compulsory part of the study programme focuses on the development of strategic management, tourism product design and sales, as well as research competencies. The study programme also emphasizes digital support tools in the management of organization and destination processes, as well as innovative solutions in product development and marketing. The elective course offer includes macro-level courses, as well as a wide range of technology-related study courses. A study tour to the Baltic-Nordic region is planned as a mandatory elective course, where students will practically appropiate the knowledge acquired during the course in cooperation with tourism industry organizations.

The volume of the study programme is either 60 CP or 80 CP, and it is structured as follows: (1) in-depth professional knowledge in *economics and entrepreneurship* by offering a block of study courses *Management and competitiveness* – strategic management courses, product development and sales – for the improvement of entrepreneurial mindset and leadership skills – together 20 CP; (2) research – courses intended for focusing on the development of a Master’s paper, research methods and data analysis (6 CP); these courses help also appropiate theoretical knowledge of economics and business (4-semester study programme – 26 CP). The total volume of the Master’s paper is 20 CP; (3) Compulsory elective courses – 6 CP, where one of the courses is a field trip, and the other is a study course *Tourism Entrepreneurship and Global Changes*, which improves the competence to work in a rapidly changing business environment; (4) Elective courses – in the amount of 8 CP – for deepening specialized knowledge of the use of technologies in tourism, also macro-level courses in international economy and financial management, etc.; 5) An offer of additional courses in accordance with the requirements of the regulatory enactments – the programme content includes study courses in civil defence and environmental protection, which students acquire if such courses have not been previously taken in a lower-level study programmes, as well as a Latvian language course for international students.

Summarizing the above, the academic Master’s degree is awarded if students fulfil the following requirements:

1. Study courses of the study programme in the amount of 40 CP must be completed;

2. If the lower-level study programme did not include courses in accordance with the requirements set out in the Law on Environmental Protection and the Law on Civil Defence, these courses must be taken in the addition to those included in the study programme. In accordance with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, international students have to take a Latvian language course.
3. Students have to pass the State examination – they have to defend the Master's paper (20 CP);
4. In the 80 CP study programme, students have to additionally do 20 weeks of research internship I & II.

Upon planning the study programme, the following was taken into consideration: the study courses should provide certain knowledge and also develop certain skills and/or competence in accordance with the outcomes of the study programme. Upon planning the study courses, lecturers paid attention to the planning of student individual and group work in such a way to allow students to consolidate or test the knowledge acquired by the help of practical assignments – case studies, study assignments in cooperation with industry companies. Such an approach corresponds to the general trend in tourism education – to offer an integrated approach for training young professionals which is based on problem-solving and focused on the development of entrepreneurial mindset, process management, and operational activity. The study programme content is specifically interdisciplinary, as such an approach provides students with the knowledge and understanding, as well as prepares them for professional work in various sectors of the tourism industry. The programme content responds to the challenges and trends that characterize the tourism industry – the need for innovation and creativity, the growing importance of technology in various aspects of the operation of tourism organizations – from product development to smart site management, from organization management to sales processes. Also, in particular, the programme emphasizes the knowledge and competence related to crisis and risk management, the introduction of new business models, the possibility of transformation of tourism and hospitality industry companies and destinations – ensuring their ability to quickly adapt to the circumstances of future crises or rapid changes. The programme focuses on several groups of competences related to sustainability management, which is one of the stable trends that contextualizes tourism development.

The study programme was licensed at the end of 2021, and so far there has been no need to update its content. Employers' needs and labour market research, as well as industry trends were taken into account in the process of developing the programme. According to the above, higher education in tourism should strengthen: (1) A perspective on tourism and natural resources, including the interaction of climate change in the context of sustainable development; (2) Understanding of the organization or destination development not only from the growth perspective, but from a broader point of view, where development is also understood as strategic stabilization of operations or, if necessary, downsizing; (3) Digitization and innovative smart solutions in tourism; (4) Safety, hygiene and health aspects in tourism; (5) Competence in the development and management of companies whose activities are not limited to tourism, in order to introduce a flexible and adaptable business concept, which is essential in cases if similar crisis situations occur, as well as other organizational management competencies that allow to set up and manage organizations which are able to quickly recover from a crisis and to adapt to changes; (6) An updated vision to financial management and planning competence, as many companies have accumulated credit obligations during the crisis; (7) More intensive and multifaceted cooperation and networking among the parties involved, both from the State and local governments, as well as from the private sector, including in circumstances of intense mutual competition. In general, studies and reports recommend assessing and making significant changes to higher education in tourism to ensure its relevancy to the post-pandemic reality.

