

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: ISMA University College

Study field: Management, Administration and Management of Real Property

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

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

The assessment addresses the study field (StF) "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" with 3 study programmes (StP) implemented and applied for accreditation in various formats at ISMA University of Applied Sciences (Informācijas sistēmu menedžmenta augstskola), hereinafter referred to as ISMA:

1) Professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration" (code 42345) implemented in Riga (Latvia) and Fergana (Uzbekistan) in formats of Full time studies in Latvian and English, Part time extramural studies in Latvian, and Part time distance learning in English. ISMA in their SER uses terminology of extramural studies distance education.

2) Professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration in Tourism" (code 42345) implemented in Riga (Latvia) and Fergana (Uzbekistan) in formats of Full time studies in Latvian and English and Part time extramural studies in Latvian and English respectively.

3) Professional master study programme "Business Administration" (code 47345) implemented in Riga (Latvia) in 3 diverse formats - Full time studies, Part time extramural studies, Distance studies; 2 variations in languages - Latvian and English, and in 4 length variations respectively - 1 year 1 month (66 ECTS), 1 year 5 month (66 ECTS), 2 years (120 ECTS), and 2 years 5 months (120 ECTS).

The experts (international panel of 5) visited the ISMA in Riga and their branch in Fergana as part of the assessment procedure on April 4, 5, 8, 9 of 2024. Prior, during and after the visit the experts have conducted an in-depth and broad analysis of the ISMA submitted self-evaluation report (SER) of the study field and study programmes, including annexes, submitted to AIKA via its e-platform in accordance with the national regulations including those regulating the assessment procedure. During and after the visit the experts had requested and received additional information from ISMA to facilitate high quality analysis leading to strongly justified observations, conclusions and assessments.

It is to be noted, that the current evaluation takes place 2 years after the previous assessment based on which the StF was granted an accreditation period of 2 years, meaning that serious shortcomings and deficiencies were identified during the previous assessment, with the recommendations for the improvement. Although, not all of the previous recommendations relate to current configuration and thus the assessment of the StF due to the changes in StF setting, e.g. closed or otherwise changed StP, the current evaluation, among other aspects in this report, took close focus and attention to analyze and assess the implementation of the relevant recommendations received during the previous assessment procedure (see section 1.6. of the assessment of StF).

Detailed analysis, conclusions, strengths, weaknesses, recommendations, and evaluations are provided below in this report - experts' joint opinion. During the evaluation the experts have detected both, strengths and weaknesses, of the study field and its study programmes. Based on both, the experts have developed recommendations largely focusing on considering weaknesses, but also keeping in mind to use the existent and potential strengths and other yet unused potential of the StF and its StP.

Overall, the experts recognize the improvement of the study field and its study programmes implementation since the last assessment results in 2022. It is evident that on the vast majority of evaluation aspects, ISMA has introduced improvements and ensures continuous work on sufficient quality of modern higher education and research in its necessary balance between academic and industry related operation. For instance, some of the major improvements, strengths, good case practices, innovations and valuable potentials are as follows: Development of the new ISMA and its HR strategy, which is currently according to the best practices being circulated among staff; the

strategies addresses also previous recommendations in relation to e.g. staff qualification and engagement in research and research projects; students` involvement in ISMA study and research process, including at time its administrative nature, visible inclusion of scientific research results in the study process including within the course descriptions; strong cooperation with industry - companies, employers; improved internal quality management system reaching as far as the unified templates of study course descriptions for all study programmes in Latvian and English; staff`s dedication and loyalty in organization and management of administrative processes, study process and research - impressive team in Fergana, specially given less resources - great potential could come from branch being more autonomous; StP directors have great valuable assets - skills, competence, ambition, attitude - showing initiative to organize the processes well-balancing between real-time-value and regulations` requirements; ISMA smartly uses the advantages of the small team efficiency, including in ambition innovation - foreign branches; strong cooperation with external actors and cooperation partners with local guest lecturers as employers and the real-business study visits; well developed and wide use of international networking incl. staff mobility.

With the strengths and their potential value-added in mind, the experts have also identified several risk factors and deficiencies, all of which can be resolved - some in short-term, some in the long-term of 2-6 years. Few of the major weaknesses to be addressed are: Outdated and in some cases seriously misleading information on the ISMA website leading also to misleading communication to students, e.g. about Music management specialization in Business Administration programme. Although few of the most serious issues (information) were removed from the website, still ISMA must review and ensure that all information online in Riga and Fergana and all posters, banners in physical spaces must be legally compliant; information management chain does not fully function and fragmentarily disrupts in between from top leadership, management in Riga to the practical implementation and its organizational aspects of study programmes in Riga and Fergana; Consultants internal legal status and actual work in Fergana signal for several - qualification risks, disbalanced study-load on contact hours, unadjusted course thematics, the unused potential; scientific research motivation programme - though seemingly well functioning true loyalty and understanding enthusiasm based, but lacks institutionalization, inclusion, accessibility and transparency; scattered study results in course descriptions, rather weak drop-out monitoring, in some cases lack of online infrastructure (databases, softwares) access for remote and distant studies.

Based on the strengths, the potential, and the deficiencies - risks and weaknesses, the experts have developed recommendations which though largely focus on the considerations of the weaknesses, but still strongly keeps in mind to use the existent and potential strengths and other yet unused potential of the StF and its StP. Detailed assessment analysis, conclusions, strengths, weaknesses, recommendations, and evaluations are provided below in this report.

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

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

##### **Analysis**

1.1.1. As it is stated in SER - the aim of the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" is to provide training of competent, self-improvement-oriented and innovative-thinking managers of various levels and fields who are competitive in the dynamic global market. The aim is pursued by implementation of two bachelor (Business Administration and Business Administration in Tourism) and one master (Business Administration) programmes. Both, study field and the programmes comply with the main directions of the strategic development of ISMA. The aims and objectives of the StF and the StP included in it are set in compliance with the

priorities stated in the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 (Latvia 2030) (Available: [https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/LIAS\\_2030\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/LIAS_2030_en_1.pdf)) (long term investment in human capital by providing qualitative education) and the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027 Available: ([https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NAP2027\\_\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NAP2027__ENG.pdf)) as well. Interconnection of the programmes of the study field is very close, allowing sharing of lecturers and the delivery of combined lectures to the students of both bachelor programmes, saving resources. At the same time, the experts analysed and note that there aren't risks in relation to the two programmes content wise overlapping as the BA programme in Tourism offers number of distinct courses throughout the programme, e.g. Travel and Hotel Management Information Technology, Tourism Basics, Hospitality Industry, Second Foreign Language, Complex Tourism Product Development, Catering Enterprise Management, Tourism Company Activity Practice, Tourism Management, Excursion Training, Economic Justification for Complex Tourism Industry Product, Recreationology (see SER Annex 3.1.6. Curriculum\_Programme\_BA\_Bac.xlsx and 3.2.6. Curriculum\_Study\_programme\_Tourism.xlsx).

Trends of the Latvian society and national economy are taken into account based on good informal connections with local businesses and their associations - confirmed at the panel meetings with employers. Studies in the Fergana branch providing European education, which is highly demanded in Uzbekistan, at the same time reflects the needs of the local business community by the internships offered in Fergana enterprises, field trips and invited guests to deliver lectures on certain topics.

1.1.2. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the study field have been identified by the ISMA and clearly described and integrated into the Strategy 2024 - 2030. ([https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA\\_strategija\\_2024\\_2030\\_ENG\\_new.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA_strategija_2024_2030_ENG_new.pdf)) The plan demonstrates critical thinking and analytical skills of the parties involved in the strategic planning.

The plan addresses weaknesses: insufficient number of foreign lecturers; Insufficient number of publications in internationally recognised data bases; ISMA journals and conference proceedings are not indexed in the SCOPUS or Web of Science Core Collection databases or included in the ERIH+ database; High costs for the ensuring of the study process; Incomplete students' foreign language skills; Students' insufficient participation in scientific and practical activities) - in a realistic way. Clear and measurable actions are foreseen, including improvement of the electronic environment and digitisation of study courses, organization of lectures by foreign guest lecturers at least once per semester, promotion of the study programmes in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, strengthening cooperation with other higher education institutions, including foreign ones.

The plan was developed with the involvement of all stakeholders of the study field. It has been analyzed and accepted by the Study Direction Council in November 2023 (SER p.24).

1.1.3. As it is stated in SER, and confirmed during the meetings with the management, Director of the Study field, Directors of the study programmes and the lecturers, the management structure of the field is simple and clear. The Director of StF organises a monthly meeting with the constant participation of the Heads of departments and the Directors of the study programmes (SER p.24). Other stakeholders, such as Heads of the Study Department and Career Centre, Vice-Rector for Studies, Vice-Rector for Research, students, employers, IT manager, etc., are invited to discuss specific issues related with the development of the study field and provide efficient and timely support. Decisions on financial support and/or technical solutions are coordinated with the Vice-Rector for Studies and approved by the Rector. The IT department ensures the improvement of the Moodle environment and other information systems, installation and maintenance of computer equipment, installation of the necessary software and technical support.

Responsibilities of the Head of the StF, the Directors of study programmes (SER p.24-25) and the teaching staff are clearly defined. Meetings of the StF Council are organised twice in an academic year. Due to the good cooperation atmosphere, small team and close relationship between the employees, decision-making processes sometimes take place even in informal meetings and might be quickly implemented. Although the management sees the fast decision making and effective administration with little bureaucracy as the competitive advantage of ISMA, informally the “family”, as it was called at one of the meetings with the teaching staff, the relationships provide space for a kind of misunderstandings, lack of awareness who does what in the highest level of management (for example, different understanding of the role of consultants in Fergana - reference to the meetings with the top management, lecturers in Riga, consultants in Fergana ), and unconscious disregard of the formalised procedures.

1.1.4. Admission of students for next academic year is regulated by the requirements for the admission in study programmes developed by the Vice-Rector for Studies and approved by the Senate on November 1, of current academic year (SER p.26) in compliance with the Cabinet Regulation No. 846, adopted 10 October, 2006 Noteikumi par prasībām, kritērijiem un kārtību uzņemšanai studiju programmās un valsts atbalstu pilsoņiem, kas brīvprātīgi pieteikušies valsts aizsardzības dienestā un pabeiguši to (“Regulations Regarding the Requirements, Criteria and Procedures for Admission to Study Programmes and State Support for Citizens Who Voluntarily Applied for and Completed the National Defence Service”). Admission requirements are published on ISMA web-page. Applications from foreigners (especially from the non-EU countries) are carefully considered by ISMA (SER p.26), which was also observed by experts during the visit and the meetings at ISMA. The admission of foreigners to ISMA in Riga and ISMA Fergana Branch takes place in accordance with Article 83 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The admission of foreigners to ISMA is organised by ISMA International Relations Department and ISMA Admission Board. Foreign citizens who do not have a permanent residence permit have the right to study at ISMA in compliance with section 83 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. As it is stated in SER, a person who is applying for submission to a study programme shall present a document certifying a previously acquired education which is recognised in Latvia and meets the requirements of the study programme, as well as a document certifying the knowledge of the English language (SER.2.1.4) A mechanism for the admission of foreign students, presented by ISMA, the experts find logical and effective ([https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents\\_en/ISMA\\_Uznemsanas\\_noteikumi\\_2023-2024\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents_en/ISMA_Uznemsanas_noteikumi_2023-2024_ENG.pdf) and 1.4.Admission process International Students.pdf)

The recognition of the study period acquired in another university is regulated by the ISMA Regulations on Studies, available on the web-page as well (SER, p.108, SER Annex 1.2.List\_internal\_regulatory\_documents\_ISMA.xlsx (item No.10) and also at [https://www.isma.lv/images/FILES/ISMA\\_Studiju\\_nolikums\\_2020\\_EN.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/FILES/ISMA_Studiju_nolikums_2020_EN.pdf)). In this case the main responsibility of the implementation of recognition procedures lies on the Director of study programme. The protocol of comparison is approved by the Vice-Rector for Studies, after which the Study Department in cooperation with the student develops an individual study plan. As it is stated in SER p.27- Every semester there are approximately 40 students who start studies in subsequent study stages.

Professional experience, prior formal and non-formal education, the assessment of students' achievements and learning outcomes are recognised in compliance with the procedures set in the Law on Higher Education Institutions p.p. 592 and 593 and Cabinet Regulations Nr. 505 Ārpus formālās izglītības apgūto vai profesionālajā pieredzē iegūto kompetenču un iepriekšējā izglītībā sasniegtu studiju rezultātu atzīšanas noteikumi (Rules for the recognition of competences acquired outside formal education or professional experience and of learning outcomes achieved in prior education), from August 14, 2018:

Awareness of the stakeholders is ensured by publication on the procedures and the requirements on the ISMA web-page.

1.1.5. The assessment of students' achievements (principles and procedures) is regulated by the ISMA Procedures for the organization of testing approved by ISMA Senate on December 19, 2019 (SER p.28 and SER Annex 1.2.List\_internal\_regulatory\_documents\_ISMA.xlsx, item No.14). The kinds of testing are set as mid-term tests and study courses final testing.

The methods for assessing achievements of students are clearly defined in the description of each study course, that as well includes the amount and content of the student's self-study work. As it is stated in SER and confirmed at the meetings with the teaching staff, students and alumni, ISMA is applying a student centered learning approach, wherefore assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes is well thought out - students receive explanation of the assessment and, if necessary, advice on how to improve their work. Possibility to discuss the relevance of the assessment methods or procedures is ensured by collecting formal and informal feedback from students.

The students and alumni appreciate teaching methods (confirmed at the meetings) that let them practically apply theoretical knowledge: case study, practical work, group work, - yet emphasizing that even more practical training hours should be considered.

1.1.6. Principles of academic integrity and mechanisms for their observance are established and described in ISMA University of Applied Sciences Procedures for the organisation of testing (Annex 1.2.List\_internal\_regulatory\_documents\_ISMA.xlsx, item 14), which defines the kinds of violation of students' academic integrity and punitive measures. The document is accessible on the ISMA Moodle system. Principles are applied with the support of every teaching staff member, who inform students about the principles of study course assessment, including the consequences of plagiarism. Technical support is ensured by the UL (University of Latvia) Unified Computerised Plagiarism Control Systems, which allows comparison of ISMA students' papers to the thematic collections of the works of other universities / colleges.

All the stakeholders are well informed what actions should be taken in a case of violation of the academic integrity principles by a student (For example, the student in the research work within the study course "Project Management" violated the rules and was asked to choose another topic and work on it. To avoid such cases lecturers regularly suggest new topics. There were no cases of violation of final theses.

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

The aims of the StF are well defined and attainable. They comply with ISMA strategic development directions, and meet the needs and trends of the society and national economy. The interconnection of the study programmes included in the study field is clear and logical.

ISMA has broadly and realistically identified and analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the StF and integrated them into its strategic development planning documents.

Partly compliant - The management structure of the StF and StP is oriented towards the development, the decision-making is efficient, but not engaging leading to communication disruption and thus the support provided by the administrative and technical staff partly ensures the needs of the StP efficient implementation.

The admission of students, the recognition of prior experience, and the assessment of students' achievements and learning outcomes are generally logical and effective, the involved stakeholders are informed and engaged according to set written ISMA quality assured procedures.

The assessment methods and procedures for achieving the aims of StP and the needs of students are analyzed - methods, principles and procedures for assessing achievements of students are

unifiedly developed and defined.

The academic integrity and mechanisms for its observance at ISMA are effective - anti-plagiarism tools and internal ISMA academic integrity culture are applied and the staff recognizes and sustains it.

Strengths:

- 1) Flat managerial structure - small dedicated team - fast decision making - friendly supportive culture.
- 2) Innovative business thinking (establishment of foreign branch).
- 3) Well thought out strategic plan.
- 4) Strong cooperation with business world representatives and other external actors.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Disbalanced informal and formal decision making.
- 2) Lack of awareness of the duties and responsibilities of employees (top management level).

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

### **Analysis**

1.2.1. Within the framework of its internal quality assurance mechanisms, ISMA has a comprehensive feedback system that actively involves students, employers, and academic staff. Students are provided with surveys aimed to evaluate the quality of academic staff and the effectiveness of the study programmes. Such initiative underscores ISMA formal procedures and willingness to know students' needs and level of satisfaction with the academic staff and the study programmes courses. Fergana branch quality policy is aligned with global ISMA quality policy.

Also, ISMA conducts annual surveys targeting employers, in addition to feedback from employers that participate in the assessment of traineeships. This practice is indicative of ISMA engagement with the job market needs, demands of industry standards and employer expectations.

ISMA ensures a yearly review of study courses, methodological materials, study literature, and proposed thesis topics. This systematic process helps to ensure that ISMA study programmes are updated and aligned with academics and industry developments.

ISMA initiative to offer courses and seminars focused on teaching and pedagogical methods represents a significant investment in the professional development of its academic staff, by prioritizing the enhancement of teaching skills.

Regarding making quality policy publicly available, SER does not clearly show the methods by which ISMA quality policy is communicated to different stakeholders. The visibility and accessibility of ISMA quality policy are critical for fostering a culture of transparency and trust among all stakeholders.

ISMA Development Strategy for 2024 - 2030 and the ISMA Quality Assurance Policy reveals an absence of specific key performance indicators (KPIs). This omission presents a challenge to the establishment of a truly comprehensive quality assurance system that is both measurable and objective. The development and implementation of detailed KPIs are essential for identifying performance gaps and promoting targeted improvements in a structured and transparent manner.

ISMA approach to quality assurance ensures feedback mechanisms, curriculum updates, and focus on study field development. ISMA could benefit from broader public dissemination of its quality policy and the development of specific key performance indicators. These steps would enable a more systematic approach to quality management, ensuring that ISMA continues to meet high standards of education.

1.2.2. ISMA policy of active participation of the Study Direction Council, alongside the direct inputs from employers plays a critical role in ensuring that the academic programmes remain relevant and

aligned with industry demands and development trends. This engagement with stakeholders is relevant for enriching the study programmes with practical insights and enhancing their relevance to employment scenarios. By bridging the gap between academic theory and industry practice, such collaborations ensure that graduates are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills that are in demand in the labour market.

ISMA shows effort in alignment with existing laws, regulatory frameworks, and occupational standards ensuring that study programmes comply with State educational requirements and norms. ISMA process incorporates a comprehensive review mechanism that leverages feedback from a variety of sources, such as surveys from current students and alumni, analysis of thesis work, outcomes of scientific research, and recommendations from employers. This inclusive feedback system is relevant for a well-informed and balanced approach towards programmes development and revision, ensuring that the curricula remain relevant, and aligned with academic advancements and market needs.

ISMA structured procedure underlies the formulation of the programme's aims, objectives, and content, which is rooted in occupational standards and labour market demands.

The cooperative effort in discussing and approving the content of study courses by the teaching staff and the Study Direction Council shows to be very relevant.

SER (p. 31) indicates that the ISMA Quality Management System procedure related to "Study Programmes" is available only in Latvian language. This limitation potentially restricts accessibility and diminishes transparency for international stakeholders, namely students, who do not speak Latvian. To fully leverage the benefits of such a comprehensive quality management system and to foster an inclusive educational environment, it is relevant to consider making such critical documentation available also in English.

Students have the opportunity to offer feedback on the study process through anonymous surveys, which they receive via email and Moodle system. As it was discussed, when receiving survey results, the directors of study programmes review them, and, if students express dissatisfaction regarding aspects of the study process, discussions are held at the management level to address necessary changes. Academic staff members also noted that they receive survey results to see what should be improved. ISMA representatives mentioned that if students express any concerns regarding specific teachers, the lecturer's performance is evaluated, followed by discussions with the teacher and making of the decision. It was stated that the response rate for surveys is at most 30%. At the same time, ISMA teaching staff themselves are creating creative strategies to encourage students to complete surveys. For example, some professors require students to complete a survey on Moodle to evaluate teachers' work as a prerequisite for accessing study materials for the final project of the course. Experts add that the response rate of surveys is fairly low and should be improved.

1.2.3. ISMA has put in place a formal system named "Nonconformance Management" under its Quality Management System (SER, p.32) to handle any complaints or suggestions that come its way. This organised method makes sure that any issues or ideas are dealt with in a clear manner. By having this structure, ISMA ensures that the process of solving complaints is not just thorough but also transparent and efficient, making it easy to understand how issues are addressed.