The draft programme has been discussed at the advisory board of the VRSTAO study field; the advisory board consists of tourism industry professionals. The members of the advisory board pointed out that the need for the Master's degree in tourism is most often related to the goal of understanding the

causes of the (in)efficiency of a specific organization and improving its operation (for example, how to more effectively reach new target markets). As a result of the discussion, the importance of solving the current problems of the industry is more emphasized in the programme. The working group which was in charge of programme development has also held individual discussions with representatives of several professional tourism and hospitality industry organizations in Latvia, who indicated, during the consultations, that the negative consequences of Covid-19 have made representatives of tourism and related industries more aware of the importance of higher education and applied research in tourism management when it comes to the prevention of Covid-19 consequences and the planning of the recovery of the industry.

During the programme development process in 2020, a focus group discussion was held with the students of the currently closed ViA Master's study programme "Strategic Management of Tourism". As a result, it was concluded that students need the knowledge related to the understanding of global macro-level developments and the management of their impact on the micro-environment of organizations, and these recommendations are clearly reflected in the programme content.

[1] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7771910/>

[2] The recommendations of the United Nations Report on *Covid-19 and Transforming Tourism*^[1], the European Tourism Manifesto, as well as the recommendations of other international reports on the future development of tourism and scientific publications on the necessary changes in tourism education in the context of Covid-19 are taken into account in the development of the programme content:

United Nations (2020). Policy Brief. Covid-19 and Transforming Tourism. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_tourism_august_2020.pdf

Tourism Manifesto (2020): <https://tourismmanifesto.eu/policy-priorities/>

European Commission (2020). JRC Science for policy report. Behavioural changes in tourism in times of COVID-19. Available at: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC121262/report_covid_tour_emp_final.pdf

Johan Edelheim (2020) How should tourism education values be transformed after 2020?, Tourism Geographies, 22:3, 547-554.

Refer to the annex for Informative report on the compliance of the study program with the state education standard (see Annex 31).

Refer to the annex for Study program plan (see Annex 32).

Refer to the annex for Descriptions of study courses of the study program (see Annex 33).

Refer to the annex for Mapping of study courses to achieve the study results of the study program (see Annex 34).

3.2.2. In the case of master's and doctoral study programmes, specify and provide the justification as to whether the degrees are awarded in view of the developments and findings in the field of science or artistic creation. In the case of a doctoral study programme, provide a description of the main research roadmaps and the impact of the study programme on research and other education levels (if applicable).

The study programme was developed taking into account the latest theoretical findings in economics and entrepreneurship, psychology (consumer behaviour), and other tourism-related sciences. Research activity of the lecturers ensures the integration of research results and findings

of the latest research projects into the study courses. It is a common practice at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences to involve students of the Master's degree programmes in the current research projects, and their Master's papers are also written as part of them.

The Master's degree of social sciences in tourism and leisure organization is awarded after successful completion of the study courses and defence of the Master's paper (State examination). The Master's paper is an independently written paper that reflects a qualified compilation of research results and a theoretical substantiation based on the latest research in economics and business, psychology (consumer behaviour), and other tourism-related sciences and their practical application in various aspects of organization and destination management. It integrates theoretical knowledge acquired during the interdisciplinary study courses and practical skills for applying theoretical knowledge in research. It shows the study outcomes, students' skills to combine theory and practice, and the ability to develop the processes related to professional work life theoretically and practically; as well as students' readiness and ability to carry out research independently. The process of writing the Master's paper is strictly controlled and supervised already from the moment of selecting the topic of the paper; this helps ensure research of topical issues of the relevant branches of science, support for the student's individual work, and a systematic, high-value result-oriented approach to the writing of the research paper.

3.2.3. Assessment of the study programme including the study course/ module implementation methods by indicating what the methods are, and how they contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study courses and the aims of the study programme. In the case of a joint study programme, or in case the study programme is implemented in a foreign language or in the form of distance learning, describe in detail the methods used to deliver such a study programme. Provide an explanation of how the student-centred principles are taken into account in the implementation of the study process.

On the scale of the entire higher education institution, every year ViA conducts a survey of students' opinion on the following issues: compliance of the study programmes implemented at ViA with the student's expectations, the quality of the study programmes, informational and material technical provision, the quality of the academic staff, the quality of international cooperation, etc. The responses received are taken into account in planning development and improving ViA operation. The ViA Rector meets and verbally discusses these issues with representatives of the ViA Student Self-Government on a regular basis.