To help students know how they can voice their complaints or suggestions, ISMA has taken proactive steps. At the beginning of courses, the Directors of StP make it a point to inform students during the introductory lectures. Moreover, all the necessary details about how to submit complaints or proposals are made available in the internal electronic system used by ISMA. This approach helps create an environment where students are well-informed about their rights and the procedures available to them for expressing their concerns and complaints. Additionally, ISMA has a policy in place to notify individuals who have made complaints within one day of any corrective or preventive actions being taken, which demonstrates ISMA's dedication to addressing issues swiftly.

ISMA also allows complaints to be made anonymously, providing an option for those who may wish

to report issues without revealing their identity. The process includes the use of the Student Council as an intermediary. However, this method, while protective of students' identities, might complicate the feedback loop. The involvement of an intermediary can potentially complicate the process.

Overall, ISMA has put in place significant measures to manage and respond to student complaints and suggestions effectively. Making improvements to how anonymous complaints are handled could further enhance its quality assurance system, ensuring that all students feel heard and that their concerns are addressed in the most efficient and way possible.

1.2.4. ISMA has put in place a structured system designed to gather, process, and analyse information that is critical to the operation and improvement of its study programmes. This system captures data concerning both students and teaching staff and plays a relevant role in providing a comprehensive overview of how study programmes are implemented.

In an effort to adhere to the suggestions made by the Study Quality Commission, ISMA has taken the initiative to create standardised surveys (SER, p.33). These surveys are distributed to students, employers, and alumni alike, with the aim of fostering a uniform method for evaluating ISMA performance across various programmes. This ensures that insights into ISMA performance and potential areas for enhancement are consistent, offering a clear picture of how well ISMA is meeting its educational objectives.

The practice of carrying out these surveys on an annual basis is a key strategy for ISMA. It allows to know the opinions of its main stakeholders. Such a consistent and regular feedback loop is invaluable. It serves as a critical tool for pinpointing the needs of these groups, assessing the success of current policies and actions, and identifying any shifts or modifications needed to improve study processes and outcomes.

Although SER (section 2.2.4 p.33) outlines the mechanisms for collecting and analysing feedback, it does not give clear detail into how the insights gained from surveys and other feedback channels are translated into concrete, actionable improvements within the institution. This reality is valid also for Fergana branch

By implementing a more detailed and transparent approach to showing how feedback leads to specific changes, ISMA could significantly enhance the effectiveness and impact of its feedback system. Establishing clear, formal documentation of the steps taken to act on the feedback received would not only demonstrate ISMA responsiveness but also its commitment to continuous improvement based on stakeholder input. This enhancement in transparency and actionability would likely contribute to the overall quality and relevance of ISMA educational offerings, reinforcing its position as a responsive and adaptive institution in the face of changing educational needs and expectations.

1.2.5. ISMA websites include details about the various study programmes available, the steps involved in the admissions process, collaborative efforts through partnerships, and facilities such as the Business Incubator and the library. Most information is presented in both Latvian and English, making it accessible to a wide and diverse audience.

However, a thorough examination of the website's content reveals some discrepancies when compared to official records (found in VIIS and the E-platform) and the SER. For instance, the specialisations listed for programmes on the website don't match the information provided in the SER or the official registers. This inconsistency was also acknowledged during experts on-site visit, discussions with the Study Field Director and the Directors of Study Programmes. Aligning the website's information with the official data is of utmost importance for ISMA to maintain its credibility and trustworthiness among students and other stakeholders. Additionally, it was noted that the tuition fees displayed on the website pertain to the previous academic year, 2022/2023, which might lead to confusion among prospective students.

ISMA has clearly defined the roles and responsibilities related to the input of data into the VIIS, as

well as the management of academic staff and student registers. This structured approach to data management underscores ISMA commitment to compliance and the accuracy of information, which is foundational for the operation of any educational institution.

ISMA shows commitment to provide comprehensive and useful information to its stakeholders via its website and digital learning platforms. The effort to make a wide range of academic and supportive services accessible online highlights an understanding of the needs of today's students. However, the significance of regularly updating the website's content cannot be overstated. Keeping the information current and in alignment with official sources and records is critical for ensuring that ISMA remains a reliable and trusted source of information for all its stakeholders. Ensuring the accuracy and timeliness of the information provided on the website not only enhances ISMA reputation but also supports the institution's mission to deliver quality education and services.

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

ISMA dedication to upholding and enhancing the quality of its educational offerings and institutional operations is evident in its comprehensive approach to quality assurance. By establishing a clear quality policy, consistently reviewing and updating its study programmes, implementing mechanisms for students to submit complaints, conducting thorough data analysis, and ensuring accessible programme information, ISMA demonstrates its unwavering commitment to excellence. This strategy shows ISMA efforts to engage in ongoing improvement efforts.

To increase ISMA quality assurance initiatives and further enhance its commitment with high standards, it is essential to focus on refining certain aspects of its quality assurance framework. Enhancing transparency across all operations, from policy implementation to decision-making processes, is crucial. This involves openly sharing information about how decisions are made, the criteria for programmes evaluations, and the methodologies behind data collection and analysis. By doing so, ISMA can build greater trust and confidence among students, staff, and external partners. Moreover, adopting a more rigorous approach to performance monitoring is vital. This can be achieved by establishing clear, measurable objectives and outcomes for each programme and administrative function. Creating key performance indicators (KPIs) that are aligned with ISMA strategic goals could enable ISMA to track progress effectively, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions based on empirical evidence.

Accuracy and reliability of information presented on ISMA website is another critical area that requires attention. Ensuring that programme details, admissions procedures, and other vital information are not only current but also aligned with official records and accreditations will eliminate confusion and reinforce ISMA credibility. Regular updates to the website, accompanied by clear communication regarding any changes in policies or programmes structures, can help to maintain an informed and engaged student body and academic community.

By addressing these areas for improvement, ISMA can enhance its quality assurance practices and further its commitment to delivering quality education and services. Transparency in operations, meticulous performance monitoring, and the accuracy of publicly available information are core elements to strengthen ISMA quality assurance system. Implementing these enhancements can support ISMA quality-driven policy and ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of its students, faculty, and the broader educational landscape.

Strengths:

- 1) Good established quality assurance mechanisms and framework that engages stakeholders, including students, employers, and academic staff.
- 2) Adequate annual review and update of study programmes.
- 3) Structured feedback and complaint mechanisms ensuring systematic and efficient resolution processes.

4) Uniform surveys and mechanisms for regular data collection.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Lack of explicit mention of how the quality policy is made publicly available limits transparency and stakeholder engagement.
- 2) The absence of specific key performance indicators in the development strategy and quality assurance policy compromises an optimal assessment of ISMA performance.
- 3) While feedback from various sources is considered, the process of integrating this feedback into improvements could benefit from increased formalisation.
- 4) Discrepancies between the information published on the website and official registers.
- 5) No availability in English of relevant documents like Quality Management System procedure "Study Programmes".
- 6) Low student survey response rates in Riga and lack of feedback mechanisms for Fergana Branch students.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA has an adequate Quality Management System defined in ISMA Quality Assurance Policy. Experts find the criterion R1 compliant to the requirements - ISMA has quality mechanisms and procedures in place and they are working largely productively. Besides, it was clear that ISMA has worked well on these issues after assessment and recommendations 2 years ago. At the same time experts identified some shortcomings (more as a place for improvement) that led to recommendations for improvement, which shall be binding for ISMA. These places for improvement do not conflict with the general compliance of the R1 requirement.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Procedures are well defined in ISMA Quality Assurance Policy

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Adequate procedures are in place to ensure approval and performance analysis as defined in ISMA Quality Assurance Policy

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Criteria are defined and published as in 3.1.5\_Mapping\_Bak.xlsx;  
3.1.7.Study\_course\_descriptions\_Bac\_BA.docx

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Measures for improvement of qualifications of academic staff implemented as regulated in ISMA Human Resources Development Strategy;  
ISMA Quality Assurance Policy;  
ISMA Regulations on Academic Positions

- 6 1.5 - The higher education institution/ college ensures the collection and analysis of the information on the study achievements of the students, employment of the graduates, satisfaction of the students with the study programme, efficiency of the work of the academic staff, the study funds available and the disbursements thereof, as well as the key performance indicators of the higher education institution/ college.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Procedures for information gathering are implemented like 2.2.1.Survey\_results\_BA.docx;  
2.5.2.Statistics\_from\_abroad\_Man.xlsx; 2.5.3.Statistics\_students\_mobility\_BA.xlsx

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Quality assurance system is efficient for study field in the terms of ISMA Quality Assurance Policy

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

#### Analysis

1.3.1. ISMA has developed a framework for allocating financial resources for the study field. Since ISMA is a private higher education institution and does not receive funding from the state, its main source of study process financing are tuition fees paid by students, constituting 75% of the total income (SER, p.35). Other financial resources consist of income generated from training courses (6%), revenue from contract research (5%), earnings from other research activities (11%), and income obtained from rental, utilities, and other services (3%) (SER, p.35). The Board - executive body established by the founder of ISMA is the governing body of ISMA for strategic and financial issues (SER, p.13). When planning the distribution of funds, the ISMA Board takes into consideration certain parameters: ensuring administrative-economic activity, ensuring the functionality of the premises, provision of the study process with teaching resources, ensuring the social life of the university, social benefits for students, renewal and supplementation of equipment and promotional activities (SER, p.35-36). Between 27-32% of the budget is allocated to the remuneration of staff and research expenses, while additional 5-6% is reserved for acquiring library resources and databases (SER, p.36). Additionally, necessary funds are planned by the ISMA's Financial Department, and the financial support is allocated to the study field in accordance with the order of ISMA's Rector (SER, p.36).

During the site visit, ISMA's Vice-Rector of Science explained that the funding for scientific research is determined annually by ISMA's Financial Department, forming roughly 15% of the entire ISMA budget. Scientific budget is then allocated for the specific activities and tasks of ISMA's academic staff. ISMA's academic staff annual employment contracts specify that a certain portion of their workload at ISMA should be dedicated to research. As a result, remuneration of scientific work is determined based on these signed agreements and scientific activities during the year. Additionally, to increase the scientific activities of academic staff, a decision was made by ISMA to cover conference fees and related expenses for ISMA lecturers whose publications are considered high-quality and are indexed in either the SCOPUS or Web of Science databases (SER, p.43). ISMA states that they believe that the best way to raise the qualifications of academic staff is achieved through

their involvement in research (SER, p.43), however, experts have observed that there are some challenges to engage academic staff in science, particularly concerning internal planning and financial support. During the on-site discussions with ISMA representatives, it was revealed that presently there is no established framework for providing financial incentives for research, and research and publication are integral components of academic work. It appears that the motivation for research of academic staff largely rely on enthusiasm; they pursue research out of passion for the work. In light of this, development of an institutional research support policy for academic staff is suggested.

Overall, ISMA representatives asserted that all of the programmes in the study field are financially sustainable. At the same time, ISMA also acknowledges the presence of challenges, such as difficulty of collecting student fees, which was mentioned by ISMA representative to the experts during the on-site visit.

Despite the significant local demand for ISMA education in the Fergana branch, Uzbekistan (hereinafter Branch), ISMA's representatives acknowledged that the Branch was not financially profitable at first. However, due to strong relationship with the Uzbekistan government and their wish for ISMA to remain in Fergana, the Branch continues its operations. During the on-site visit, ISMA management also noted that to support the growth of ISMA Fergana Branch, the local government has promised help in promoting study programmes to attract more students.

During the site visit, ISMA Fergana Branch representatives stated that the yearly tuition cost for one student is relatively high compared to the average tuition fees in other local higher education institutions. When asked about their views on the amount of study fees, the students of the Branch agreed that the tuition fees are high, but are justified by the quality of education they receive. They pointed out the significance of the ISMA diploma in shaping their future prospects and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to pursue education at ISMA in Fergana.

Branch representatives also explained the distribution of revenue generated from Branch' student fees: half goes back to ISMA in Riga, while the other half remains within the local budget of ISMA Fergana Branch, which is used for various operational costs, including salaries of local staff and other necessary expenses. Additionally, during the on-site meeting, Branch representatives noted that the Fergana municipal government provides support to students through study grants, allowing some students to study for free, e.g. during the meeting with ISMA Fergana branch management the ISMA representatives mentioned that Fergana municipality sends 5-6 students to study every year tuition-free.

1.3.2. ISMA ensures the provision of sufficiently equipped premises and essential technical resources to organise the study process. Study process is organised in two buildings, primarily in the Building 5 located in Riga, Valērijas Seiles Street 1. Additionally, it continues to use some of the existing rooms and administrative areas in Buildings 6 and 7 also located at Valērijas Seiles Street 1 (SER, p.37). During the facility tour, ISMA representatives demonstrated and explained their face recognition system. This system is used to track student arrivals and departures from the premises while also serving as proof of their attendance. Upon signing their study contracts, students also sign an agreement consenting to the use of this technology. ISMA staff and students also have cards containing chips, allowing them to access ISMA premises' floors and special classrooms. On the first floor of ISMA premises, there is an information center available for students seeking assistance on matters related to the study process. Furthermore, there is a room for the Student Council, various relaxing areas for students, a cafeteria, and a spacious conference hall. The lecture rooms and computer rooms used in the study process are equipped with all necessary material and technical equipment. At the same time, during the discussions with both bachelor's and master's students, it was pointed out that there is a lack of dormitories available for students from other countries. They noted that international students typically reside in dormitories of other Latvian higher education institutions or try to rent apartments. Given the substantial number of international students

(annexes 3.1.2, 3.2.2 and 3.3.2), ISMA should explore options such as acquiring or renting spaces for student dormitories, or establishing formal agreements with accommodations where students can reside, depending on financial possibilities. The necessity for dormitories has also been expressed by students in surveys, alongside the demand for sports facilities.

At ISMA Fergana Branch lectures take place in the renovated historic building - former Fergana Officers' House. This building has been allocated by Fergana City Council for ISMA Fergana Branch. The building is renovated and is equipped with 11 auditoriums, including two computer classes with 21 computers (SER, p.37). During the site visit, it was observed that all study rooms are equipped with web cameras and microphones, enabling students to connect with lecturers in Riga. Currently, the building has a small conference hall with a capacity of approximately 60 people, chill areas for students, and a library. Another building, intended for use in the study process, is currently undergoing renovations. These renovations are expected to be completed by the end of 2024, with plans to incorporate study areas, a cafeteria, a large conference hall, and other necessary rooms for the operation of ISMA Fergana Branch. Overall, experts observe that the infrastructure and other resources at the ISMA Fergana Branch are adequately provided and believe that with the planned opening of another building, it will further enhance the provision of study process for students in Fergana.

1.3.3. ISMA library is located on the first floor of Building 7. Its total area is 286m<sup>2</sup>, with 160m<sup>2</sup> provided for readers and seating for a total of 37 students, 118m<sup>2</sup> for storage, and 8m<sup>2</sup> for other purposes (SER, p.38). The library offers various services, such as provision of textbooks for home use and access to scientific collections for on-site study, seven computers for independent work, as well as self-service copying, printing and scanning (a paid service), access to the e-reading services and interlibrary subscription services, consultations on using electronic resources and assistance with specific information searches in electronic resources, among others (SER, p.38). As of December 18, 2023, the library has a total of 5494 resources. Among these, there are 1387 resources in Latvian, 516 in English, and 3591 resources in other languages (SER, p.40). During the tour of facilities, it was observed that the majority of resources listed under 'other languages' are in Russian, but could be explained by the past implementation of study programmes in Russian language. At the same time, the limited number of English resources is concerning, given the significant amount of international students at ISMA, (annexes 3.1.2, 3.2.2 and 3.3.2) and due to the fact that study programmes are partly implemented in English. Hence, in the future, ISMA should prioritise obtaining English language resources.

ISMA has formulated a process for replenishing library resources. At the start of each academic year, funds are allocated within ISMA's overall budget for the development of the library and replenishment of books. After that, subscription orders are made in collaboration. The librarian then conducts a search to select a supplier, preparing an overall order and indicating prices for ISMA's management. If the total order sum exceeds the budget, an analysis is conducted during ISMA administration meetings, and the final decision is approved by the ISMA Rector. Following approval, the purchase of books is carried out. Lecturers and students are then notified about the availability of new literature, and an exhibition showcasing the new additions is organised in the library (SER, p.39). During the on-site visit, students also mentioned that they have the opportunity to propose new literature for ISMA to purchase by contacting the administration.

ISMA students have access to various online resources, including the ISMA electronic library, publications from the International Monetary Fund, databases such as EBSCO and Scopus. Additionally, they can access online editions of ISMA scientific magazine "Economics and Education", theses and abstracts from ISMA conferences like "Information Technologies and Management" and "Open Learning and Education", and publications of the publishing house "Baltija Publishing" (ISMA's official partner). Furthermore, there are links available to publications and monographs from partner institutions featuring works by ISMA faculty members. Students are also encouraged to use online

scientific publication resources and a variety of open-access scientific databases and platforms (SER, p.39). During the site visit, experts received mixed responses regarding student access to scientific databases - EBSCO and Scopus for remote use. However, it was clarified that these databases are exclusively accessible on ISMA premises and are not available for students to use from home. In experts' opinion, the accessibility of these databases (EBSCO and Scopus) should be improved and those should be available for students for remote use.

As stated on SER page 37, ISMA website underwent a renewal in 2021 and now provides more convenient and faster communication with students and potential students. However, during the on-site visit, experts observed inconsistencies in the information presented on ISMA's webpage. For instance, while SER page 38 states that the library operates daily from 09:00 to 22:00, the website indicates different hours, from 10:00 to 16:00. Another concerning discrepancy was found in the information regarding bachelor study programmes of the study field - Business Administration (42345) and Administration in Tourism (42345). The website listed specializations under each study programme, such as "Music Management", "Business Communication" and "Information Technology" for Business Administration programme, and "Restaurant and Club Business Management" and "Digital Technologies in Tourism" for Administration in Tourism programme, none of which were mentioned in SER. Although it seems that ISMA has since corrected these inconsistencies, the initial presence of such discrepancies is troubling and misleading for prospective students. Therefore, experts stress the importance for ISMA to maintain accurate website information and regularly update details related to the study process in the future.

There is a library in ISMA Fergana Branch premises but it is rather small in size. As of December 18, 2023, the Branch library has a total of 51 library resources. Among these, there are 39 resources in English and 12 resources in other languages (SER, p.40). As observed during the tour of facilities, to compensate for the limited book collection, the library has created a selection of open-source online library resources specific to each study programme. These resources are accessible in the form of manuals within the library, with dedicated pages for each book outlining its title, author, year of publication, and a brief description. Additionally, QR codes are provided for students to access the sources directly, and the open-source online library resources are also listed on posters displayed in the premises' hallways. In addition to the learning resources in the library at the Branch, the students have the opportunity to use the resources of the University of Fergana due to the cooperation memorandum signed in 2017 (SER, p.147). Moreover, in 2019, two additional cooperation agreements were signed. One being between the ISMA library and the Information Resource Center of Fergana State University. Under this arrangement, ISMA students have unlimited access to the Information Center's resources. Another agreement is between ISMA Fergana Branch and Fergana Regional Information Library Center, allowing students of the ISMA Fergana Branch to request resources from the Regional Information Library Center without limitations (SER, p.38). During the visit, the representatives of the Branch explained that the list of students studying in the Branch is shared with the libraries which they have cooperation agreements with. These libraries then issue special library cards to these students, giving them access to all necessary resources. While ISMA Fergana Branch students have the opportunity to visit other local libraries and access books there, depending on the financial situation, additional books should be acquired for the library at premises as well and/or resources on the open-source online library should be regularly updated. At the visit, ISMA Fergana Branch representatives confirmed that students of the Branch have access to the same online databases as those in Riga, facilitated through a virtual private network (VPN). Just like in Riga, however, these databases are only accessible within the premises of ISMA Fergana Branch and are not accessible for students to use from home. The steps should be taken to improve the accessibility of these databases for students to use them remotely.

Overall, the representatives of ISMA Fergana Branch mentioned that essential resources for the study process are obtained locally using budget from the collected study fees, in cooperation with ISMA in Riga, who also contribute in providing resources.

1.3.4. For the implementation of the study process, Moodle e-learning system is used, where all relevant information is compiled, such as study courses, users, groups, access rights and other course-specific information, and can be accessed anytime and anywhere (SER, p.41). As observed on the site visit, a single template is used for all study courses in the Moodle system, but at the same time, ISMA representatives noted that the pace of digitalization of the study process is not as fast as desired and emphasized the need for further development of the Moodle system.

In the upcoming academic year, ISMA plans to implement distance learning studies in two programmes of the study field: Business Administration bachelor's study programme (42345) and Business Administration master's study programme (47345). Thus, ISMA has developed two documents: The Distance Learning Study Guide for Students and the Distance Learning Methodological Guidelines for Teaching Staff (both documents were submitted by ISMA additionally during the experts visits thus are not available as annexes to initially submitted SER), which were presented to experts in printed form during the on-site visit and also provided in digital format. The Student Guide is aimed to assist students in navigating their distance learning studies, while the Methodological Guidelines offer instructions to teaching staff on organizing and delivering effective distance learning process. Distance learning is planned to be organized in the Moodle system. Within Moodle, students will find sections such as study courses, news from study departments, schedules, organization plans for the study year, consultation hours, methodological materials etc. Under the study courses section, students will access active study courses and course materials, assignments and other resources, while the study course description section will provide details on course objectives, expected learning outcomes and individual work schedules. Assessment criteria of tasks will be outlined in the evaluation section, and a section of individual assignments and tasks will describe each assignment. Final examination specifics will be provided at the beginning of semester and will be available on the platform, but overall, exams will be conducted online and recorded. Overall, ISMA plans to incorporate various methods into the distance study process, including videos, PowerPoint slides and audio recordings as well as live online sessions. All in all, experts conclude that ISMA has established a solid organizational structure for the implementation of distance learning. While the effectiveness of the distance studies remains to be seen until their implementation, after reviewing developed materials, descriptions of study processes, methods, and the planned resources, experts believe that ISMA has prepared well for the practical implementation of distance learning.

1.3.5. Elections to academic positions of ISMA take place in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia and in accordance with internal regulatory document "Regulations on Academic Positions" adopted by the ISMA Senate (SER, p.87). The academic staff of ISMA is composed of professors, associate professors, docents, leading researchers, lecturers, researchers and assistants (SER, p.87). Qualification requirements for positions have also been established. The criteria to be elected in the position of professor include holding a Doctoral degree, the individual is expected to be internationally acclaimed as an expert in their field, possessing relevant scientific publications, textbooks, or teaching materials as well as is actively engaged in scientific research, delivers high-quality education in their field of science and is required to have a minimum of three years of academic work experience as an associate professor or professor (section 3.1. of Regulations on Academic Positions). The prerequisites to be elected in the position of associate professor include holding a Doctoral degree and having scientific publications, textbooks, or teaching materials relevant to the field of science as well as being actively engaged in scientific research, and having at least two years of academic experience at ISMA, or, with regards to professional study programmes, individuals should hold relevant higher education, have a minimum of 10 years of practical experience in the relevant sector, and have at least two years of academic experience at ISMA (section 3.2. of Regulations on Academic Positions). Candidacy criteria for a position of docent include holding a Doctoral degree and capacity to deliver lectures, conduct seminars, practical

classes and laboratory sessions, engage in independent research, and to have at least one year of academic experience at ISMA (section 3.3. of Regulations on Academic Positions). Requirements for the position of leading researcher consist of holding a Doctoral degree alongside being a globally acknowledged expert in their field, who has produced publications relevant to the field and is actively engaged in scientific research (section 3.4. of Regulations on Academic Positions). The criteria for the position of lecturer include holding either Doctoral or Master's degree and capability to deliver lectures and conduct seminars, practical classes and laboratory work (section 3.5. of Regulations on Academic Positions). The prerequisites for the position of researcher are holding either Doctoral or Master's degree, having scientific publications relevant to the field and the capacity to carry out independent research (section 3.6. of Regulations on Academic Positions). Requirements for the position of assistant include holding either Doctoral or Master's degree in the relevant field of science and ability to lead practical sessions and participate in research work (section 3.6. of Regulations on Academic Positions). The number of positions of professors, associate professors, docents, lecturers and assistants is determined by the ISMA Senate (section 1.4. of Regulations on Academic Positions), and the number of positions of leading researchers and researchers is determined based on the ISMA Scientific Institute needs of scientific research and financial possibilities (section 1.5. of Regulations on Academic Positions; ISMA provided access to it via its local Moodle system). Based on this document, the vacancies of academic positions are published in Latvian daily press and on the ISMA website (sections 4.1. and 5.1. of Regulations on Academic Positions). If ISMA has a temporarily unoccupied academic position, with the proposal of the ISMA Vice-Rector of Studies, the ISMA Senate can choose not to announce the competition. In such cases, ISMA Rector can employ visiting professors, associate professors, docents, lecturers, or assistants for a duration of up to two years (section 1.8. of Regulations on Academic Positions). The elections for the academic positions take place via open competition for six years. ISMA Institute Council evaluates candidates' qualifications for the academic position (section 1.3. of Regulations on Academic Positions) based on the criteria outlined in Annex 1 of ISMA's Regulations on Academic Positions. Then the ISMA Senate, by open voting, approves the results of the academic staff election (section 6.2. of Regulations on Academic Positions) and the Personnel Department informs the candidates of the results (section 6.4. of Regulations on Academic Positions). The candidate has the possibility to challenge the election results by submitting an appeal request to ISMA (section 7.1. of Regulations on Academic Positions). External candidates are invited to deliver a guest lecture, after which the director of the study programme conducts a student survey and presents the results for each candidate to the Study Direction Council. The council then reviews the documents and holds discussions with the candidates. Students within a particular study direction have a veto right if they express a negative opinion about the lecturer. If the Study Direction Council approves the candidacy, the next Senate meeting holds open elections. Following the elections, candidates are notified about the results of the vote, and in the event of a favorable vote, the Rector concludes a contract with the elected lecturer (SER, p.42).

In discussions during on-site visits, guest lecturer presence in the study process was highlighted. Representatives of ISMA noted that students want to learn more real-life insights from industry experts, therefore ISMA regularly invites professionals to share their expertise in specific fields. Guest lecturers are usually invited based on their relevance within the business community and in relation to specific courses. Students also noted the presence of numerous guest lecturers in their classes and expressed a desire for participation from even more. Similar perspectives were shared by graduates and some even expressed their willingness to become guest lecturers at ISMA themselves. Experts share a similar view to that of students and graduates and observed that students highly value guest lecturers in their courses. This practice should be continued and potentially expanded, taking into account students' wishes when selecting guest lecturers, as well as considering graduates as potential guest lecturers in the future.

Between 2021 and 2023, there was just one international teaching staff member in the study field.

This was in 2023 within the "Business Administration in Tourism" programme, with the representative originating from Cyprus (annex 2.5.2). During the site meeting with ISMA representatives, they acknowledged that attracting foreign academic staff is challenging. One of the obstacles mentioned was the barrier of the local Latvian language. Experts see that the limited presence of international academic staff at ISMA requires improvement, but overall, experts conclude that the ISMA has a transparent system for attracting qualified teaching staff.

It is stated that the implementation of study programmes at the ISMA Fergana Branch are conducted by ISMA teachers who deliver the courses in corresponding study programmes of the study field in Riga and the study programmes' plans being implemented at the Branch do not differ from the study plans implemented in Riga - both the volume of study courses and their arrangement by semesters fully align (section 3 of annex 1.1). The only mentioned distinction, according to ISMA, is that the lecturer of the respective study course is traveling to ISMA Fergana Branch for a two weeks, during which all contact hours take place (SER, p.75). During the on-site discussions regarding ISMA Fergana Branch study process organization, the topic that came up the most revolved around the ISMA's academic staff presence at the Branch. ISMA representatives stated that there are no local teachers there, only three consultants. At the same time, the SER did not reference these consultants, whose substantial role in the study process became apparent during the discussions. During the visit, ISMA Fergana Branch representatives explained that consultant selection is based on their educational experience and then the evaluation process takes place. An important criterion in this process is the proficiency level in English - candidates with higher proficiency are given priority in the selection process for employment. The primary role of the consultant, as explained, is to support students throughout their studies. If students struggle with understanding English materials, the consultant assists by translating. Additionally, consultants help students with guiding them on studying within the module system and helping them to reach out to lecturers, as well as help students in their studies when Riga academic staff are absent in the Branch and elaborate on presentations given by lecturers and provide additional explanations for students when needed, among other tasks. Branch's representatives elaborated on the initial invitation of consultants to the study process. According to them, initially, academic staff from Riga frequently visited the Branch, however, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the study process was moved online. Consequently, local assistance became essential and the consultants were hired due to challenges of Riga-based lecturers traveling to Fergana. According to representatives, presently, some Riga lecturers are visiting Branch, some do not and conduct lectures via Zoom. This contradicts with the information given during meetings with ISMA representatives in Riga, when they stated that all ISMA lecturers visit the Branch and deliver lectures there. The experts find the existence of such discrepancies perplexing and concerning. It is problematic that the information provided by ISMA representatives in Riga and Fergana differs, causing confusion about what the actual situation is.

1.3.6. ISMA provides several opportunities for academic staff to improve their qualifications by taking part in various seminars and courses both as participants and lecturers (SER, p.42). If an academic staff member wishes to attend a particular event, one must submit an application to the Vice-Rector for Studies in agreement with the director of the study programme. ISMA administration then considers the application and grants funding. For example, ISMA received several applications regarding the lecturers' desire to improve their English language through English language courses and ISMA administration, in response to these requests organized free courses for these lecturers (SER, p.42-43).

Additionally, the academic staff contribute to their growth by participating in international exchange within the framework of Erasmus+ mobility programmes, as well as take part in international weeks, and are involved in other projects and events (SER, 43). The procedure for applying for a mobility visit to a partner university is outlined as follows: at the beginning of each academic year, ISMA International Relations department provides lecturers with a form, where they can indicate their

desired activities and proposed duration. Following this, the department in cooperation with ISMA Board, director of the study field, and directors of the study programmes review the suitability of proposed activities in relation to the study process. Once approved, lecturers can apply for funding (SER, p.43). From 2021 to 2023, six members of teaching staff participated in 28 Erasmus+ mobilities in countries such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Turkey, Italy, Finland, Spain, Slovenia, Lithuania, Portugal and Greece and 12 members of teaching staff participated in 23 Erasmus+ mobilities as guest teachers in other universities in countries such as Lithuania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Spain, Turkey (annex 2.5.4). As of the beginning of 2024, ISMA has 66 ongoing collaboration agreements with higher education institutions in different countries and is engaged in partnerships with 70 countries through the Erasmus+ programme (annex 2.5.1). Additionally, in 2019, ISMA launched an initiative to promote the collaboration between ISMA's academic staff and academic staff from foreign higher education institutions, hosting Erasmus+ Staff Teaching and Training Week with around 40 participants from various countries, including Germany, Portugal, and Lithuania, attending the event (SER, p.43). During the site visit, the academic staff acknowledged that their participation in mobility exchanges has provided them with valuable knowledge and experience.

On January 8, 2024, ISMA approved The Human Resources Development Strategy (SER p.41, [https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents\\_en/ISMA\\_Cilvkresursu\\_attstbas\\_stratija\\_lat\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents_en/ISMA_Cilvkresursu_attstbas_stratija_lat_ENG.pdf)) for the period of 2024-2030. This document presents ISMA's initiative to introduce a new approach of human resources development and is based on lifelong education, continuous development and improvement of personnel. It is designed to make targeted improvements in human resource management processes, including human resource attraction and selection, human resource development and professional growth and human resource retaining and motivating, renewal and succession (The Human Resources Development Strategy, 3). Although the strategy has been recently adopted and has not had sufficient time to fully demonstrate its effectiveness in practice for experts to evaluate, experts view the creation of such a strategy and goals listed as a positive step towards further growth of ISMA. On top of that, during the on-site meetings, ISMA representatives highlighted the necessity for a more systematic organization of ISMA processes with regards to the arrival of new academic staff members at ISMA, stressing the importance of providing onboarding procedures for new teachers.

Experts do agree that the development of more comprehensive internal process documentation to facilitate the integration of new teachers is needed, in addition to mechanisms to reward teachers, which could involve additional compensation for improved qualifications, experience, demonstration of good performance at work, research accomplishments, and others.

Altogether, during the meetings, academic staff expressed satisfaction with the amount of development opportunities provided by ISMA. They mentioned participation in conferences with fees covered by ISMA, training sessions offered by the training center, support for pursuing PhD studies, Erasmus mobility opportunities, and access to self-development courses. They noted that communication with ISMA management is quite straightforward, allowing them to propose projects, courses, conferences, or other initiatives they wish to be involved in.

1.3.7. The composition of teaching staff of the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" consists of the academic staff of the ISMA and guest lecturers. In total, there are 32 teaching staff representatives involved in the implementation of the study field. Out of the total, 24 are elected at ISMA, while the remaining 8 are guest lecturers. Among the 24 academic staff members elected at ISMA, 14 hold a Doctoral degree, while the remaining 10 have a Master's degree (annex 2.3.1).

The workload and remuneration of the teaching staff is calculated based on four criteria: pedagogical work, scientific work, organizational work and work in projects (ISMA academic staff salary Regulations, available at ISMA Moodle <https://beta.moodle.isma.lv/>). During the on-site meeting, academic staff shared varied perspectives on their workload, with some finding it

manageable but challenging, particularly when teaching both Latvian and English streams of courses. Others mentioned difficulties due to commitments elsewhere. However, all of them expressed pride and enjoyment in working with students as well as noted the flexibility in managing academic responsibilities, highlighting the straightforward process of discussing necessary adjustments with ISMA management when needed.

Regarding scientific workload, academic staff representatives added that at the start of each academic year, they must outline their planned scientific activities, which are then reviewed during study programme directors meeting. In general, they are expected to produce approximately one article per semester. At the same time, they mentioned that scientific activities are the second part of the day due to other responsibilities, but at the same time added that they are aware of their academic workload and are informed about upcoming conferences, therefore can intentionally plan their research activities.

Overall, experts observed that teaching staff at ISMA seem to genuinely enjoy their work environment and team around them, along with the respect shown by the management towards them.

Regarding the workload of Riga teaching staff in ISMA Fergana Branch, during the visit, the Branch representatives indicated that Riga lecturers come for about two weeks and deliver 3-4 lectures per day, five days a week, when they visit the Branch. In general, experts note that it is unclear how many ISMA lecturers in total travel to the Fergana Branch for both programmes. Additionally, it is unclear why some ISMA lecturers are going to Fergana Branch and deliver lectures on-site, while others deliver lectures via Zoom. Regarding the workloads of consultants, Branch representatives elaborated that some consultants work full-time, five days a week, while others work part-time, nevertheless, all of them have consultancy hours to communicate with students. The consultants also reflected on the amount of their workload during the visit, mentioning that they experience particularly heavy workload at the end of the semester when assisting students with final thesis preparation, but are present at the Branch every day to support students, as well as despite their official working hours, they come to Branch also in their extra time to get to know the students better.

In discussions with students of the Branch, they expressed that two weeks for a single course is challenging and suggested that having at least four weeks for one module would be more beneficial. Similarly, representatives of the Branch also agreed that two weeks for one module is very concentrated and demanding for students, as well as graduates of the Branch added that certain courses, particularly those related to economics and finance, need more study time than two weeks. Additionally, consultants of the Branch highlighted the challenges they face in providing guidance on courses related to taxes and law, as they are primarily based on Latvian legislation. In general, representatives of the Branch agreed that having local teachers permanently would greatly improve the effectiveness of the work. Students of the Branch similarly expressed the wish of local teachers, especially for subjects of taxes and law.

In experts opinion, it would be preferable if Riga teachers visited ISMA Fergana Branch more often. However, discussions with ISMA representatives in both Riga and Fergana showed significant discrepancies in responses about the entire process, indicating that the existing system isn't quite working. Firstly, it's logistically challenging and financially burdensome for ISMA's academic staff to make frequent trips to Fergana — according to the calculations made by ISMA, travel and business trip expenses combined account for approximately 40% of the costs of implementing each study programme in Branch. Secondly, students find intensive two-week contact hour modules challenging and would prefer less concentrated study courses with more time dedicated for on-site lectures. Lastly, while students highly value the involvement of local academic staff (consultants) in the study process, these staff members cannot consult on all study courses due to limitations in their subject knowledge. Therefore, making revisions to ISMA's current approach is needed and establishment of permanent academic staff positions at the Branch is believed to be beneficial for all parties involved.

1.3.8. ISMA respects the multicultural student contingent and the diversity of their needs (SER, p.45), which was confirmed during a meeting with the Director of the study field. To integrate international students more into the ISMA community, the Director creates extra get-to-know classes to encourage student interaction with each other. Additionally, students in the meetings mentioned that they integrated into ISMA fairly quickly and highlighted the responsiveness and supportiveness of ISMA teaching staff. Also, during the meetings, ISMA students mentioned that if they struggle to find a practice placement, they can seek assistance from the Director of the study programme and generally appreciated ISMA's annual international conference "Internship and Employment" where they get acquainted with potential employers from Latvia and abroad (SER, p.76). According to students, interacting with company representatives during this event has proven to be effective for obtaining internship placements.

ISMA's infrastructure is suitable to accommodate students with special needs. For instance, the auditoriums, situated on the ground floor of Building 5, are accessible for students with wheelchairs (SER, p.45). ISMA also has a Student Council, which, as discussed during on-site meetings, can easily get in touch with ISMA management to address student-related issues due to non-formal and close community.

Concerning students in distance learning, as outlined in The Distance Learning Study Guide for Students, it is planned that the team of instructors and support staff will be available at every stage to assist students. Students will be encouraged to reach out if they have questions about course content, encounter technical difficulties, or require guidance, and students will be able to contact the study course lecturer for consultations if they will have questions about course materials or seek further clarification on specific topics by arranging a meeting via Zoom. Moreover, distance students will have the possibility to provide feedback through course evaluations, surveys, and direct communication with study course lecturers.

Altogether, experts conclude that the support provided to ISMA students is of a high standard, fostering a trusting and friendly environment among students, teaching staff and ISMA management.

During a facilities tour of the Branch, it was noted that there is a lack of infrastructure to support students with special needs, which should be improved.

The representatives of the Branch highlighted opportunities for students to engage in scientific activities, such as participating in conferences at other Fergana universities and collaborating on innovation projects with the Fergana Innovation Center, and in addition, the presence of a Student Council at the Branch was confirmed.

Branch representatives noted that although students do not have surveys to provide feedback on the study process, consultants regularly report to ISMA about ongoing developments. Experts emphasize the necessity and significance of feedback possibilities for students, thus a feedback mechanism for ISMA Fergana Branch students to evaluate the study process and lecturers should be implemented, through surveys same to those available to students in Riga.

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

ISMA, being a private higher education institution, heavily relies on tuition fees for funding, making up 75% of its total income. While experts recognize the suitability of the budget allocation, considering the challenges mentioned by ISMA management of study fee collection, it is advisable for ISMA to explore diversifying its income sources and attracting new funds. The funding for scientific research is determined annually and is intended for the research activities of academic staff. However, there appear to be obstacles in engaging academic staff in research, primarily due to the absence of a formal incentive framework, hence, the development of an institutional policy to support research activities for academic staff is suggested. Concerning the ISMA Fergana Branch, tuition fees for local students are relatively high, yet students justify the amount by the quality of

education they receive. The distribution of student fee revenue between the main ISMA institution and the Branch's local budget appears to be appropriate.

ISMA premises, including lecture and computer rooms, are sufficiently equipped with technical resources to support effective study processes. However, there is a lack of dormitories for international students, which is a shared concern by both students and experts, therefore, depending on the financial circumstances, it is necessary to acquire or rent spaces for student housing, or establish formal agreements with accommodation providers. At the Fergana Branch, lectures take place in renovated historical building with modern amenities, and there are plans for future renovations and facility expansions, which is a positive development.

ISMA library resources, databases, and services are partly appropriate for the needs of the study field. There are concerns regarding the limited availability of English language resources at the ISMA library in Riga, despite the significant number of international students. Similarly, at the Fergana Branch, although students can access local libraries through cooperation agreements, there is a need to expand the Branch's library's own collection. Furthermore, while scientific databases are accessible to students in both Riga and Fergana, they are only available on the premises, therefore remote access to online resources for students in both Riga and Fergana should be granted in the future. Additionally, inconsistencies in the information provided on the ISMA website may lead to confusion. Thus, in the future it is crucial to maintain accurate website information and regularly update it with current information.

The creation of distance learning documentation and materials indicate the institution's preparedness for upcoming implementation of distance learning studies and the organizational structure for distance learning is considered solid, yet its effectiveness remains to be seen.