The programme director is responsible for the study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management*. It is planned to continue the already established ways of cooperating with students – several meetings during the semester to discuss current issues, to listen to suggestions and comments, as well as to introduce the practice of organizing individual meetings once a semester to provide students with more support in blended learning studies and to more timely find out possible problem situations. It is also planned to pay more attention to learning analytics, by which we mean not only regular surveys of student satisfaction, but also the wider use of data generated by the e-learning environment on student activity and progress in acquiring study courses.

Student feedback on study courses is regularly discussed at the VRSTAO study field meetings with lecturers involved in the implementation of the study programmes, as well as at the study field council composed of the teaching staff and a student representative from each study programme

implemented in the study field – each study year is represented by a representative.

Student assessment

The implementation of the student assessment procedure is monitored and supervised by the management of the academic structural unit responsible for the implementation of the programme, the Study Administration Group of the Administrative Department, and the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs. Students are assessed during the study courses, within the framework of internship, and upon defending their Master's papers. The main principles of student assessment are as follows: assessment is mandatory (it is necessary to obtain passing grades for the entire content of the study programme), assessment transparency (public availability of the approved and established assessment criteria in the course descriptions, Master's Paper Regulations, Internship Regulations, as well as students receive lecturer's explanation about the evaluation received), as well as the right of students to appeal the evaluation received (the procedure is defined in the ViA Study Regulations), as well as the principle of diversity of assessment methods, which can have several forms: 1) students are involved in the assessment process within the study courses, for example, assessing each other's contribution as part of group work, reviewing group members' study assignments, etc., as well as 2) during the course, the lecturer uses different forms of assessment, for example, some study assignments are assessed as "passed", others are assessed by a grade, etc. Professionals of the industry participate in the assessment of graduation papers, and are included in the defence commission by the decision of the Faculty Council.

The guidelines on writing and defending the Master's papers also include detailed assessment criteria. The description of each study course includes information on the assessment criteria and assessment forms. The course lecturer discusses the assessment criteria with the students at the beginning of the course. It is a mandatory requirement for the lecturer to prepare and give students (electronically) a full course description at the beginning of the study course, as well as to discuss the study course plan, content, requirements and deadlines for students' independent assignments or group work in the first lecture of the course.

Criteria for assessing research papers (Master's papers) are defined and available to students on the ViA e-environment. Study course lecturers are responsible for providing students with publicly available course assessment criteria, while the director of the study programme is responsible for general supervision. The rules regarding student's absence, illness and other excusing circumstances are included in the course descriptions. These measures ensure that students are informed of the ViA assessment strategy, criteria, examinations and other assessment techniques that will be implemented during the assessment process of the study outcomes, and of what is expected of students. In case of questions, students consult with the lecturers of the specific study courses or with the programme director.

Summarizing the above, the main principles that make up the student assessment system are as follows:

- The ViA Study Regulations define the criteria, forms and deadlines for student assessment, conditions regarding academic debts, and other requirements for achieving study outcomes;
- The criteria, conditions and measures published in the study course descriptions are used and consistently applied for the assessment of students' knowledge;
- Methodical guidelines are developed and approved for the procedure of writing and defending students' graduation papers;
- The composition of the State examination commission is approved by the Faculty Council. The commission also includes industry specialists/experts who act in accordance with the *Regulations of*

the Procedure for Writing and Defending the Master's Papers.

- The Internship Regulations determine the procedure for internship, the conditions for writing and defending reports.

3.2.4. If the study programme envisages an internship, describe the internship opportunities offered to students, provision and work organization, including whether the higher education institution/ college helps students to find an internship place. If the study programme is implemented in a foreign language, provide information on how internship opportunities are provided in a foreign language, including for foreign students. To provide analysis and evaluation of the connection of the tasks set for students during the internship included in the study programme with the learning outcomes of the study programme (if applicable).

The goal of internship is to provide students of the Master's study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Management* (80 CP) (who previously acquired education in an academic study programme) the opportunity to approbate and improve the knowledge and skills acquired during the studies in organizations of the industry, as well as to support them in the process of writing the Master's paper, the subject of which is closely related to the practical challenges of the industry.

Internship tasks are as follows:

1. To get to know the work specifics of the internship organization chosen;
2. In agreement with the internship supervisor and the supervisor of the Master's paper, to participate in the implementation of specific tasks related to the subject of the Master's paper;
3. To summarize information obtained during internship, as well as to document the experience acquired, knowledge, skills that could be used in further research, including in the process of writing the Master's paper.

The total duration of internship is 20 weeks (20 CP), and students do internship during the 3rd and 4th semesters, thus it is divided into *Research Internship I* (in the third semester – 14 CP) and *Research Internship II* (in the fourth semester – 6 CP). A student chooses an internship provider in accordance with the specifics of his or her Master's paper topic, harmonizing it with the management of the study programme and the supervisor of the Master's paper.

The internship provider provides the student with the opportunity to perform internship tasks in accordance with the internship programme, which the student prepares and submits to the management of the study field before the beginning of internship. The internship organization appoints a contact person (internship supervisor) for the student; the internship supervisor is responsible for ensuring the performance of the internship tasks in accordance with the Internship Regulations and the internship programme. The contact person is an intermediary between the relevant organization and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. At the end of internship, the internship supervisor provides feedback on the student's performance. If internship is done in several organizations, the feedback must be received from each organization.

The student's responsibilities during internship are as follows:

1. to complete the internship programme drawn up before the beginning of internship;
2. to meet with the internship supervisor on a regular basis to analyze the progress of

internship;

3. to maintain communication on the internship progress with the management of the study programme;
4. to maintain communication on the course of internship with the supervisor of the Master's paper on issues related to the writing of the graduation paper;
5. to prepare a written interim report after the first stage of internship, and the internship report at the end of internship, as well as to present and defend publicly the tasks performed during internship.

During the course of internship, the student prepares a report on the work completed at the organization in accordance with the requirements of the internship report. This report is prepared in accordance with the internship programme developed by the student and submitted to the director of the study programme before the beginning of internship, as well as in accordance with the conditions agreed upon by the student and the internship supervisor at the beginning of internship. Upon developing the internship programme, the student consults on the content of internship with the director of the study programme and the supervisor of the Master's paper. The following has to be specified in the internship programme: internship organization (or organizations), internship goal, tasks planned during internship, and justification of the connectivity of internship with the Master's paper topic.

Internship is not passed if:

1. Negative feedback of the student's behaviour, and of bad and superficial attitude is received;
2. The student, during the internship defence, is unable to provide an adequate report on the work done during internship and its usefulness, as well as its connectivity with the Master's paper;
3. Internship tasks have not been completed, or their quality does not meet the requirements.

The Internship Regulations, as well as student report and internship feedback form templates are appended in [Annex 33](#).

The study field VRSTAO of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences receives on a regular basis requests from industry organizations for interns, as well as cooperation agreements are entered into with internship providers; long-term work in tourism education and connectivity with the industry have made it possible to make a database of employers. Previous experience shows that students basically look for internship providers themselves because in this way they can choose the company according to the field of their professional interest; besides the location of the internship provider is often important for financial reasons (low transport costs, close to their place of residence and family). Internship is often done in the student's workplace, thus providing for an opportunity of an in-depth study of the organization and providing feedback for companies that appreciate it and use it in practice. If necessary, the programme management provides support in providing a place of internship.

Since there have been no students in the programme so far, there has been no need to find an internship place for international students, however, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences has previous positive experience with finding internship places for international exchange students – due to the specificity of the tourism industry, a large number of cooperation partners from the industry is open for international students.

For detailed information on the internship tasks and their connection with the study programme plan refer to the Internship Regulations and the Study Programme Plan in the Annex (see Annex 33).

3.2.5. Evaluation and description of the promotion opportunities and the promotion process provided to the students of the doctoral study programme (if applicable).

3.2.6. Analysis and assessment of the topics of the final theses of the students, their relevance in the respective field, including the labour market, and the marks of the final theses.

The study program received a license at the end of 2021 and its implementation in practice has not yet started. The defense of the final theses is planned for the first time in January 2024.

3.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

3.3.1. Assessment of the compliance of the resources and provision (study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision) with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the learning outcomes to be achieved by providing the respective examples.

ViA does not separate infrastructure by study programs, but resources are assessed for the entire university as a whole. The base available for the implementation of the KTSV study program (auditoriums, computer auditoriums, laboratory, library resources) is fully sufficient.

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

Information about the resources of the study program and its provision is available in Part II, Chapter 3 of the report, 2.3.1.- 2.3.3. in points.

3.3.2. Assessment of the study provision and scientific base support, including the resources provided within the framework of cooperation with other science institutes and higher education institutions (applicable to doctoral study programmes) (if applicable).