ISMA has a quite transparent process for attracting and electing qualified teaching staff. Moreover, guest lecturers play a significant role in enhancing the educational experience and are appreciated by students and graduates. However, limited international academic staff presence requires attention. The issue of ISMA's academic staff presence in the Fergana Branch raises concerns due to conflicting responses from ISMA representatives. At the same time, the Branch relies on consultants to support students in the study process locally. Overall, there is a need for more effective coordination between academic staff in Riga and Fergana.

ISMA offers satisfactory development opportunities for its teaching staff, such as seminars, courses, international exchange programmes like Erasmus+, and collaboration projects. Moreover, the recent development of a Human Resources Development Strategy by ISMA ([https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents\\_en/ISMA\\_Cilvkresursu\\_attstbas\\_stratija\\_lat\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/documents_en/ISMA_Cilvkresursu_attstbas_stratija_lat_ENG.pdf)), focusing on lifelong learning and professional growth of academic staff, represents a positive advancement. While the teaching staff generally express satisfaction with the existing opportunities, there is room for enhancement in areas such as onboarding procedures for new staff and establishment of a structured system for recognizing and rewarding accomplishments.

The workload and remuneration of academic staff are determined based on pedagogical, scientific, organizational, and project-related criteria. Despite varying perspectives on workload management, the teaching staff is generally motivated and dedicated, expressing loyalty to ISMA and its students. Experts observed a positive atmosphere and mutual respect between staff members and ISMA management. The workload of Riga teaching staff at ISMA Fergana Branch involves two-week trips to deliver lectures, supported by three consultants working locally. However, students find the intense two-week modules overwhelming and wish for longer, less concentrated study modules. Both students and Branch representatives agree that having permanent local teachers at the Branch would improve effectiveness of the study process, therefore revisions to the current approach are suggested, emphasizing the challenges of frequent travel for Riga teachers, the intensity of the two-week modules, and the limitations of local consultants' subject expertise.

ISMA shows commitment to the diverse needs of its multicultural student body and creates integration and support. While ISMA premises in Riga have appropriate infrastructure for students

with special needs, attention should be given to improving the infrastructure in Fergana. Student feedback mechanisms are in place just in Riga, but improvements are suggested due to relatively low response rates. These mechanisms should also be introduced in the Fergana Branch in the future, as they are not available there now. Overall, support provided to ISMA students is sufficient and creates a trusting and friendly atmosphere among students, teachers, and ISMA management.

Strengths:

- 1) The premises in Riga and Fergana are well-equipped with modern infrastructure to support effective implementation of the study process.
- 2) Access to open source library and cooperation agreements with local libraries increase resource availability in ISMA Fergana Branch.
- 3) Development of distance learning materials and methodological guidelines demonstrates readiness for upcoming implementation of distance studies.
- 4) ISMA maintains a transparent process for attracting qualified teaching staff and values the contribution of guest lecturers.
- 5) Consultants at ISMA Fergana Branch play a crucial role in supporting students and bridging the gap between Riga and Fergana.
- 6) Development opportunities for teaching staff and financial support provided by ISMA for staff participation in these activities.
- 7) Adoption of a Human Resources Development Strategy, demonstrating commitment to staff growth and improvement.
- 8) Multicultural student integration efforts, including extra get-to-know classes.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Lack of a formal framework for providing financial incentives for academic staff research activities.
- 2) Lack of dormitories for international students.
- 3) Limited availability of English language resources in ISMA Riga library.
- 4) Limited remote access to scientific databases for students both in Riga and Fergana.
- 5) Limited presence of international academic staff at ISMA.
- 6) Academic staff presence in the Fergana Branch and coordination between Riga and Fergana staff is questionable.
- 7) Lack of systematic onboarding procedures for new academic staff.
- 8) Absence of a structured rewards system for academic staff.
- 9) Insufficient infrastructure to support students with special needs at the Fergana Branch.

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

### **Analysis**

1.4.1. The directions of the scientific research and the applied research at ISMA within the study field (StF) "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" is well integrated within the study-research-cooperation processes of the field and its study programmes implementation, meaning that the research thematics is largely driven by the expertise field of the teaching, research and management staff within the study field and ISMA. Having the vision points of excellence in research envisaging also the synergy between research and study process ( SER p.4-5), and implementing 3 study programmes particularly of the professional character, ISMA`s strategic goals consecutively follow the current trends in socio-economics including also excellence in research narrowed down to stimulating scientific research environment with active involvement of academic staff and students in research, engage in international research networks, promote student collaboration and other relevant objectives ( SER p.9-10). Thus, ISMA in its StF Self-

evaluation report defines its main scientific research areas in the StF as Artificial Intelligence, Sustainable Tourism and Educational Management (SER p.45), which corresponds well to the development strategy of ISMA, its goals and objectives as well the aims and expected results of the StF and its 3 professional study programmes. For instance, there is an ongoing research cooperation with LBTU (Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies) professor Baiba Rivža on a joint study on the use of artificial intelligence in studies, the results of which will be presented at the LBTU international scientific conference "Economic Science for Rural Development 2024" and published in the conference collection, which is indexed in WoS (SER p.52); also, the inclusion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Business Administration curriculum (elective course) is a significant and timely update, given the growing importance of AI in today's business landscape (SER p.137). In fact, the scope of research and its relevance is actually stronger and broader than ISMA reports in its SER p.45 - the broader scope manifests in two major ways: 1) staff publications` topics and areas (Annex 2.4.2.ScientificWorks\_2020-2023\_BA.docx) and 2) students` final bachelor and master thesis research topics, which are closely related to socio-economic topicalities in the industry; within the latter it should also be noted that the supervision and consultation of the final thesis are lead by academic staff doing research themselves or by industry representatives. The ISMA has also a system in place incentivising the research - according to the experts meetings with ISMA representatives - employment agreement for academic position (as of lecturer, asst.prof.) envisages workload also for scientific work including during an acting position transfer period until elections - if one does well, the board can strengthen the incentive by broader motivation benefits. The appearance of the ISMA board in such a scheme also ensures that research of the staff within the study field corresponds to the development goals of ISMA including those relevant for the study field and industry.

It also to be noted that although experts sees improvement potential for more structured, broader-engaging, better-communicated and transparent ISMA research motivation policy, the staff (lecturers, directors) of the StP under review during the experts visit showed strong loyalty and visible satisfaction and also productivity about the current ISMA research context approach.

1.4.2. There are several clearly visible connections of scientific and applied research with the study process, including also the research outcomes` integration in the study process in the study programmes - lecturers particularly those who participate in scientific research, apply the obtained scientific results in the study process (in preparing for lectures and developing practical examples and teaching methods, seminars, independent and project work, as well as in defining the topics of bachelor and master thesis). Four of the teaching staff are experts of the Latvian Council of Science in Social sciences-Economics and business. The publications of the teaching staff are included in the descriptions of the study courses, e.g. professional bachelor study programmes` study courses Management Information Technology, Public Relations Management, Management Psychology and Sociology, Strategic Management, Course Project 3, Social Entrepreneurship and other; and professional master study programme study courses Strategic Management Concepts, Human Resource Management and Development, Management and Leadership and other - see Annex 3.1.7.Study\_course\_descriptions\_Bac\_BA.docx, 3.2.7.Study\_Course\_descriptions\_Tour.docx, and 3.3.7.Study\_course\_descriptions\_Mag\_BA.docx at SER section III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof of each study programme (see also SER p.49-50 - Table "Examples of the scientific activity of the teaching staff used in the improvement of the study process"). Such an approach is logical and justified showing also the student-centered approach within the process and towards the results - both, study results (learning outcomes), as well as the research promotion.

1.4.3. International cooperation and internationalization, including that of scientific research, is emphasized and highlighted in various structural and content-wise levels. At the highest hierarchical

organizational leadership level the international cooperation and internationalization manifests in ISMA strategic development (SER p.4, 7, 8 and 9), incl. internationalization being one of the key horizontal lines of action (SER p.8) as well as it manifest in 3 strategic objectives of ISMA (SER p.9 and its Development strategy at [https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA\\_strategija\\_2024\\_2030\\_ENG\\_new.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/2024/ISMA_strategija_2024_2030_ENG_new.pdf)) - including improving its competitiveness at international by attracting foreign students and teaching staff; facilitation students` and staff mobility thus promoting also international cooperation in research, and having ambitions to develop joint study programmes with international partners. Launching and managing the ISMA Fergana branch in Uzbekistan shows ISMA`s internationalization strategy in clear action. Furthermore, to institutionalize the strategic development plans in relation to international cooperation, incl. in the field of scientific research, ISMA management structure provisions several positions with inter-structural cooperation competences for international cooperation, incl. in the field of scientific research (SER p.16-17) - Vice-rector for International Relations, International Relations Department, International Relations Coordinators. Also, having the Quality Management System based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model and the international excellence standard Investors in Excellence (SER p.15), facilitates continuous improvement of ISMA operation.

The relevance of ISMA international cooperation in the field of scientific and applied research to the study field and its 3 study programmes under review manifests also via ISMA's annual International Scientific Conferences Information Technologies and Management and Open Learning and Distance Education ( <https://www.isma.lv/en/science/conferences-and-research>). It reflects also the results of scientific research by ISMA lecturers and students, including those developed via international cooperation (SER p.48). Also, part of ISMA`s international cooperation in the field of scientific and applied research are scientific journals "Baltic Journal of Economic Studies" (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/publications/baltic-journal-en>, and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/issue>) and "Economics&Education" (<http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/issue/view/151/310>) publishing at <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/> 4 times a year and being indexed in Copernicus, as well as in other popular databases of scientific articles (SER p.15 and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/indexed>). To facilitate internal scientific research engagement, one free publication per academic year is available to all ISMA faculty and students (SER p.39).

Noteworthy to mention that staff publications are included in the study course description of the respective course as well as the international scientific research cooperation is thematically offered for further research topics of final papers of bachelor and master students (SER p.48).

ISMA's commitment to international cooperation and internationalization in the dimension of scientific research is evident also in other organizational endeavors, e.g. in 2019 to promote the exchange of knowledge and competencies of ISMA academic staff with foreign academic staff, ISMA hosted the Erasmus + Staff Teaching and Training Week to promote cooperation of academic staff in pedagogical-methodological work. The event was attended by about 40 participants from various countries thus fostering international cooperation ( SER p.43).

To conclude, ISMA`s international cooperation including in the field of scientific and applied research also shows visible network scope of their international partners shown via ISMA webpage at <https://www.isma.lv/en/isma/partners/isma-international-partners>.

Overall, ISMA`s international cooperation in the field of scientific research and applied research clearly relates to the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" and its three relevant study programmes and is being evidently sustained and purposefully developed.

1.4.4. ISMA defines in rather details the research workload of the teaching staff members involved in

the implementation of the study field and its 3 study programmes, classifying it in 5 major activity types and time/amount provisioned for it, including preparation of a scientific article for publishing or preparing a thesis for a scientific conference with respective 3 and 2 ac.h per A4 page of 1800 characters, editing of papers for counting 1 ac.h per 5 pages of work, and organization and moderation of a conference accounting for a workload of 50 ac.h a year (SER section 2.3.7. p.44).

The information about staff`s plans, performance and the achievements in scientific and applied research activities is gathered via a table filled by staff "Scientific and professional activities" (SER p.48), which is organized also in the context of annual individual meetings between study field director or study programme director and teaching staff on payroll with a general aim to improve quality of professional study process. The showed and planned scientific and professional activities are then reviewed and assessed together with the results of student surveys on the respective staff`s study course and are then further incentivized by ISMA management via awards bonuses and / or increases the hourly rates for certain scientific and professional activities. ISMA also uses various forms of internal encouragement such as the Certificate of Merit and gratitude of the Rector, cash awards for significant success in teaching, research, and methodological activities. Also, scientific activity is a precondition to be elected to an academic position (e.g. associate professor or professor), which also affects the salary and thus incentivizes research (SER p.48).

During the visit at ISMA with experts meeting various representative groups (study field director, vice-rector for science, programme directors, payroll staff and other teaching staff), based on the discussions with representative of the mentioned the experts gained a strong impression of scientific research motivation system being largely enthusiasm, loyalty and one's self academic development driven with a) some current ISMA incentives, including those of reimbursement of research related activities research being integral part if work agreement (contract) which is annual and envisages 15% of work to be for scientific work and b) plans to define clearer financial promotion in future - "Motivational system for research - do not have it distinctly - included into the workload. Plans to include financial promotion in the future"; "..Motivates team to joint writing and publishing..", "Research motivation is enthusiasm based - they love doing it, "we don`t need additional outside motivation", "The elected must do scientific work. If one does very well, then they can have motivational benefits decided by the board" (based on experts visits` meetings). ISMA itself in the SER p.48 states that "The main motivation for the scientific and creative activity of ISMA employees is the possibility of self-realization, interest in the subject taught and the opportunity to engage in scientific activities, including joint research with students" - although it does clearly work at ISMA with staff being visibly satisfied, loyal and fully accepting such science motivation culture, experts believe a more clearer, transparent, accessible ISMA institutionalized research motivation system, including clear key criteria and their financial incentives would be beneficial and welcomed.

1.4.5. The mechanisms to involve students in scientific and applied research are present at ISMA at various institutional, organizationally-structural, procedural, communicative and inter-relational aspect within the study and research process - e.g. within the ISMA study quality management and assurance students take part in the development of curricula and study environment through their involvement in Student Council and participation other ISMA and the study field decision making bodies. As analyzed above (section 1.4.2. of experts report), the research is also to an extent promoted through e.g. course descriptions. At the same time, although noted as a strength that the issue is being addressed, ISMA itself recognizes that students are not sufficiently motivated to engage in scientific research beyond the compulsory requirements of the study programme (SER section 2.1.2. on SWOT analysis, weaknesses last point p.23). The most comprehensive and also mandatory part of research skills and competence development comes from the development and graduate thesis (bachelor and master thesis), while the fragmented elements of research work are applied in various forms of learning activities and envisaged in study course design, at workshops and seminars, practical work, and in the process of traineeship (SER p.50). ISMA notes in SER p.50

that students` publication (and general research) activity is largely intensified by timely provided information about the upcoming events. For instance, the ISMA ITM Conference website at <https://ismaitm.lv/registration/> offered information about the upcoming/ongoing IT&Management Conference in 4 sections. The Conference webpage provides information and guidelines, template for smoothly facilitated participation. However the ISMA main webpage at <https://www.isma.lv/> the section on Science and its 3 subsections, are rather outdated showing events of 2023 and before.

1.4.6. ISMA`s general operation model itself can, should be seen as an innovation worth mentioning which does bring significantly extraordinary impact on the study process and also the cases studies in higher education in Latvia. That includes a) the education levels` structures provided by ISMA and staff and teachers` engagement in them - strong structural and jointly-visioned cooperation with secondary school "ISMA Premjers" as well as higher education programmes on short-cycle, bachelor and master levels; b) it also includes the functioning and noteworthy the very opening of ISMA Fergana branch in Uzbekistan as well as c) organization of higher education related activities, e.g. ISMA Festival ( SER p.51 and ISMA website <https://www.isma.lv/en/isma/isma-festivals> (needs serious updates though)).

Other innovative solutions and approaches in the study field mentioned in SER and observed during the experts` visit at ISMA in Riga and Fergana are as follows: d) ISMA Innovation Centre and the monthly Master classes provided by it; e) few teaching method now turning classically innovative e.g. google tools and application for assessments and examinations, very practical real-time case studies, gaming methods in teaching, guest lectures as strict responsiveness to students` surveys; f) many study courses in their description has the competence to be developed named "Ability to find innovative solutions for the activity of an enterprise".

Overall, ISMA and the study field and its 3 study programmes under current review, show sufficient level of innovative solutions fully aligned and in cases beyond conventional best practices in leadership, strategic development, management, study process and research with positive effect on the study process.

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

The scientific and applied research directions at ISMA is well integrated within the study-research-cooperation processes of the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" and its study programmes` implementation; the research thematics is largely driven by the expertise field of the teaching, research and management staff within the study field and ISMA. There are several clearly visible connections of scientific and applied research with the study process, including the research outcomes` integration in the study process (incl. course descriptions). Such an approach is logical and justified showing also the student-centered approach within the process and towards the results - both, study results (learning outcomes), as well as the research promotion.

ISMA has a broad network of international cooperation partners. Fostering of scientific research and its internationalization is part of ISMA development strategy and tactical operations mainly via international scientific publishing including hosting of ISMA conferences and indexed publication issues based in both individual and international projects based research, staff mobility, and incorporation of research results and process in the curriculum and study process.

Teaching staff are generally well involved in and encouraged for scientific and applied research. Though the engagement mechanism is locally well-functioning and even efficient, but based on the discussions with representatives of ISMA, the experts gained a strong impression of the scientific research motivation system being largely enthusiasm, loyalty and one's self academic development driven.

The mechanisms to involve students in scientific and applied research are present at ISMA at various

institutional, organizationally-structural, procedural, communicative and inter-relational aspects within the study and research process at ISMA. Still, ISMA itself recognizes that students are not sufficiently motivated to engage in scientific research beyond the compulsory requirements of the study programme.

ISMA and the study field and its 3 study programmes under current review, show sufficient level of innovative solutions fully aligned and in cases beyond conventional best practices in leadership, strategic development, management, study process and research with positive effect on the study process.

Strengths:

1) The staff (teachers, directors) of the StP under review during the experts visit showed strong loyalty and visible satisfaction and also productivity about the current ISMA research context approach.

2) ISMA has a broad network of international cooperation partners which form good grounds for fostering scientific research and its internationalization which is part of ISMA development strategy activities. The network is further put into tactical operations mainly via international scientific publishing including hosting of ISMA conferences and indexed publication issues based also on projects` research, staff mobility, and incorporation of research results and process in the curriculum and study process.

3) Staff publications in many cases are incorporated in the study process, including in study course descriptions.

4) Research and scientific, academic publishing is generally topical and integral part of the academic work and is being discussed in ISMA management structures and largely supported, co-produced (delivered, actual publications) by staff, however, largely on enthusiasm, loyalty and one's self academic development basis.

5) ISMA recognizes the issue of low students` motivation to engage in scientific research and is addressing them in various ways including ISMA-side operational processes as well as considering students`encouragement aspects.

6) ISMA has its own annual Conference on IT & Management issues (<https://ismaitm.lv>) and Quarterly and Annual Scientific Journals` Issues (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/publications>).

Weaknesses:

1) Currently there is a lack of clear, transparent, accessible ISMA institutionalized research motivation system, including clear key criteria and their financial incentives. Experts see improvement potential for more structured, broader-engaging, better-communicated and transparent ISMA research motivation policy.

2) Students are not sufficiently motivated to engage in scientific research beyond the compulsory requirements of the study programme. Although, generally and widely present and active, the mechanisms to promote the involvement of the students in scientific research and/or applied research are not fully well-functioning and efficient and many students of the professional bachelor and master study programmes are not involved in scientific and/ or applied research apart from StP compulsory requirements (courses, tasks, graduation papers).

3) ISMA main webpage at <https://www.isma.lv/> including section on Science and its 3 subsections, are rather outdated showing events of 2023 and before.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

4 staff members are experts of the Latvian Council of Science. Noteworthy part of teachers has their publications in the literature part of the course descriptions. Teachers incorporate research projects, publications and conference results in the study process (see SER Section 2.4. pp.45-51).

## **1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

1.5.1. ISMA cooperates with the institutions from Latvia, for example, with higher education institution Ventstpils augstskola, Baltijas Starptautiskā akadēmija, Daugavpils Universitāte, Juridiskā koledža etc. (see SER annex 2.5.1. List of cooperation agreements). ISMA teaching staff works closely with NGOs, for example, the teaching staff representative is a member of the Association of Latvian social entrepreneurship, participates in common projects and follows up how social entrepreneurship enterprises develop.

ISMA Career Center cooperates with local and foreign employers. ISMA has developed close cooperation with several employers over several years. The cooperation partners are selected in view of the specific features of the study field and the relevant study programmes. A great opportunity for cooperation and for employers to meet students are conferences, e.g. Conference on Tourism. Cooperation also takes place by inviting guest lecturers.

One of the ways to find out and evaluate cooperation with employers is questionnaires. Employers are also encouraged in the development of these. ISMA asks for their feedback and review.

To expand the experience, lecturers and students participate in the meetings of the Latvian Hotel and Restaurant Association and visit hotels. Students also appreciated the study visit to one of the leading banks of Latvia, there was also an exhibition, students were involved in debate with the bank with culture programme at the end. ISMA meets with companies like telecommunication leader LMT, Rail Balic, and invites guest lecturers for 2 academic hours to share information on how companies practically work. ISMA has cooperation agreements with companies. Companies also participate in the events organized by ISMA, for example, the Latvian Employers' Confederation, Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, their suggestions also have been incorporated in the study programmes.