3.3.3. Indicate data on the available funding for the corresponding study programme, its funding sources and their use for the development of the study programme. Provide information on the costs per one student within this study programme, indicating the items included in the cost calculation and the percentage distribution of funding between the specified items. The minimum number of students in the study programme in order to ensure the profitability of the study programme (indicating separately the information on each language, type and form of the study programme implementation).

The first students enrolled in the study programme on 31.08.2022, so it is not possible to make a financial assessment. The financial evaluation of the study field of the VRSTAO can be consulted in [Part II, Chapter 2.3., Sub-chapter 2.3.1.](#) of the report.

3.4. Teaching Staff

3.4.1. Assessment of the compliance of the qualification of the teaching staff members (academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants) involved in the implementation of the study programme with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments. Provide information on how the qualification of the teaching staff members contributes to the achievement of the learning outcomes.

The study programme is conceptually developed based on the current needs of the labour market and industry trends, rather on the already available faculty resources. This is also one of the reasons why several guest lecturers have been attracted to the programme – to ensure the adequacy of the lecturer's competence; teaching staff was sought outside the study field and ViA.

Prerequisites for lecturers' involvement in the programme are as follows: direction of scientific activity and topics of research carried out so far, professional experience accumulated in academic work (preparation of study courses), competence and knowledge in the fields related to the programme content, scientific degree, although ViA prefers to involve lecturers with scientific work experience in the implementation of the study programme. Both academic work experience and professional experience in the industry were also taken into account when attracting guest lecturers. Most of the lecturers have a long-term scientific background (regular involvement of the lecturers in research is confirmed by their work in scientific institutes of ViA or elsewhere – elected research staff is as follows: A. Līviņa, L. Veliverronena, A. Klepers, A. van der Steina, M. Leščevica, V. Silkāne, J. Buholcs, S. Lemša) and/or professional work experience in the industry (participation in the work of various industry organizations, providing consultations or leading educational activities for industry representatives on topics related to the study courses taught). The profile of scientific publications and research of the teaching staff should be related to the expertise required in the study courses.

Lecturers and guest lecturers having English language knowledge at the level C1 are involved in the study programme, as well as lecturers who have expressed their willingness to improve their English language knowledge and to obtain a C1 level certificate. Some of the lecturers have already improved their foreign language knowledge by participating in the English language training held within the

framework of the European Social Fund project “Improvement of academic staff and development of human resources of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences” (SAM 8.2.2).

In general, it is expected that the implementation of the Master’s study programme *Tourism Competitiveness Strategic Management* will be ensured by the following lecturers: two professors (Prof. A. Līviņa and Prof. M. Lešceviča), four associate professors (A. Klepers, V. Silkāne, J. Buholcs, A. van der Steina), assistant professors L. Veliverronena, A. Šmitiņa, visiting assistant professor I. Kalve, and three assistant lecturers (G. Bukovska, S. Lemša, I. Beliatskaya). In total, 8 of the lecturers have doctor’s degrees (fields of sciences – economics, psychology, geography, pedagogy, communication and media, which cover the interdisciplinary nature of various fields of tourism), while all the others (3) are continuing their doctoral studies.

Nine of the lecturers work for ViA, and it is their main place of work, one of the guest lecturers represents Riga Stradiņš University, besides, she has previous teaching experience in ViA’s tourism Master’s degree programme. Two guest lecturers are studying in the doctoral programme “Economics and Entrepreneurship” jointly implemented by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, and Rezekne Academy of Technologies, as well as both have long-term professional experience closely related to the study courses taught in the programme. One of the lecturers attracted by ViA has international tourism education and work experience, she has taught and worked within the industry in various European countries – Ilona Beliatskaya attracted by ViA in the framework of SAM 8.2.2 project and, based on the successful experience so far, the cooperation is continued. She has started doctoral studies at the Estonian Business School (EBS).

A list of the lecturers and their academic positions is available in Annex 16 of the report.

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

3.4.2. Analysis and assessment of the changes to the composition of the teaching staff over the reporting period and their impact on the study quality.

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

3.4.3. Information on the number of the scientific publications of the academic staff members, involved in the implementation of doctoral study programme, as published during the reporting period by listing the most significant publications published in Scopus or WoS CC indexed journals. As for the social sciences, humanitarian sciences, and the science of art, the scientific publications published in ERIH+ indexed journals or peer-reviewed monographs may be additionally specified. Information on the teaching staff included in the database of experts of the Latvian Council of Science in the relevant field

of science (total number, name of the lecturer, field of science in which the teaching staff has the status of an expert and expiration date of the Latvian Council of Science expert) (if applicable).