Students admitted that they have had guest lecturers from companies several times and they value it positively.

During the visit, the employer representative, who works in a leading position in one of the largest hotel chains, mentioned that students need more soft skills, communication, financial and market analyzing skills. Employers indicated that theoretical knowledge of the students is pretty high but real business knowledge is lacking, for example, document preparation. Latvian language is also a problem especially for foreign students, English language is not a problem.

Students admitted that they lack practical skills, so internships are very useful. Internship is also a place where to meet experts of the field.

Comparing trainees, employers do not see differences between students from other universities, most important is personality.

Contract negotiator at ISMA helped to find a company for internship. After internship students fill report and it comes to Career centre. According to SER (p.110) During traineeship, the representatives of the Career Centre follow up, communicate with the representative of the traineeship placement, and the student solving the situations that arise.

In the opinion of students, ISMA students are more privileged as other students of other universities - lectures are in English, it is also a possibility to improve English skills, possibility to go and study in Latvian ISMA etc.

In general, experts assess cooperation with other institutions in Latvia as good.

1.5.2. ISMA has around 80 contracts, from them are 2 types - internship and teaching mobility (SER Annex 2.5.1. Sadarbības līgumi. Agreements Vad.). ISMA looks more broadly and it was mentioned during the visit, that ISMA will try to conclude an agreement with Malaysia, ISMA plans to meet with the Malaysian ambassador.

Academic staff actively participate in outgoing mobility, mostly for one week. Teaching staff recognized it as a very good experience. Such practice contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programmes, for example, one of the outgoing mobility was to Cyprus with very good experience for tourism and hotels.

ISMA has very good cooperation with the Uzbekistan government. It is worth mentioning that ISMA lost some students. Covid restrictions caused many students to drop out; they were unable to start studies due to mobility restrictions and also because of the geopolitical situation (see SAR, p.68, information during the visit). Instead, they chose China, USA.

ISMA also goes outside Latvia to look for new opportunities and forms of cooperation. For example, during the visit ISMA announced that they visited Georgia and presented the academy. Employers are invited to tours, during these excursions ISMA asks about required skills and knowledge, in turn employers ask questions about internships. As a result, ISMA may consider new course, new business cases. After internships students analyze the strong and weak sides of enterprises.

One of the weaknesses is the insufficient number of guest lecturers from foreign universities, for example, in 2021 there was only one guest lecture from Bulgaria. Situation was improved in 2022 and 2023 when there were 7 and 11 guest lectures (SER, Annex 2.5.4. Incoming-Outgoing staff 2021-2023) One of the recommendations is to organize guest lectures by industry experts, to supplement the teaching staff with practitioners. According to SER, ISMA has no cooperation with scientific partnership abroad, "In recent years the cooperation with the EU and its partner countries has mainly been carried out through the opportunities and funding of the Erasmus and Erasmus + programmes."

ISMA covers fees for participating in conferences, also covers Erasmus+ expenses. In some cases students can not participate in the Erasmus+ programme as they have a full time job.

ISMA Fergana branch has good cooperation with government, banks, private companies, hotels and agreements for internship with companies. Each month the Fergana branch provides lecturers from innovation center, from private companies - managers, accountants, directors of banks, masters. The Fergana branch organises master class meetings with other lecturers from other Fergana universities, especially those who are experts in the tax system of Uzbekistan. Fergana students also visit local enterprises to get to know potential employers. Companies from Latvia could come as guest lecturers as they are familiar with EU rules. Fergana branch provides companies, when contracts are signed, students go to the host company. To study in ISMA Fergana branch, it is necessary to present an IELTS certificate.

Several employers indicated that there is a shortage of IT specialists in Fergana, therefore, IT studies in Fergana would have great potential.

Communication with the Fergana branch and ISMA management takes place every day. ISMA acknowledges that it is difficult to attract financial resources from European Union funds. Cooperation with other universities mainly takes place through the Erasmus+ programme however there are no specific features of the study field and the relevant study programmes that are base for selection.

Criterion:

1.5.3. ISMA does not have a system and procedures on how to attract teaching staff from abroad. Mainly teaching staff comes from Bulgaria, Turkey, Lithuania etc. (SER Annexes 2.5.4. Incoming-Outcoming Staff\_2021-20023) .

ISMA attracts teaching staff by organising multiple annual conferences <https://www.isma.lv/en/science/conferences-and-research>. Discussions on possible cooperation are

held with the most promising lecturers (SER, p.56) providing added value to the implementation of the study process and the quality of studies.

Students can also do an internship abroad through the Lifelong Learning Program Erasmus, where students are given a stipend instead of a salary. At the university, there is no such period where work experience is counted as an internship. Students strongly recommend studying in ISMA to their friends, colleagues etc.

Consultants of ISMA Fergana affiliate help students to organize internships. Only 15% of all ISMA Fergana students go to Latvia to study. Not all students are completely aware of the advantages of the diploma issues by EU countries.

Knowledge of Latvian is the main problem to attract guest lectures, probably a guest lecturer from India could not come as a permanent lecturer.

In the opinion of students, the Erasmus+ programme is also a good way to improve English skills. The COVID pandemic introduced adjustments to the Erasmus+ programme, when everything was done remotely, including the studies in the Erasmus+ programme. Students do not see the difference between study in Latvia and study abroad.

According to information during the visit, 2023/2024 is the first academic year when grants for international staff mobility are available for ISMA Fergana affiliate teaching staff, 2 lecturers have been in Cyprus.

Employers could be more involved in the content of the study courses development and discussions.

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

ISMA cooperates with institutions from Latvia and abroad. ISMA also has strong cooperation traditions with employers from Latvia. ISMA provides various activities to get to know the profession - internships, guest lecturers from enterprises, excursions to enterprises, etc. However incoming teaching mobility is low and should be improved. In addition, there is no procedure for attracting teaching staff and students from abroad.

Strengths:

- 1) ISMA has very good cooperation with employers from Latvia.

Weaknesses:

- 1) ISMA does not have a system and procedures on how to attract teaching staff from abroad.
- 2) ISMA has low incoming teaching staff mobility.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA has strong cooperation with employers from Latvia which contributes to the achievement of the aims of the study field. However incoming teaching mobility is low ((SER Annexes 2.5.4. Incoming-Outcoming Staff\_2021-2023)

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

### **Analysis**

The previous assessment procedure of the study field and the corresponding study programmes was held in the beginning of 2022 with Accreditation page number 2022/19, Accreditation date of

27.04.2022 and the accreditation duration provided for 2 year until 28.04.2024 (see AIKA e-platform official information - <https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=site%2Fprogram%2Fview&id=951>). The relevant recommendations developed within the previous assessment are publicly available on AIKA e - platform at

<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=site%2Fdownload&key=ba09b151fdd2342df00462303d7bbc11> - Expert group joint report:

- p.19 (Recommendations for the Study Field) - 9 short-term and 14 long-term recommendations,
- p.42 (Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration in Tourism" (professional bachelor 42345)) - 1 short-term and 6 long-term recommendations,
- p.53-54 (Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration" (professional bachelor 42345)) - 2 short-term and 9 long-term recommendations,
- p.65 (Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration" (professional master, 47345)) - 8 short-term and 10 long-term recommendations.

ISMA has carefully addressed the previous recommendations (SER p.57 and SER Annex 2.6.1.Implementation\_of\_recommendations-2022.docx). In addition to the major improvement reflected in SER section 2.6.1. p.58 - development of the HR strategy; new cooperation agreements with industry; stronger staff and students engagement in various ways and aspects of quality evaluation as well as in research, including projects-based research; addressing industry needs with new study courses; strengthened research activities - also number of other, including technical, but valuably important improvements and serious changes have been made based on previous recommendations such as - infrastructure is adapted to people with different needs and learning specifics; staff mobility expanded; doctoral programme closed; increased involvement of academic staff in research, increased number of publications in internationally cited databases, unified and elaborated course descriptions templates, and many other.

Some of the previous recommendations are continuously regularly performed and monitored, and few are still to be partly repeated in this report - e.g. ensuring access to online infrastructure (databases, softwares) access for remote and distant studies; keep improvement on incentive system for academic staff to do research and publish papers in valuable journals.

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

ISMA has worked seriously with the review, change and implementation of previous recommendations - the vast majority are well addressed, met, implemented or certainly planned in foreseeable timeline. ISMA recognizes that the impact of the recommendations on the quality of studies was high, the study programmes were improved and so was the competitiveness and the compliance with the development trends of the higher education, economy, industry. Some of the previous recommendations are continuously regularly performed and monitored, and few are still to be partly repeated in this current report.

Strengths:

1) ISMA had clearly and fundamentally addressed the vast majority of previous recommendations - fundamental changes and improvements had been made and thus the quality and compliance of the StP improved.

Weaknesses:

1) Few of the previous recommendations are still to be partly repeated in this report - e.g. 1) ensuring access to online infrastructure (databases, softwares) access for remote and distant studies, and 2) keep improvement on incentive system for academic staff to do research and publish papers in valuable journals.

## Assessment of the requirement [4]

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

### Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

ISMA had clearly and fundamentally addressed the vast majority of previous recommendations - fundamental changes and improvements had been made and thus the quality and compliance of the StF and its StPs improved.

Few of the previous recommendations which will be partly repeated in this report (access to online infrastructure; research motivation policy) are either being currently solved or addressed otherwise to be solved.

## 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

- 1) Serious review and update (and respectively lock) of public information - ISMA must review and ensure that all information online in Riga and Fergana and all posters, banners in physical spaces is legally compliant.
- 2) Acquire or rent dormitory spaces to accommodate international students, or establish formal agreements with accommodation providers or other institutions to ensure international students have suitable housing options.
- 3) Obtain more English language resources at ISMA Riga library to better serve the needs of international students.
- 4) Expand the book collection at the Fergana Branch library and/or regularly update the open-source library.
- 5) Create accessibility of EBSCO and Scopus scientific databases for remote use for both ISMA Riga and Fergana students.
- 6) Develop onboarding procedures for new academic staff members to facilitate their integration into ISMA.
- 7) Develop a feedback mechanism for Fergana Branch students to evaluate the study process and lecturers, same to what is available to students in Riga.
- 8) To update, amend and keep updated information on ISMA website Science section at <https://www.isma.lv/> - Science, and its 3 subsections. Consider a subsection for students including possibility for it to be content-wise managed by Students` Council together with webpage IT and StF or StP representatives.
- 9) Develop a system and procedure on how to attract teaching staff from abroad.

### Long-term recommendations

- 1) Develop and implement specific KPIs aligned with the ISMA development strategy and quality assurance policy.
- 2) Explore alternative revenue sources beyond relying on tuition fees such as seeking grants or partnerships with industry.

3) Establish a structured rewards system to recognize achievements of academic staff based on qualifications, performance, and contributions to research and teaching.
4) Improve infrastructure at the Fergana Branch to better support students with special needs.
5) Extend the duration of on-site study modules for ISMA Fergana Branch to provide students with more time for comprehension and engagement.
6) Consider establishing permanent academic staff positions at the ISMA Fergana Branch to improve the effectiveness of the study process.
7) To establish a comprehensive formal ISMA science and research motivation programme institutionalizing the rather many formal and informal research promotion current aspects (annual plans, 6 year plans, conference fee reimbursement and other fragmented science promotion); add clear guidelines, goals, key indicators linked to ISMA development strategy and requirements linked to study process; consider expanding on research network locally and internationally.
8) To strengthen the communication (timely, clearly, and widely) to the students about possibilities and events of research character (conferences, publications, research, project a.o.) offered by ISMA as well as by its partners and counterpart including on geographical base, e.g. consider Baltic International Academy Student Conferences, too.
9) Translate relevant documents, such as the Quality Management System procedure for Study Programmes, into English to improve accessibility for international stakeholders

## II - "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. Professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration" (code 42345) with the qualification to be obtained - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs based on ISMA SER Annex 3.1.1.Diploma\_paraugs\_Bak.docx), implemented in Riga (Latvia) and Fergana (Uzbekistan) in four formats - Full time studies in Latvian and English, Part time extramural studies in Latvian, and Part time distance learning (ISMA in its SER used the term extramural studies distance education) in English, fully - content-wise, administratively and legally LQF-EQF-wise, code-wise and Latvian Industry qualification structure/map-wise - complies with the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property".

The title of the programme "Business Administration" fully meets the conventional perception of business studies at bachelor level. The name and also the study content of the StP relates to the code 42 345 according Latvian Education Classification (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.322, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitiba-klasifikaciju>), meaning that first two digits `42` notes that the StP is professional bachelor programme (level 6 of Latvian and European Qualification Framework) and the last three digits `345` notes the StP belongs to the group of programme in "Management and administration".

The qualification to be obtained - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs) is fully aligned with the Latvian Industry qualification structure/map (see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_uznemejdarbiba.pdf)) according to the Map of professions included in the structure of the business, finance, accounting and administration (wholesale and retail trade, commercial sciences) sector by the Vocational education

and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023. A minor remark for consideration about the NKS (Nozares kvalifikāciju struktūra, Industry Qualification Structure) suggested English formulation of the qualification to be obtained - Commercial Manager (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) or Manager and operator of small business (ISCO) instead of Business Administrator - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.16. p.13 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023.

2.1.2. The interrelation of major and detailed parameters of the study programme, including its:

- type - Professional bachelor study programme;
  - title - Business Administration (in Latvian - Uzņēmējdarbības vadība);
  - code - 42345;
  - degree to be obtained - Professional Bachelor's degree in Business Administration
  - professional qualification - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs),
  - aims (goal at SER p.127),
  - objective (tasks at SER p.127-128),
  - learning outcomes (study results at SER p.131)
  - and admission requirements (SER, p.128-129) - secondary education for programme`s formats in Latvian; while for English streams an additional requirement of at least level B2 of the English language proficiency.
  - implementation languages (SER p.128-129) - Latvian and English.
- is sufficiently analyzed (SER, p.130-132) and are well interrelated with their formulations and terminology corresponding to and strengthening one another.

2.1.3. SER p.130 section 3.1.1. confirms that the title of the study programme, the code, the qualification to be obtained, the scope and duration of studies, the admission rules, as well as the final examination have remained unchanged. Changes have been made to the wording of the aim which is clarified, harmonizing it with the formulation of the StF aim.

2.1.4. The study programme "Business Administration" is a relevant and popular (well demanded) programme among the programmes offered by other universities. Despite this, a decrease in students can be observed in 2022. A relatively small number of students can be observed in the programme in Latvian language. For example, in the Latvian stream part-time extramural programmes study 4 people in all years in total. This calls into question whether this programme is economically justified. Overall, the number of students has gradually decreased over the past three years (SER p.7, 69, 103).

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

Indicators and major detailed parameters of the study programme describing the title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualification, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are consistent, reasonable and justified, relevant to one another, to StF and ISMA, national regulations and supranational guidelines as well as sufficiently analyzed in SER p.130-134 including showing their up-to-date to socio-economic trends and demand.

A mere suggestion: Just for consideration to pay attention to - the qualification to be obtained "Business Administrator" sounds possibly less than Latvian origin (Uzņēmuma vadītājs), so experts would just suggest to consider the NKS suggested english formulation of the qualification to be

obtained - Commercial Manager (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) or Manager and operator of small business (ISCO) instead of Business Administrator - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.16. p.13 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023. Or consider other possible equal translations - e.g. Manager of an Enterprise; Company manager; Use AIKA HEI platform to look for case practices (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=site%2Fprogram%2Flist>).

Strengths:

1) ISMA pays attention to alignment of indicators and major detailed parameters of the study programme including their internal alignment to one another, to StF and ISMA strategy, national regulations and supranational guidelines as well as to socio-economic trends and demand.

Weaknesses:

1) None

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The study programme is comprehensive encompassing legal regulations, occupational standards, and valuable feedback from an engaged community of students, alumni, and employers. This approach is designed to ensure the programme's direct relevance to the current demands of the labor market while also aligning with the latest scientific and technological advancements.

At the heart of the curriculum lies a logical and thoughtful structure, highlighted by courses such as "Enterprise Management" and "Quantitative Methods and Statistics" guaranteeing that students acquire good knowledge, skills, and competences essential for their professional growth.

However, the programme faces challenges in its elective course offerings, which are currently limited to 12 ECTS for part C and an additional 12 ECTS for specializations or electives from the ISMA Catalogue, as specified in Annex No. 3.1.6. There is a compelling need to expand these offerings to include more elective ECTS. Increasing the number of ECTS by elective courses could increase the programme's attractiveness and empower students with a more versatile skill set, positioning them for success across a multitude of career paths.

Addressing the gap in registered specializations, as evidenced by discrepancies in official records (VIIS and E-platform) and ISMA website, is also crucial. This involves a critical reassessment of the 12 ECTS designated for potential specializations, ensuring they are allocated in a manner that reflects the programme official records. The experts analysed programme`s curriculum (SER Annex 3.1.6. Curriculum\_Programme\_BA\_Bac.xlsx) also in accordance with Latvian Cabinet regulation No.305 - Regulations on the state standard of professional higher education (Ministru kabineta 2023. gada 13. jūnija noteikumi Nr. 305 "Noteikumi par valsts profesionālās augstākās izglītības standartu". <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342818>) section 22 on distribution of ECTS amount in programmes` contents among compulsory A part courses (30 ECTS in the programme according to regulations` minimum) and limited elective B part courses (programme offers in total 198 ECTS of courses to choose from to gain 144 ECTS according to regulation) - it is evident that curriculum offers both - the basic theoretical knowledge courses and information technology courses of at least 54 ECTS (section 22.2. of the regulation) and relevant specialization study courses in the amount of at least 90 ECTS (section 22.2. of the regulation).

When it comes to the free elective study courses within the programme, they are not explicitly detailed. There is no indication of the specific courses available for students to choose from. Instead, in annex 3.1.5. and 3.1.6. they are simply stated as "Specialization or other elective course from

ISMA Catalogue" in amount of 12 credit points.

Moreover, there seems to be a very extensive number of courses and some of them could easily be merged avoiding duplication of syllabus. For instance, courses such as "Business Communication" and "Event Management" could potentially be consolidated as they both belong to the same field and learning outcomes could be merged.

Syllabus overlap is an area of concern, traditionally addressed through informal discussions among faculty members. Adopting a more structured approach to identifying and resolving these overlaps could significantly enhance the coherence and efficiency of the programme. Merging of courses could solve this problem.

Along with the extensive number of courses there is not clear evidence on the criteria of ECTS by courses. Merging courses and making a more homogenous distribution of ECTS could enhance programme structure efficiency.

Tailoring syllabus to reflect the specific legal and tax frameworks of locations like Fergana, would greatly enhance the programme relevance and quality, making education more contextual and beneficial for students in specific regions. In Fergana Branch seems to exist a lack of specific adjustments made to courses content to cater Uzbekistan's unique legal, cultural, and economic context. This is particularly relevant for courses such as "Legal Regulation of Enterprise Activity," "Accounting and Taxes," and "Property and Liability Law in Business."

The programme's compliance with national regulations (state education standard, professional (occupational) standard) analysis ISMA provides in SER Annexes 3.1.3.Compliance\_Education\_stand\_BA\_Bak.docx

(<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=expert%2Fannex%2Fdownload&id=2489&key=78&suffix=English&spid=4147>) and 3.1.4\_Compliance\_Prof\_Standard\_Bak.xlsx

(<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=expert%2Fannex%2Fdownload&id=2489&key=79&suffix=English&spid=4147>). The occupational standard compliance analysis by ISMA is provided generally, i.e., for the occupational standard ISMA has well extracted the list of knowledge the occupational standard necessary for performing professional tasks to which and aligned them against the respective study courses of the programme. Although it can be found and concluded via study course descriptions (including their topics, thematics, tasks, assessment methods and results, learning outcomes) that they indeed address the respective parameter of the standard, such approach holds risks for inefficiency and potentially nonconformity. A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course's skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. The programme employs an adequate range of study methods, including interactive tools and applications (e.g., Kahoot!, Socrative.com), which engage students actively in the learning process. This variety caters to different learning styles and keeps the educational experience engaging and shows evidence of student-centred learning.

The inclusion of practical work, such as business analysis and development of business ideas in courses like "Introduction to Entrepreneurship," directly connects theoretical learning with real-world application. This approach ensures that learning outcomes are relevant and actionable in the business environment.

The academic staff's regular review and potential adjustment of the learning process and rating system based on student feedback and the specific needs of the course highlight a commitment to student-centered learning. This method not only enhances the learning experience but also encourages student engagement and responsibility for their own learning.

Regular training sessions for academic staff on the latest teaching methods and the use of e-

learning environments demonstrate ISMA's commitment to continuous improvement in teaching quality and adaptation to modern educational trends.

The implementation of this programme in Fergana presents unique challenges. The condensed schedule, with most classes conducted online and over a short timeframe, can be intense for students, as understood in Meeting with Students. The compact structure may not allow enough time for deep learning and retention, leading to a potentially overwhelming experience. This challenge is compounded by the logistical issues faced by the teaching staff who commute to Fergana. The long travel times and fatigue can impact the quality of instruction and the overall learning experience.

To address these challenges, the programme could consider hiring more permanent local teachers in Fergana. This strategy would not only provide a consistent teaching presence but also ensure that the curriculum is aligned with local needs and cultural contexts. By fostering collaboration between the Fergana and Riga academic staff, the Fergana branch could establish a stronger academic identity, offering a more tailored educational experience while maintaining high standards.

As for the Study course descriptions, although programmes' study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the languages in which the programme is implemented (Latvian and English), and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions(annex 3.1.7) however, the amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.

Overall, the programme approach to education is designed to be flexible, interactive, and responsive to feedback, with an emphasis on practical application and continuous improvement. However, addressing the challenges in Fergana requires a more localized approach, balancing intensive study schedules with the need for effective learning and addressing logistical issues for staff and students alike.

2.2.4. The internship complies with the requirements of the regulatory enactments and are formally regulated in Annex 3.1.8.Traineeship\_regulations.doc. The internship component of the programme, which spans across the second, third, and fourth years, totaling 36 ECTS, is organized in harmony with the programme objectives and the Occupational Standard. This strategic structure facilitates the integration of theoretical learning with practical application, ensuring students are prepared to enter the labour market. The process is designed based on progression of tasks, tailored to match students' evolving knowledge and skill set, ensuring that each phase of the internship builds upon the last.

The process of developing and continually refining the goals of the internship is a collaborative effort involving the ISMA administrative and academic staff alongside employers. This cooperative approach ensures that internship objectives reflect the industry and educational standards. Feedback gathered from both students and employers plays a relevant role in this process, serving as a critical measure of the internship success.

ISMA Career Centre plays a relevant role in the internship experience for students. Its active engagement in organizing traineeship workshops and facilitating regular interactions with potential employers underscores a dynamic and effective strategy in securing internship placements. These initiatives exemplify a proactive commitment to ensure students have good opportunities to apply their learning in real-world settings. The range of internships available through the Career Centre is diverse, in both local and international fields. This includes opportunities facilitated through established partnerships and the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme.

The emphasis placed on internships within the programme is very important in bridging the gap between academic study and professional practice. By prioritizing hands-on, experiential learning, ISMA ensures that students are not only academically prepared but also practically prepared for the labour market.

Internship in the programme is well organised also for foreign students in English language streams. Every year at the end of November, ISMA organises the international conference “Internship and Employment” <https://www.isma.lv/en/science/conferences-and-research/internship-employment>, where students get acquainted with potential employers from Latvia and abroad. At the end of the conference, each student has the opportunity to talk to company representatives and apply for traineeship. Experience has shown that this conference is very useful as many students gain traineeships in Latvia and in foreign companies. (SER p.140). Also during the evaluation visit at ISMA, particularly during the meetings with students, experts assured that quite some students had had their internships also as an Erasmus exchange semester abroad. SER p.141 explains that there is a wide range of traineeship opportunities offered to the students in Latvia and abroad - cooperation partners abroad include such companies as "Odeon Tours" (Spain), “Veton 2011 Eood” (Bulgaria), , JobTrust (Greece) etc. For example, “Clio” (Bulgaria) and "Animafest Experience" (Spain) regularly offer positions in the customer service department and the HR department (SER p.141). Successful cooperation has been established with employers in Uzbekistan, such as “Aysel-Invest”, “Fergana Golden Valley Service” - insurance companies, “Sheba properties” - real estate company, “Catering, trade and service enterprises” - food industry company, etc. Students are assigned an traineeship supervisor at ISMA Fergana branch, who introduces students to the traineeship assignments they are expected to carry out at the company and to present an internship report at the end of the traineeship. (SER p.142).

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. The methodology behind the selection of final thesis topics within the "Business Administration" (42345) programme at ISMA deliberately incorporates topics that are not only academically relevant but also deeply intertwined with current market trends and the evolving needs of the industry. This approach is further enriched by the direct involvement of employers, who contribute by suggesting topics that embody scientific-practical innovations. Such collaboration ensures that the chosen thesis topics are not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable, addressing real-world business challenges and needs with precision and relevancy.

Employers play a pivotal role beyond topic selection, actively participating in the thesis defence commissions and providing critical feedback on the practicality and innovativeness of the proposed solutions within the industry context. This partnership creates a relevant bridge between academic research and the business environment, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and ensuring that the research conducted by students is both relevant and valued by the industry.

The spectrum of thesis topics is broad, spanning key areas like business efficiency, competitiveness, quality management, and the integration of information technology. This reflects a holistic approach to business administration education, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the field and preparing students to tackle a wide range of challenges.

Linking the objectives of traineeships with the themes of final thesis projects, particularly through the assignments in the 4th-year traineeship, is a strategy that amplifies the practical application of academic learning. This integration ensures that students are able to directly apply their knowledge, skills, and competences in real-world settings, effectively reinforcing the program's intended learning outcomes and demonstrating the practical value.

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

The professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration" (42345) demonstrates a clear focus on aligning with industry needs, labour market demands, and current scientific trends. The curriculum is comprehensive and interconnected, incorporating feedback from students, alumni, and employers to ensure relevance and applicability. Improvements could be made by expanding the

range of elective courses and resolving discrepancies in specializations to provide a more flexible and tailored educational experience.

The programme's compliance with national regulations (state education standard) is analysed and justified in detailed manner and provides compliance-evident analysis of the StP with the relevant education standard. The occupational standard compliance analysis by ISMA is provided generally, i.e., for the occupational standard ISMA has well extracted the list of knowledge the occupational standard necessary for performing professional tasks to which and aligned them against the respective study courses of the programme. Although it can be found and concluded via study course descriptions (including their topics, thematics, tasks, assessment methods and results, learning outcomes) that they indeed address the respective parameter of the standard, such approach holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity. A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course's skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods.

In Fergana, the programme's condensed schedule presents challenges. Addressing this with a more localized approach, such as hiring permanent local teachers and adjusting courses to fit the regional context, could improve learning outcomes and instruction quality.

Internships are a key component, with a well-structured progression that aligns with students' developing skills. The emphasis on practical experience helps bridge the gap between academic learning and the job market.

Final thesis topics in the "Business Administration" programme are closely tied to industry trends, with employer involvement ensuring they are relevant and practical. This collaboration with industry adds value to the academic process, providing students with a platform to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.

ISMA's programme balances theoretical and practical learning, with a strong focus on student-centered education. To further enhance the programme's effectiveness and appeal, ISMA should address the condensed structure in Fergana, expand elective offerings, and reduce syllabus overlap. These steps would help ensure the programme's continued relevance and success in preparing students for a competitive labour market.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration" (42345) is designed with a well-structured curriculum that covers legal regulations, occupational standard, and integrates feedback from students, alumni, and employers. This comprehensive approach ensures that the programme is relevant to industry needs and evolving market trends.
- 2) The content of the study courses is carefully crafted to meet the demands of the industry and scientific trends. Courses like "Enterprise Management" and "Quantitative Methods and Statistics" reflect this alignment, providing students with essential skills and knowledge for their professional growth.
- 3) The internship component, spanning the second to fourth years with a total of 36 ECTS, is structured to ensure students gain practical experience in real-world settings.
- 4) The inclusion of employers in the selection of final thesis topics ensures that the research is not only academically sound but also relevant to industry needs. This collaboration fosters a stronger bridge between academic research and business practice.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) The intensive, compacted schedule in Fergana poses challenges for both students and commuting faculty. This structure may not provide sufficient time for deep learning and retention, potentially impacting the quality of the educational experience.
- 2) There are gaps in registered specializations, with discrepancies in official records (VIIS and E-

platform). A critical reassessment of the 12 ECTS designated for potential specializations is needed to align with the programme's official records.

3) The programme has a high number of courses, with some overlapping in content. This leads to redundancy and inefficiency. A more structured approach to identifying and resolving these overlaps, along with merging courses to reduce redundancy, could improve the programme's coherence and efficiency.

4) In Fergana, there's a lack of specific adjustments to courses to cater to Uzbekistan's legal, cultural, and economic context. Addressing this could enhance the programme's relevance in the region and improve the learning outcomes for local students.

5) From 2.2.3.: The amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. Based on the findings from SER (p.146-147) and observations of the site visit, the resources necessary for the study programme implementation are adequately provided. Overall, the resources available for the study programme are identical to those of the study field and a more comprehensive description can be found in the analysis section of the study field (1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field).

Students enrolled in the bachelor's "Business Administration" programme have access to the ISMA library and its resources, both in Riga and Fergana. As it was evident during the site visits, these libraries provide ISMA students copies of textbooks and other study materials. In all ISMA premises where the study process takes place, students have equal access to online resources such as the Moodle system, electronic library containing digital books, and electronic databases.

In general, the implementation of the study programme does not require specialized laboratories or other specific resources, nonetheless the lecture rooms in both Riga and Fergana are equipped with all the modern learning essentials, such as computers, projectors, TVs, interactive whiteboards, and more (SER, p.146). During the visits in both Riga and Fergana, it was evident that the classrooms where study programme lectures take place are well equipped. They use various classes and setups depending on the needs of each subject. For instance, in Riga, they have different types of tables and movable chairs with attached small desks, allowing for easy transformations for group works of different sizes, increasing efficiency of the learning process. Generally, students from both Riga and Fergana expressed that the accessibility of study materials and resources is satisfactory, except for the possibility to access scientific databases (EBSCO and Scopus) from home.

Starting in the upcoming academic year, this programme will also offer distance learning option. All students enrolled in the distance learning format will have equal access to the resources provided by ISMA.

In summary, it can be concluded that the study infrastructure mainly meets the needs of students and ISMA's existing material and technical base in both Riga and Fergana provide the necessary requirements for the implementation of the study programme.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. Financial resources for the implementation of the study programme primarily come from the tuition fees paid by students, since ISMA is a private higher education institution and does not receive government funding for its operations.

ISMA has calculated that for the study programme to be financially profitable, it needs a minimum of 7 full-time students, 4 students in distance learning studies, and 3 students in extramural studies per academic year, regardless of the language of instruction (SER, p.151). The current student enrollment numbers for this programme are sufficient to sustain a study process without financial losses. In 2023, there were 351 students enrolled in full-time intramural studies, with 45 studying in the Latvian stream and 306 in the English stream, and 262 students enrolled in part-time extramural studies, with 4 studying in the Latvian stream and 258 in the English stream (annex 3.1.2). Since distance learning studies are set to start in the next academic year, there are no available statistics regarding student enrollment numbers.

It is evident that there is a notably small number of students enrolled in the Latvian stream, particularly in part-time extramural studies, with only 4 students. Given this low enrollment, it is suggested for ISMA to assess the sustainability of maintaining Latvian streams and perhaps consider implementing study programme only in English.

ISMA has calculated that for the programme to be financially profitable, it needs a minimum of 20 students in the ISMA Fergana branch per academic year (SER, p.151). The current student enrollment numbers for this programme are sufficient to sustain a study process without financial losses. In 2023, there were 48 students enrolled in the study programme at the ISMA Fergana branch (annex 3.1.2).

The breakdown of costs of implementing study programme in ISMA Fergana Branch reveals that transportation costs make up 31.3% and business trip costs - 11.3%, totaling 42.6% of the whole budget dedicated to the programme's implementation at the Branch. As previously discussed in the analysis section of the study field (1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field), this expenditure is significant. Therefore, it is recommended for ISMA to consider options to employ local academic staff at the ISMA Fergana branch to optimize financial resources.

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

Resources and provision for the study programme mainly meet the requirements for effective study programme implementation. Overall, the resources available are the same with those available for the study field. Students have access to ISMA libraries, online resources, and well-equipped lecture halls, ensuring their study needs are met. Additionally, students who plan to study in distance learning in the upcoming academic year will have the same resource access as on-site students. However, challenges outlined in the analysis section of the study field also apply to the study programme, such as the limited amount of English language resources in the ISMA Riga library and non-existent remote access to scientific databases for students in both Riga and Fergana. ISMA's study programme financing relies mainly on student tuition fees due to its status as a private higher education institution. To ensure financial sustainability, minimum enrollment targets have been established, which are currently being met in both Riga and the Fergana Branch. Nevertheless, the low enrollment in the Latvian streams of the programme could be problematic in sustainability in the future, and their continuation should be reassessed. For the ISMA Fergana branch, there are significant transportation costs and business trips costs related to the implementation of the study programme. It is necessary to reassess the sustainability of the current system and employment of permanent academic staff at the Branch should be considered.

Strengths:

- 1) Availability of well-equipped lecture halls with modern learning essentials and flexibility in classroom setups.
- 2) Equal access to resources for students planning to study in distance learning.
- 3) Current student enrollment numbers meet the requirements for financial sustainability in both Riga and Fergana.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Low enrollment in Latvian streams of the study programme.
- 2) Significant transportation and business trip costs for the implementation of the study programme at the ISMA Fergana Branch.

## Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The resources and provision of the study programme mainly meet the criteria for effective implementation. While the infrastructure and essential technical needs are adequately provided, there are shortcomings concerning factors outlined in the analysis section of the study field (small amount of English resources at the ISMA Riga library; limited remote access to scientific databases for students), as well as there are aspects that are slightly challenging, such as the low enrollment of students in the Latvian streams of the study programme and significant expenses associated with implementing the study programme at the ISMA Fergana Branch.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. As it is stated in SER p.87, ISMA academic positions are filled in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, through the election procedure stipulated by ISMA's "Regulations on election into academic positions". The Regulations include the qualification and eligibility criteria for the teaching staff in accordance with Articles 28, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, and 40 of the "Law on Higher Education Institutions". Out of 24 lecturers that are involved in the implementation of the Professional Bachelor's study programme "Business Administration", 5 hold the position of the lecturer, 3 - assistant professors (docents), 4 - associate professor, 6 - professor, 5 are guest lecturers (20%). More than 50% of the academic staff are PhD holders. Z.Oborenko, a long-term lecturer in the programme, obtained a PhD degree during the reporting period, some of the teaching staff continue their doctoral studies, e.g. J.Mironova, J.Galkina, Z.Klescevnikova. Overall qualification and education fields of the teaching staff members correspond to requirements for the implementation of the study programme and are fully appropriate.

It has to be noted that students, as well as alumni are especially grateful for the training of practical skills, provided by the academic staff members having strong business experience (subjects they taught: Accounting and Taxes, Business English, Social Entrepreneurship, etc).

2.4.2. As it is stated in SER p.88-89, there have been some changes in both the composition of the teaching staff and in the numerical indicators since the previous accreditation of the study field, although the main core of the academic staff remains the same. The proportion of elected teaching staff and the ratio of PhDs to Masters have increased in the 2022/2023 academic year. The number

of associate professors and professors involved in the implementation of the programme has increased accordingly. Almost a third of the teaching staff (32%) in the 2022/2023 academic year are professors.

Several ISMA academic staff members have been working in the study programme for many years, e.g. I.Linde, V.Riaschenko, T.Odinokova, Z.Oborenko, etc. However, several faculty members with significant experience in teaching, practical business and research have been recruited, e.g. E.Liepa, A.Djakona, J.Mironova, J.Chaiko.

Measures of the changes in composition of the teaching staff are taken purposely. The lecturers are encouraged to obtain Phd, scientific work is included in job descriptions as a part of the workload.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4.: Although full and clear information about the number of teaching staff members with their scientific and/or professional practical experience achievements is not compiled in an unified review and annex, but experts extracted the information the following way - The list of academic staff involved in the whole StF is provided by ISMA in SER Annex 2.3.1.Info\_Teaching\_staff\_Management.xlsx. 24 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the professional bachelor study programme (SER p.152), the list of which can be extracted (filtered) from SER Annex 2.3.1.Info\_Teaching\_staff\_Management.xlsx. The list of teaching staff involved in the courses` conduct in the programme can be also obtained from the study plans of the professional master study programme (SER Annex 3.1.6.Curriculum\_Programme\_BA\_Bac.xlsx) and from the course descriptions at SER Annex 3.1.7.Study\_course\_descriptions\_Bac\_BA.docx. The publications of the teaching staff of the whole StF are provided in staff`s CVs (SER Annex 2.3.2.Teaching\_staff\_CV\_Vad.pdf), and also the list of the publications of the teaching staff of the whole StF over the reporting period is provided in SER Annex 2.4.2.ScientificWorks\_2020-2023\_BA.docx. Also, ISMA provides SER Annex 2.4.1.Quantitative\_data\_research\_BA.xlsx on StF academic staff generally indicating each staff`s contribution to (participation in) number of projects and grants, and publication and conferences - Summary of quantitative data on scientific and/ or applied research activities corresponding to the study field in the reporting period 2020 - 2023.

As a result of the detailed review experts find that all the teachers, according to the information in SER and annexes, have either the required scientific publications, or the five years of practical experience. It is clear that ISMA`s academic staff is active in scientific publishing, visibly at collective level more than at individual, and it is evident, that each member of the academic staff in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions - the publications e.g. Dehtjare J., Mironova J., Balode I. 2022 "Innovative strategy development for supporting sustainable tourism in Latvia" (at [https://lluub.lv/conference/economic\\_science\\_rural/2022/Latvia\\_ESRD\\_56\\_2022-136-142.pdf](https://lluub.lv/conference/economic_science_rural/2022/Latvia_ESRD_56_2022-136-142.pdf)), 2022 Garanti, Z., Berjozkina G. (2002), Attitudes (Stereotype and Prejudice) of Local People towards Seasonal Tourism Workers, at <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003161868-26/attitudes-stereotype-prejudice-local-people-towards-seasonal-tourism-workers-zanete-garanti-galina-berjozkina>, Čaiko et al, 2021 (<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/9711732>) and many more are published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions and further in databases accepting editions only with peer-review - these include SCOPUS, WoS, ProQuest, MDPI, Sciendo and other.

ISMA emphasises also the strategic role of scientific publishing as one of its strategic priorities - Excellence in research with the objective O.2.6. - Promote the publication of publications of academic staff and students in internationally recognized scientific journals and collections of papers, as well as encourage presentation of papers at scientific conferences, and O.2.7. - Analyse opportunities to include collections of ISMA scientific publications in internationally relevant

databases and develop a plan of activities to be undertaken, and O.2.8. - Develop and implement a system of support for the production and publication of scientific publications (support for editing articles, translating them into a foreign language (s) and publishing), and O.2.9. Promote the publication of scientific publications and research data in Open Access (SER p.10). Number of internationally recognized publications and Number of joint publications of lecturers and students at ISMA conferences are also two of ISMA`s strategic indicators of the Academic and general staff performance as well as of the Achievements and evaluation of results within ISMA Quality Assurance Policy (SER p.19). One free publication per academic year is available to all ISMA faculty and students (SER p.39) as part of ISMA`s international cooperation in the field of scientific and applied research are scientific journals "Baltic Journal of Economic Studies" (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/publications/baltic-journal-en>, and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/issue>) and "Economics&Education" (<http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/issue/view/151/310>) publishing at <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/> 4 times a year and indexed in Copernicus, as well as in other popular databases of scientific articles (SER p.15 and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/indexed>).

Also, according to the staff CVs and largely based also on the experts meetings with ISMA representatives during the visit, it is clear that all teaching staff has relevant professional practical experience, which crucially contributes to the programme.

2.4.5. As it is stated in SER and confirmed at the panel meeting with the academic staff of the programme, mutual cooperation of the teaching staff is implemented in three directions: - cooperation in the development and updating of study programme and study course descriptions; - cooperation on the improvement of methodological work; - collaboration in scientific research. Implementation of those 3 cooperation directions has formal and informal ways. To ensure interdisciplinary relation and harmonization of common requirements for the achievement of learning outcomes, and to eliminate an unnecessary overlapping of study content (example, given by the lecturers - overlapping topic of marketing tools), the content of the study courses is regularly discussed and approved at Council meetings. Agreements on the improvement of methodology or on the idea of common research might be reached both informally and formally (Collaborative research includes such areas as innovative management solutions to enhance business competitiveness, application of artificial intelligence, sustainable tourism, educational management).