3.4.4. Information on the participation of the academic staff, involved in the implementation of the doctoral study programme, in scientific projects as project managers or prime contractors/ subproject managers/ leading researchers by specifying the name of the relevant project, as well as the source and the amount of the funding. Provide information on the reporting period (if applicable).

3.4.5. Assessment of the cooperation between the teaching staff members by specifying the mechanisms used to promote the cooperation and ensure the interrelation between the study programme and study courses/ modules. Specify also the proportion of the number of the students and the teaching staff within the study programme (at the moment of the submission of the Self-Assessment Report).

Within the study field, the lecturers communicate on a regular basis during the study field meetings, as well as during the programme lecturer meetings, they have also meetings with the programme director. An additional communication tool for the programme lecturers is the Lecturer Handbook for internal use, which emphasizes the concepts to be integrated into the study courses, the importance of connectivity with the industry, and various forms of how it can be implemented, as well as there is an emphasis on a student-centred approach. In order to increase the quality of the lecturer performance and the benefit students can gain from the courses, several study courses are taught by two or even three lecturers who mutually collaborate (courses with the involvement of two or more lecturers are as follows: Tourism strategic leadership, Marketing strategies in tourism, Tourism entrepreneurship and global changes, Tool set for business data management, Research methods for business) where one of the lecturers assumes the role of coordinator for the course planning and organization, including coordination of the issues related to the industry guest lecturers. Such courses promote the cooperation among the lecturers for ensuring an interdisciplinary approach, and ensure that students are more interested in the course and acquire it more successfully.

In general, lecturers, upon planning and implementing study courses, pay a lot of attention to the planning of students' individual assignments and group work to provide such formats that allow students to consolidate and/or test the knowledge acquired by the help of practical assignments – for example, case studies, solving problem situations of real companies – starting from the field work and data collection to solution presentation. In this way, the acquisition and approbation of knowledge is promoted in an integrated way. Specific cases can be analyzed from the perspective of several courses (e.g., marketing, strategic management, financial management). Such an approach corresponds to the common trend at the higher education institutions in Europe – to offer an integrated approach that focuses on the development of entrepreneurial mindset, process

management, and operational activity.

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

The student and teaching staff ratio is not applicable to the programme not yet implemented in practice.

Annexes

III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme		
Sample of the diploma and its supplement to be issued for completing the study programme	29P-Diploms-TSVK-28092021.zip	29P-Diploms-TSVK-28092021.zip
For academic study programmes - Opinion of the Council of Higher Education in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)	30P-AIP-atzinums-TSVK en-GB-Translation by DeepL.docx	30P-AIP-atzinums-TSVK.zip
Compliance of the joint study programme with the provisions of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (table) (if applicable)		
Statistics on the students in the reporting period	2P-Studentu-statistika-2010-2021-AIKA-visi-StudentStatistics-red22112022.xlsx	2P-Studentu-statistika-2010-2021-AIKA-visi-StudentStatistics-red22112022.xlsx
III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof		
Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard	31P-TSVK_atbilstiba_izgl_standartam_2022_10 en.docx	31P-TSVK_atbilstiba_izgl_standartam_2022_10.docx
Compliance of the qualification to be acquired upon completion of the study programme with the professional standard or the requirements for professional qualification (if applicable)		
Compliance of the study programme with the specific regulatory framework applicable to the relevant field (if applicable)		
Mapping of the study courses/ modules for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study programme	34P-TSVK_kartejums-2022_10.xlsx	34P-TSVK_kartejums-2022_10.xlsx
The curriculum of the study programme (for each type and form of the implementation of the study programme)	32P-Study_plan_eng_2022_10.docx	32P-Studiju_plans_TSVK_I-II_labots_2022.docx
Descriptions of the study courses/ modules	33P-TSVK-kursu-apraksti_Course-Descrip.zip	33P-TSVK-kursu-apraksti_Course-Descrip.zip
Description of the organisation of the internship of the students (if applicable)	33P.1-Internship-regulations_I_II_EN_labots.doc	33P.1-Prakses_nolikums_I_II_LV_2022.docx
III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.4. Teaching Staff		
Confirmation that the academic staff of the doctoral study programme includes not less than five doctors, of which at least three are experts approved by the Latvian Council of Science in the branch or sub-branch of science in which the study programme intends to award a scientific degree (if applicable)		
Confirmation that the academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)	Apliecinajums-TSVK-AL.55.pants-IP-02112022.edoc	Apliecinajums-TSVK-AL.55.pants-IP-02112022.edoc