Since April 2019, ISMA has launched a new initiative, which is also aimed at promoting lecturers' cooperation in pedagogical-methodological work. April 23-26, 2019 ISMA hosted the first Erasmus + Staff Teaching and Training Week at ISMA University (SER p.43 and 154 and at <https://www.uma.es/relaciones-internacionales/noticias/isma-university-first-erasmus-staff-week-2019/>). In an informal setting, participants had the opportunity to discuss current issues in higher education, develop recommendations for student mobility, and share experiences on the specificities of learning delivery in Ukraine, Lithuania, Portugal and other countries. The event was highly appreciated by the teaching staff members and would be welcomed in the future.

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

The qualification of the programme`s academic and teaching staff is legally and content-wise compliant and up-to-date, which positively contributes to the quality of the programme, including, the practical contribution to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes.

The recent changes of the composition of staff has had a positive effect on the quality of the programme and has exceeded the regulatory requirements.

It is clear that ISMA`s academic staff is active in scientific publishing, visibly at collective level more

than at individual, and it is evident, that each member of the academic staff in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions; all teaching staff has relevant professional practical experience, which crucially contributes to the programme.

A cooperation mechanism (formal and informal) of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme is well in place and it ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and clearly also the interconnection of study courses within the study programme.

Strengths:

- 1) Motivated and dedicated academic team.
- 2) Good cooperation between teaching staff within the study programme.

Weaknesses:

None

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualifications of teaching staff meet and in cases exceeds legal requirements. The staff and their qualification and competences fully align with the StP objectives and needs.

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

#### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme generally fulfills the criteria outlined for the Professional Higher Education (Regulation Nr. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 3.1.3).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme is compliant with the sixth level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (6. LQF) for professional qualifications, as well as with the applicable qualification to be obtained - "Business administrator" (annex 3.1.4). Although it can be found and concluded via study course descriptions (including their topics, thematics, tasks, assessment methods and results, learning outcomes) that they indeed address the respective parameter of the standard, such approach holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity. A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Although programmes` study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the languages in which the programme is implemented (Latvian and English), and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions(annex 3.1.7), however needs some improvements on a) connecting teaching and assessment methods to learning outcomes; b) specification on compulsory literature; and c) concising the amount learning outcomes of the study courses, which is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Diploma sample for completing the study programme is in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents (Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 3.1.1).

However, it should be noted that ISMA needs to make updates in accordance with the latest amendments to Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers, effective as of April 3, 2024.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Acknowledgement signed by the ISMA Rector verifies that the proficiency level in the state language of the academic staff involved in delivering the study programme meets the requirements of the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language (Regulation Nr. 157 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 2.3.3).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Acknowledgement signed by the ISMA Rector confirms that the teaching staff who are involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2 level knowledge in English in accordance with the European Language Assessment Levels (annex 2.3.4).

However, during the interviews, it was observed that some lecturers struggle with fluency in English. Therefore, additional trainings to improve their proficiency level may be considered.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement and requirements of the Mandatory Provisions To Be Included In The Study Agreement (Regulation Nr. 70 of the Cabinet of Ministers)(annex 2.1.5).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA has signed agreements with several institutions: Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, Rezekne Academy of Technologies and Transport and Telecommunication Institute. The agreements include provisions for continuing studies in the case of termination of the study programme implementation (annex 2.1.3).

At the same time, in the light of strengthening ISMA operation in Fergana branch, experts would suggest ISMA to consider ideating and exploring cooperation opportunities also with local HEI including the case of ISMA provided study programme is terminated or discontinued.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Acknowledgement signed by the ISMA Rector states that the ISMA guarantees students compensation for loss if a study programme is not accredited or the licence is withdrawn in the result of the actions (active or inactive) of ISMA and student is not willing to continue studies in another study programme (annex 2.1.4).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Fully compliant with the requirements, however, the amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.

Given that ISMA has visibly and surely worked well on issues after evaluation and recommendations 2 years ago, the shortcomings identified by experts are more to be seen as a place for further improvement - recommendations shall be binding for ISMA. These places for improvement do not conflict with the general compliance of criterions.

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

ISMA`s professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration" (code 42345) with the qualification to be obtained - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs) generally complies with the normative regulatory enactments as well as holds the competitiveness within socio-economic aspects of higher education.

Experts identified the compliance, the strengths, as well as several weaknesses of the programme however, no such deficiencies have been identified that cannot be eliminated during the 2-year accreditation period. The identified weaknesses are transformed into recommendations further below in the report.

Major strengths: The programme is well designed with a well-structured curriculum that covers legal regulations, occupational standard, and integrates feedback from students, alumni, and employers. This comprehensive approach ensures that the programme is relevant to industry needs and evolving market trends. The contents of the study courses as well as the internship is carefully crafted to meet the demands of the students, the industry as well as incorporates scientific trends. The inclusion of employers in the selection of final thesis topics ensures that the research is not only academically sound but also relevant to industry needs. This collaboration fosters a stronger bridge between academic research and business practice. Availability of well-equipped lecture halls with modern learning essentials and flexibility in classroom setups. Equal access to resources for students planning to study in distance learning. Current student enrolment numbers meet the requirements for financial sustainability in both Riga and Fergana. Motivated and dedicated academic team. Good cooperation between teaching staff within the study programme. The qualifications of teaching staff meet and in cases exceeds legal requirements. The staff and their qualification and competences fully align with the StP objectives and needs.

Major weakness: The intensive, compacted schedule in Fergana branch poses challenges for both students and commuting faculty, thus may not provide sufficient time for deep learning and retention, potentially impacting the quality of the educational experience. In Fergana, there's a lack

of specific adjustments to courses to cater to Uzbekistan's legal, cultural, and economic context. Addressing this could enhance the programme's relevance in the region and improve the learning outcomes for local students. The amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice. Limited remote access to scientific databases for students.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Business Administration"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration"**

#### **Short-term recommendations**

- 1) Conduct a comprehensive review of the registered specializations to identify and correct discrepancies in official records (VIIS and E-platform). This should include a detailed examination of the 12 ECTS designated for potential specializations and ensure they align with the programme's official records.
- 2) Adjust courses to reflect the specific legal and tax frameworks of Uzbekistan, especially in the Fergana branch. This involves updating the content of courses like "Legal Regulation of Enterprise Activity," "Accounting and Taxes," and "Property and Liability Law in Business" to make them more contextually relevant.
- 3) Develop a more balanced timetable in Fergana, allowing for deeper learning and reducing stress on students and faculty. This may require hiring permanent local teachers to avoid logistical issues and reduce fatigue.
- 4) The amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.
- 5) To update the programme's compliance to the occupational standard showing not only the relevant study course to the parameter of the standard, but also the relevant study course's skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods. Such a more conventional approach would diminish the risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity with the standard as well as will strengthen the overall study quality system from top to bottom.

#### **Long-term recommendations**

- 1) Consider expanding the number of elective courses. This should include specializations or elective options from the ISMA Catalogue.
- 2) Foster closer collaboration between the Fergana and Riga academic staff to ensure a consistent educational approach and shared resources. This could involve joint training sessions and curriculum planning.
- 3) Implement a structured approach to identify and eliminate syllabus overlaps. And consider merging courses with complementary content, such as Business Communication and Event Management.

4) To address low enrollment of students in Latvian streams, explore the possibility of merging Latvian streams with English streams.

5) To optimize high transportation and business trip costs for the implementation of the study programme at the ISMA Fergana Branch, consider recruitment and employment of local academic staff at the Branch.

6) In the light of strengthening ISMA operation in Fergana branch, experts would suggest ISMA to consider ideating and exploring cooperation opportunities also with local HEI including the case of ISMA provided study programme is terminated or discontinued.

7) Just for consideration to pay attention to - the qualification to be obtained "Business Administrator" sounds possibly less than Latvian origin (Uzņēmuma vadītājs), so experts would just suggest to consider the NKS suggested english formulation of the qualification to be obtained - Commercial Manager (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) or Manager and operator of small business (ISCO) instead of Business Administrator - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.16. p.13 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council's (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023. Or consider other possible equal translations - e.g. Manager of an Enterprise; Company manager; Use AIKA HEI platform to look for case practices (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=site%2Fprogram%2Flist>).

## II - "Business Administration in Tourism" ASSESSMENT

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

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. Professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration in Tourism" (code 42345) with the qualification to be obtained - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs based on ISMA SER Annex 3.2.1.Diploma\_paraugs\_Tur.docx and 3.2.1.Diploma\_Tour.docx), implemented in formats of Full time studies in Latvian and English and Part time extramural studies in Latvian and English respectively, complies well with the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property".

More justification would be beneficial of why this particular StP would not offer qualification of Tourism services manager (see at PINTSA NKS map of professions included in the structure of the tourism industry [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK\\_turisms.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_turisms.pdf)) with the respective Occupational Standart approved by PINTSA - <https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-253.pdf>. Still, the title of the programme "Business Administration in Tourism" meets the perception of business studies at bachelor level with specialization. The name and also the study content of the StP still fully relates to the code 42 345 according Latvian Education Classification (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.322, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju>), meaning that first two digits `42` notes that the StP is professional bachelor programme (level 6 of Latvian and European Qualification Framework) and the last three digits `345` notes the StP belongs to the group of programme in "Management and administration", in this case within the subgroup - 345 17 - Tūrisma vadība, Tourisms Management.

Given the large share of management knowledge, skills, and competence contents in the programme, the qualification to be obtained - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs)

is justified with the Latvian Industry qualification structure/map (see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_uznemejdarbiba.pdf)) according to the Map of professions included in the structure of the business, finance, accounting and administration (wholesale and retail trade, commercial sciences) sector by the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023. A minor remark for consideration about the NKS suggested english formulation of the qualification to be obtained - Commercial Manager (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) or Manager and operator of small business (ISCO) instead of Business Administrator - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.16. p.13 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023.

ISMA in SER p.62-68 provides further compliance analysis of the StP with the relevant education standard and the relevant Occupational Standard for "Business Administrator" (uzņēmuma vadītājs) - see at <https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-115.pdf> and SER Annex 3.2.3.Compliance\_Education\_stand\_Tour.docx for the compliance of the StP to the State education Standard ((No. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers of June 13, 2023 "Regulations on the Standard of State professional higher education", <https://m.likumi.lv/ta/id/342818-noteikumi-par-valsts-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitibas-standartu>), and SER Annex 3.2.4.Compliance\_prof\_standart\_Tour.xlsx for the compliance of the StP to the Occupational Standard for "Business Administrator" (uzņēmuma vadītājs). The compliance analysis by ISMA is done provide generally, i.e., for the occupational standard (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-115.pdf>) ISMA has well extracted the list of knowledge the occupational standard necessary for performing professional tasks to which and aligned them against the respective study courses of the programme. Although it can be found and concluded via study course descriptions (including their topics, thematics, tasks, assessment methods and results, learning outcomes) that they indeed address the respective parameter of the standard, such approach holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity. A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods.

2.1.2. The interrelation of major and detailed parameters of the study programme, including its:

- type - Professional bachelor study programme;
- title - Business Administration in Tourism;
- code - 42345;
- degree to be obtained - Professional Bachelor's degree in Business Administration
- professional qualification - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs), but SER p.66 mistakenly refers to profession Occupational Standard of "Company Manager".
- aims (goal at SER p.62),
- objective (tasks at SER p.62),
- learning outcomes (study results at SER p.63)
- and admission requirements (SER, p.63-64) - secondary education for Latvian stream and additionally at least level B2 of the English language proficiency for English study stream.

is sufficiently analyzed (SER, p.62-68) and are well interrelated with their formulations and terminology corresponding to and strengthening one another.

2.1.3. According to SER p.65 - by the decision of the AIC/AIKA Study Quality Commission of the previous accreditation dated April 27, 2022, the name of the study programme was changed from

"Tourism Business Management" to "Business Administration in Tourism", the awarded degree from "Professional Bachelor's Degree in Tourism Business Management" to "Professional Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration in Tourism". Though according to information clarified by AIKA - The title was changed only in Latvian from: "Tūrisma uzņēmējdarbības vadība" to "Uzņēmējdarbības vadība tūrismā", in English it remained the same. Also, the same about the degree - the changes referred only to Latvian degree from "Profesionālais bakalaura grāds tūrisma uzņēmējdarbības vadībā" to "Profesionālais bakalaura grāds uzņēmējdarbības vadībā tūrismā". In English it was slightly improved grammatically - from "Professional Bachelor Degree in Business Administration in Tourism" to "Professional Bachelor's degree in Business Administration in Tourism". Thus, experts conclude that changes were made only in Latvian translation of the programme's title and degree. SER p.65 section 3.1.1. confirms that the title of the study programme, the code, the qualification to be obtained, the scope and duration of studies, the admission rules, as well as the final examination have remained unchanged. Changes have been made to the wording of the aim which is clarified, harmonizing it with the formulation of the StF aim.

2.1.4. The study programme "Business Administration in Tourism" is relevant among the programmes offered by other universities. A relatively small number of students can be observed in the programme in Latvian language. For example, in the Latvian stream full-time intramural programme study 3 people in 2023 in the first year. This calls into question whether this programme is economically justified. Overall, the number of students has gradually decreased over the past three years. ISMA explores and justifies (SER p.67-68) programme's socio-economic necessity and their competitive ability with the wide target audience - business owners and managers in the field of tourism, hospitality, catering, both private or public sector (such as tourism information centres and public bodies related to tourism dissemination and promotion), professionals planning to start a business, and anyone interested in acquiring in-depth knowledge and competencies in tourism and hospitality fields of business administration, as well as foreign students as ISMA offers studies in English.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

Indicators and major detailed parameters of the study programme describing (title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualification or degree and professional qualification of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements) are consistent, reasonable and justified, relevant to one another, to StF and ISMA, national regulations and supranational guidelines as well as sufficiently analyzed in SER p.130-134 including showing their up-to-date to socio-economic trends and demand.

Just for consideration to pay attention to - the qualification to be obtained "Business Administrator" sounds possibly less than Latvian origin (Uzņēmuma vadītājs), so experts would just suggest to consider the NKS suggested English formulation of the qualification to be obtained - Commercial Manager (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) or Manager and operator of small business (ISCO) instead of Business Administrator - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.16. p.13 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council's (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023. Or consider other possible equal translations - e.g. Manager of an Enterprise; Company manager; Use AIKA HEI platform to look for case practices (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=site%2Fprogram%2Flist>).

Strengths:

1) ISMA pays attention to alignment of indicators and major detailed parameters of the study programme including their internal alignment to one another, to StF and ISMA strategy, national regulations and supranational guidelines as well as to socio-economic trends and demand.

Weaknesses:

1) More justification would be beneficial in SER and other sources of ISMA considerations of why this particular StP would not offer qualification of Tourism services manager (see at PINTSA NKS map of professions included in the structure of the tourism industry [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK\\_turisms.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_turisms.pdf)) with the respective Occupational Standard approved by PINTSA - <https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-253.pdf>.

2) The qualification to be obtained is slightly inconsistently mentioned in various sections in - mostly in SER and officially (incl. on AIKA platform) it seems to be "Business Administrator" while in really few cases in SER - p.62 "Goal of the study programme", p.66 relevant Occupational Standard, p.71, p.76 and p.23 - "Company Managers" (seems to be technical misspell, but in this case worth to pay attention to).

3) ISMA`s approach to analyse the programme`s compliance to the occupational standard holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity (list of knowledge from the occupational standard is aligned only with the respective study courses). A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods.

## 2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

2.2.1. The curriculum is developed and periodically updated in response to legal requirements, occupational standard, and feedback from students, graduates, and employers. This ensures the programme remains relevant and aligned with industry needs and regulatory standards. Involvement of academic staff who are also industry professionals ensures that students are exposed to industry practices and real-world scenarios, enhancing the practical applicability of their learning. The logical sequencing in the development and implementation of the study programme, with content designed to meet the objectives of the programme and ensure the achievement of learning outcomes, indicates a well-structured curriculum that is both interconnected and complementary. The content of the study programme is adequate to a Business Administration in Tourism Bachelor degree.

Regular collaboration with employers and feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and participation in state examination commissions, ensure the curriculum is continuously improved and aligned with market demands.

The use of various teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, case studies, and project work, facilitates a dynamic learning environment that caters to different learning styles and encourages the development of a broad range of skills.

While significant changes have not been made to the core content since the last accreditation, the programme may benefit from regularly reviewing and adjusting elective courses to ensure they reflect the latest market requirements and scientific trends.

The experts analysed programme`s curriculum (SER Annex 3.2.6.Curriculum\_Study\_programme\_Tourism.xlsx) also in accordance with Latvian Cabinet regulation No.305 - Regulations on the state standard of professional higher education (Ministru kabineta 2023. gada 13. jūnija noteikumi Nr. 305 "Noteikumi par valsts profesionālās augstākās

izglītības standartu". <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342818>) section 22 on distribution of ECTS amount in programmes` contents among compulsory A part courses (30 ECTS in the programme according to regulations` minimum) and limited elective B part courses (programme offers in total 201 ECTS of courses to choose from to gain 144 ECTS according to regulation) - it is evident that curriculum offers both - the basic theoretical knowledge courses and information technology courses of at least 54 ECTS (section 22.2. of the regulation) and relevant specialization study courses in the amount of at least 90 ECTS (section 22.2. of the regulation). The programme, however, has limited free elective course offerings (part C), with only 9 ECTS available. There's a pressing need to broaden these options by introducing more elective ECTS. By increasing the number of elective courses, the programme could enhance its appeal and provide students with a more flexible and diverse skill set, preparing them for a wider range of career opportunities.

Furthermore, the programme includes a large number of courses, some of which could be merged to reduce redundancy. For example, "Business Communication" and "Event Management" might be consolidated as they both belong to the same field and learning outcomes could be merged. Traditionally, faculty members have addressed syllabus overlap through informal discussions, but a more systematic method for identifying and resolving these issues could improve the programme's coherence and efficiency. Merging courses could help streamline the curriculum and eliminate unnecessary repetition.

When it comes to the free elective study courses within the programme, they are not explicitly detailed. There is no indication of the specific courses available for students to choose from. Instead, in annex 3.2.5 and 3.2.6. they are simply stated as "Specialization or other elective course from ISMA Catalogue" in amount of 9 credit points.

In addition, the current structure does not clearly explain the criteria for allocating ECTS among courses. Consolidating courses and standardizing ECTS distribution could lead to a more balanced programme structure.

Regarding the Fergana Branch, tailoring courses to reflect the specific legal and tax frameworks of locations like Fergana would significantly improve the programme's relevance and quality, offering a more contextualized educational experience. The Fergana branch seems to lack specific course adjustments that cater to Uzbekistan's unique legal, cultural, and economic context. This is especially pertinent for courses like "Labour Law," "Accounting and Taxes," and "Legal Regulation of Enterprise Activity" (for instance, the course "Labour Law" has no clearly visible reference to Uzbekistan specifics (no sources, no references)). By making these adjustments, the programme can better meet the needs of students in specific regions.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. The programme uses a wide range of teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, case studies, and role-playing games, which cater to various learning styles and encourage active learning. The use of online tools like sli.do and Kahoot! enhances student engagement and supports the assessment of learning outcomes.

Guest lectures and excursions enable students to gain insights from industry professionals and critically evaluate real-world operations, fostering innovative thinking and social responsibility.

Encouraging the use of the Scopus database and other research tools prepares students for their Bachelor's papers and instills a habit of basing activities on research, contributing to their competitiveness in the tourism industry.

The academic staff's approach to teaching, which includes discussing learning outcomes with students and adjusting teaching methods based on student needs, aligns with student-centred learning principles.

Implementing this programme in Fergana comes with specific hurdles. The compressed timetable, where most classes are held in presence or online within a brief timeframe, can be quite intense for

students, as noted during Meeting with Students. This tight schedule might not give enough room for thorough learning and knowledge retention, which could make the experience stressful. This issue is further complicated by the logistical difficulties faced by the teaching staff who travel to Fergana. The lengthy travel and fatigue can impact the quality of teaching and the overall educational experience.

To address these issues, the programme could hire more permanent local teachers in Fergana. This approach would not only offer a stable teaching presence but also help align the curriculum with the specific needs and cultural context of the region. Additionally, fostering greater collaboration between the Fergana and Riga academic teams could allow the Fergana branch to build a stronger academic identity, leading to a more customised learning environment while keeping high standards.

As for the Study course descriptions, although programmes` study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the languages in which the programme is implemented (Latvian and English), and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions(annex 3.1.7) however, the amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.

2.2.4. The internship complies with the requirements of the regulatory enactments and are formally regulated in Annex 3.1.8.Traineeship\_regulations.doc. The programme structured internships across the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years, with a cumulative 36 ECTS, ensure that students gain practical experience progressively aligned with their learning journey. Internship objectives are adequately linked to the programme learning outcomes, showcasing the practical application of knowledge, skills, and competences as evidenced in the detailed traineeship descriptions that outline specific goals and tasks.

Collaboration with local and foreign employers in developing and updating traineeship objectives shows a strong and relevant industry connection. Involvement of professionals in discussions and traineeship conferences ensures a relevant and up-to-date curriculum that meets industry standards and needs.

The provision for students to undertake internships abroad, particularly through the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme, is relevant to enhance students' experiences and employability in the tourism sector.

ISMA Career Centre plays a relevant role in organizing internships and conferences like the annual "Internship and Employment" conference, which shows a proactive approach and effort to facilitate students' integration into the labor market.

The emphasis placed on internships within the programme, both in Latvia, Riga and Uzbekistan, Fergana, is very important in bridging the gap between academic study and professional practice. By prioritizing hands-on, experiential learning, ISMA ensures that students are not only academically prepared but also practically prepared for the labour market. Successful cooperation has been established with employers in Uzbekistan, such as "Aysel-Invest", "Fergana Golden Valley Service" - insurance companies, "Sheba properties" - real estate company, "Catering, trade and service enterprises" - food industry company, etc. Students are assigned an traineeship supervisor at ISMA Fergana branch, who introduces students to the traineeship assignments they are expected to carry out at the company and to present an internship report at the end of the traineeship.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Bachelor thesis topics show relevance to industry and practical impact. The topics are aligned with the core subjects in the tourism industry, such as service quality improvement, new service

development, and competitiveness enhancement. Also, thesis topics reflect responsiveness to global events, such as the pandemic, showcasing the programme adaptability to changing industry dynamics.

Allowing students to freely choose their thesis topics, with guidance from scientific supervisors ensures that the research is aligned with students' interests and career goals and regular engagement with employers through feedback questionnaires, conferences, and participation in defence commissions ensures alignment with quality policy.

The fact that many theses result in recommendations that are economically viable and used by companies, show the practical impact of the research conducted by students and relevance of the bachelors thesis.

The variety of thesis topics and their relevance to current market trends and challenges demonstrate the programme's strong alignment with industry needs.

Feedback from employers on the practical application of thesis recommendations underscores the real-world impact of these research projects.

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

The Professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration in Tourism" (42345) is well-structured and aligns with industry needs, labor market demands, and scientific trends. The curriculum is comprehensive, incorporating legal requirements, occupational standards, and feedback from stakeholders like students, alumni, and employers.

The curriculum includes courses like "Enterprise Management" and "Quantitative Methods and Statistics," offering a solid foundation for professional development. Diverse teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, and case studies, create a dynamic learning environment that promotes student-centered learning.

The internship component is well-organized, providing students with valuable practical experience and strong connections to local and international employers. The final thesis topics are also closely tied to industry trends, allowing students to focus on practical applications and receive feedback from employers on the relevance of their research.

However, the programme's elective course offerings are limited, with only 9 ECTS available. Expanding these offerings would provide students with more flexibility to tailor their education and develop a broader skill set. Additionally, the programme's high number of courses often leads to redundancy, suggesting that some could be merged to avoid syllabus overlap.

In Fergana, the condensed schedule and intense teaching format can be overwhelming for students and faculty alike. Addressing this by hiring more permanent local teachers and tailoring the curriculum to reflect the region's legal and cultural context could enhance the programme's effectiveness.

To improve the programme, ISMA should expand elective course offerings, reduce syllabus overlap by merging redundant courses, and strengthen collaboration between the Fergana and Riga branches. These steps could help ensure the programme remains relevant and continues to prepare students for successful careers in the tourism sector.

Strengths:

- 1 ) The study programme aligns with industry needs, labor market demands, and scientific trends, ensuring its content remains relevant and applicable. The curriculum is periodically updated to reflect legal requirements and occupational standard.
- 2) Faculty members often have industry experience, providing students with real-world scenarios and enhancing the practical aspects of their education.
- 3) The programme employs various teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, case studies, and project work, catering to different learning styles and promoting student-centered learning.
- 4) Well-organized internships, providing students with practical experience and industry

connections. Collaborations with local and international employers ensure that internships are relevant and effective.

5) The final thesis topics are closely tied to industry trends, with employer participation ensuring that research is both relevant and practical. This collaboration strengthens the connection between academic research and real-world business challenges.

Weaknesses:

1) The high number of courses sometimes leads to syllabus overlap and redundancy. Merging courses, such as "Business Communication" and "Event Management," could reduce repetition and improve coherence.

2) The current structure does not clearly explain the criteria for allocating ECTS among courses. Standardizing this process could enhance the balance and structure of the programme.

3) The compressed schedule and intense teaching format in Fergana can be overwhelming for both students and faculty. Additionally, the curriculum doesn't always align with Uzbekistan's legal, cultural, and economic context, leading to a lack of localized relevance.

4) The Fergana branch lacks specific course adjustments to cater to Uzbekistan's unique legal, cultural, and economic context. Courses like "Labour Law," "Accounting and Taxes," and "Legal Regulation of Enterprise Activity" would benefit from a more tailored approach to better meet regional needs.

5) The amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable.

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

#### **Analysis**

2.3.1. Based on the findings from SER (p. 82-83) and observations of the site visit, the resources necessary for the study programme implementation are adequately provided. Overall, the resources available for the study programme are identical to those of the study field and a more comprehensive description can be found in the analysis section of the study field (1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field).

Students enrolled in the bachelor's "Business Administration in Tourism" programme have access to the ISMA library and its resources, both in Riga and Fergana. As it was evident during the site visits, these libraries provide ISMA students copies of textbooks and other study materials. In all ISMA premises where the study process takes place, students have equal access to online resources such as the Moodle system, electronic library containing digital books, and electronic databases.

The implementation of the study programme does not require specialized laboratories or other specific resources, except for the study courses related to catering elements like "Catering Enterprises Management" and others, also among elective choice courses. For the purposes of these courses ISMA has dedicated spaces near the ISMA cafeteria where it is possible to provide master classes and table setting training. Additionally, a terminal for the R-keeper (catering business accounting system) is set in that area (SER, p.82). Additionally students receive training on systems

commonly used in the tourism and hospitality enterprises as part of the "Travel and Hotel Management Information Technology" study course, where they familiarize themselves with Hotelinco (hotel management information system) and Amadeus (online flight ticket booking system). These courses, focused on information systems, are conducted in specially equipped computer classes. Furthermore, Hotelinco, available in English, allows every student to practice and complete assignments remotely, using their assigned username and password (SER, p.82). However, in general, the lecture rooms in both Riga and Fergana are equipped with all the modern learning essentials, such as computers, projectors, TVs, interactive whiteboards, and more (SER, 82). During the visits in both Riga and Fergana, it was evident that the classrooms where study programme lectures take place are well equipped. They use various classes and setups depending on the needs of each subject. For instance, in Riga, they have different types of tables and movable chairs with attached small desks, allowing for easy transformations for group works of different sizes, increasing efficiency of the learning process. Generally, students from both Riga and Fergana expressed that the accessibility of study materials and resources is satisfactory, except for the possibility to access scientific databases (EBSCO and Scopus) from home.

In summary, it can be concluded that the study infrastructure mainly meets the needs of students and ISMA's existing material and technical base in both Riga and Fergana provide the necessary requirements for the implementation of the study programme.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. Financial resources for the implementation of the study programme primarily come from the tuition fees paid by students, since ISMA is a private higher education institution and does not receive government funding for its operations.

ISMA has calculated that for the study programme to be financially profitable, it needs a minimum of 7 full-time students and 3 students in extramural studies per academic year, regardless of the language of instruction (SER, p.87). The current student enrollment numbers for this programme are sufficient to sustain a study process without financial losses. In 2023, there were 155 students enrolled in full-time intramural studies, with 21 studying in the Latvian stream and 134 in the English stream, and 49 students enrolled in part-time extramural studies, with 1 studying in the Latvian stream and 48 in the English stream (annex 3.2.2).

In much the same way as the bachelor's study programme "Business Administration", there is a notably small number of students enrolled in the Latvian stream, particularly in part-time extramural studies, with a critical number of only one student. Likewise, given this low enrollment, it is suggested for ISMA to assess the sustainability of maintaining Latvian streams and perhaps consider implementing study programme only in English.

In relation to the resources and provisions for the ISMA branch in Fergana, ISMA has calculated that for the programme to be financially profitable, it needs a minimum of 20 students in the ISMA Fergana branch per academic year (SER, p.87). The current student enrollment numbers for this programme are sufficient to sustain a study process without financial losses. In 2023, there were 52 students enrolled in the study programme at the ISMA Fergana branch (annex 3.2.2).

Identical to the "Business Administration" bachelor's study programme, the breakdown of costs of implementing study programme in ISMA Fergana Branch reveals that transportation costs make up 31.3% and business trip costs - 11.3%, totaling 42.6% of the whole budget dedicated to the programme's implementation at the Branch. As previously discussed in the analysis section of the study field (1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field), this expenditure is significant. Therefore, it is recommended for ISMA to consider options to employ local academic staff at the ISMA Fergana branch to optimize financial resources.

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

Resources and provision for the study programme mainly meet the requirements for effective study programme implementation. Overall, the resources available are the same with those available for the study field. Students have access to ISMA libraries, online resources, and well-equipped lecture halls, ensuring their study needs are met. Additionally, for courses related to catering aspects, there are dedicated spaces near the ISMA cafeteria for practical training, as well as students receive training on systems commonly used in tourism and hospitality enterprises as part of specific courses. However, challenges outlined in the analysis section of the study field also apply to the study programme, such as the limited amount of English language resources in the ISMA Riga library and non-existent remote access to scientific databases for students in both Riga and Fergana. ISMA's study programme financing relies mainly on student tuition fees due to its status as a private higher education institution. To ensure financial sustainability, minimum enrollment targets have been established, which are currently being met in both Riga and the Fergana Branch. Similar to "Business Administration" bachelors study programme, the low enrollment in the Latvian streams of the programme could be problematic in sustainability in the future, and their continuation should be reassessed. Also the same as for the "Business Administration" bachelor's study programme, for the ISMA Fergana branch, there are significant transportation costs and business trips costs related to the implementation of the study programme. It is necessary to reassess the sustainability of the current system and employment of permanent academic staff at the Branch should be considered.

**Strengths:**

- 1) Availability of well-equipped lecture halls with modern learning essentials and flexibility in classroom setups.
- 2) Use of dedicated spaces for practical training near the ISMA cafeteria and integration of specialized systems training, such as Hotelinco and Amadeus into relevant study courses.
- 3) Current student enrollment numbers meet the requirements for financial sustainability in both Riga and Fergana.

**Weaknesses:**

- 1) Low enrollment in Latvian streams.
- 2) Significant transportation and business trip costs for the implementation of the study programme at the ISMA Fergana Branch.

**Assessment of the requirement [6]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The resources and provision of the study programme mainly meet the criteria for effective implementation. While the infrastructure and essential technical needs are adequately provided, as well as there are dedicated spaces for practical training and systems training in study courses specific to the study programme, there are shortcomings concerning factors outlined in the analysis section of the study field (small amount of English resources at the ISMA Riga library; limited remote access to scientific databases for students), as well as there are aspects that are slightly challenging, such as the low enrollment of students in the Latvian streams of the study programme and significant expenses associated with implementing the study programme at the ISMA Fergana Branch.

**2.4. Teaching Staff**

## Analysis

2.4.1. As it is stated in SER p.87, ISMA academic positions are filled in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, through the election procedure stipulated by ISMA's "Regulations on election into academic positions". The Regulations include the qualification and eligibility criteria for the teaching staff in accordance with Articles 28, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, and 40 of the "Law on Higher Education Institutions". Out of 29 lecturers that are involved in the implementation of the Bachelor's study programme "Business Administration in Tourism", 6 hold the position of the lecturer, 4 - assistant professors (docents), 4 - associate professor, 6 - professor, 8 are guest lecturers from Business establishments (Swisscom DevOps center, ITEM Business Solutions, MATCH Agency ...) (28%). 24 out of 29 teach as well in the professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration", 5 of them is only for this professional bachelor programme. More than 50% of the academic staff are Phd holders. Some of the teaching staff continue their doctoral studies, e.g. J.Mironova, Z.Klescevnikova. Overall the education and qualification of the teaching staff members correspond to requirements for the implementation of the study programme.

Students are highly appreciated to the lecturers (confirmed at the panel meeting with students in Riga and Fergana) for the practical experience they bring to the studies: Yulia Mironova, the Director of the programme, has worked both as a hotel director and currently leads an innovative company in the tourism industry, A/S "Nordic Marine Engineering", I. Balodei ("Tourism Basics", "Hospitality Industry") has significant experience working in Latvian hotels, etc.

2.4.2 As it is stated in SER p.88-89, the changes in the composition of the teaching staff are small, the proportion of teaching staff by scientific degree, place of election and positions, has also changed in a positive direction - the number of professors has doubled, the proportion of elected doctors has increased significantly - from 27% in 2020 to 58% in 2023. The number of teaching staff with professional experience relevant to the specifics of the programme have been re-attracted (G. Berjozkina with rich experience in both scientific research and teaching in the field of hospitality and tourism; R. Shevelis, a professional in digital solutions).

Measures of the changes in composition of the teaching staff are taken purposely. The lecturers are encouraged to obtain Phd, scientific work is included in job descriptions as a part of the workload. So far the composition of the teaching staff comply with the requirements specified in regulatory enactments.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. Although full and clear information about the number of teaching staff members with their scientific and/or professional practical experience achievements is not compiled in an unified review and annex, but experts extracted the information the following way - The list of academic staff involved in the whole StF is provided by ISMA in SER Annex 2.3.1.Info\_Teaching\_staff\_Management.xlsx. 24 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the professional bachelor study programme (SER p.152), the list of which can be extracted (filtered) from SER Annex 2.3.1.Info\_Teaching\_staff\_Management.xlsx. The list of teaching staff involved in the courses` conduct in the programme can be also obtained from the study plans of the professional master study programme (SER Annex 3.2.6.Curriculum\_Study\_programme\_Tourism.xlsx) and from the course descriptions at SER Annex 3.2.7.Study\_Course\_descriptions\_Tour.docx. The publications of the teaching staff of the whole StF are provided in staff`s CVs (SER Annex 2.3.2.Teaching\_staff\_CV\_Vad.pdf), and also the list of the publications of the teaching staff of the whole StF over the reporting period is provided in SER Annex 2.4.2.ScientificWorks\_2020-2023\_BA.docx. Also, ISMA provides SER Annex

2.4.1. Quantitative\_data\_research\_BA.xlsx on StF academic staff generally indicating each staff's contribution to (participation in) number of projects and grants, and publication and conferences - Summary of quantitative data on scientific and/ or applied research activities corresponding to the study field in the reporting period 2020 - 2023.

As a result of the detailed review experts find that all the teachers, according to the information in SER and annexes, have either the required scientific publications, or the five years of practical experience. It is clear that ISMA's academic staff is active in scientific publishing, visibly at collective level more than at individual, and it is evident, that each member of the academic staff in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions - the publications e.g. Dehtjare J., Mironova J., Balode I. 2022 "Innovative strategy development for supporting sustainable tourism in Latvia" (at [https://llufb.llu.lv/conference/economic\\_science\\_rural/2022/Latvia\\_ESRD\\_56\\_2022-136-142.pdf](https://llufb.llu.lv/conference/economic_science_rural/2022/Latvia_ESRD_56_2022-136-142.pdf)), 2022 Garanti, Z., Berjozka G. (2002), Attitudes (Stereotype and Prejudice) of Local People towards Seasonal Tourism Workers, at <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003161868-26/attitudes-stereotype-prejudice-local-people-towards-seasonal-tourism-workers-zanete-garanti-galina-berjozka>, Čaiko et al, 2021 (<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/9711732>) and many more are published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions and further in databases accepting editions only with peer-review - these include SCOPUS, WoS, ProQuest, MDPI, Sciendo and other.

ISMA emphasises also the strategic role of scientific publishing as one of its strategic priorities - Excellence in research with the objective O.2.6. - Promote the publication of publications of academic staff and students in internationally recognized scientific journals and collections of papers, as well as encourage presentation of papers at scientific conferences, and O.2.7. - Analyse opportunities to include collections of ISMA scientific publications in internationally relevant databases and develop a plan of activities to be undertaken, and O.2.8. - Develop and implement a system of support for the production and publication of scientific publications (support for editing articles, translating them into a foreign language (s) and publishing), and O.2.9. Promote the publication of scientific publications and research data in Open Access (SER p.10). Number of internationally recognized publications and Number of joint publications of lecturers and students at ISMA conferences are also two of ISMA's strategic indicators of the Academic and general staff performance as well as of the Achievements and evaluation of results within ISMA Quality Assurance Policy (SER p.19). One free publication per academic year is available to all ISMA faculty and students (SER p.39) as part of ISMA's international cooperation in the field of scientific and applied research are scientific journals "Baltic Journal of Economic Studies" (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/publications/baltic-journal-en>, and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/issue>) and "Economics&Education" (<http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/issue/view/151/310>) publishing at <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/> 4 times a year and indexed in Copernicus, as well as in other popular databases of scientific articles (SER p.15 and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/indexed>).

2.4.5. As it is stated in SER p.89-90 and confirmed at the panel meeting with the academic staff of the programme, mutual cooperation of the teaching staff is implemented in three directions: - cooperation in the development and updating of study programme and study course descriptions; - cooperation on the improvement of methodological work; - collaboration in scientific research. Implementation of those 3 cooperation directions has formal and informal ways. To ensure interdisciplinary relation and harmonization of common requirements for the achievement of learning outcomes, and to eliminate an unnecessary overlapping of study content (example, given by the lecturers - overlapping topic of tourism basics), the content of the study courses is regularly discussed and approved at Council meetings. Agreements on the improvement of methodology or

on the idea of common research might be reached both informally and formally (Collaborative research includes such areas as innovative management solutions to enhance business competitiveness, application of artificial intelligence, sustainable tourism, educational management).

Since April 2019, ISMA has launched a new initiative, which is also aimed at promoting lecturers' cooperation in pedagogical-methodological work. April 23-26, 2019 ISMA hosted the first Erasmus + Staff Teaching and Training Week at ISMA University (SER p.43 and 154 and at <https://www.uma.es/relaciones-internacionales/noticias/isma-university-first-erasmus-staff-week-2019/>). In an informal setting, participants had the opportunity to discuss current issues in higher education, develop recommendations for student mobility, and share experiences on the specificities of learning delivery in Ukraine, Lithuania, Portugal and other countries. The event was highly appreciated by the teaching staff members and would be welcomed in the future.

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

The qualification of the programme's academic and teaching staff is legally and content-wise compliant and up-to-date, which positively contributes to the quality of the programme, including, the practical contribution to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes.

The recent changes of the composition of staff has had a positive effect on the quality of the programme and has exceeded the regulatory requirements.

It is clear that ISMA's academic staff is active in scientific publishing, visibly at collective level more than at individual, and it is evident, that each member of the academic staff in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions; all teaching staff has relevant professional practical experience, which crucially contributes to the programme.

A cooperation mechanism (formal and informal) of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme is well in place and it ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and clearly also the interconnection of study courses within the study programme.

Strengths:

- 1) Motivated and dedicated academic team.
- 2) Good cooperation between teaching staff within the study programme.

Weaknesses:

None

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualifications of teaching staff meet and in cases exceed legal requirements. The staff and their qualification and competences fully align with the StP objectives and needs.

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

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme generally fulfills the criteria outlined for the Professional Higher Education (Regulation Nr. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (SER annex 3.1.3.Compliance\_Education\_stand\_BA\_Bak.docx)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme is compliant with the sixth level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (6. LQF) for professional qualifications, as well as with the applicable qualification to be obtained - "Business administrator" (SER annex 3.2.4.Compliance\_prof\_standart\_Tour.xlsx). Although it can be found and concluded via study course descriptions (including their topics, thematics, tasks, assessment methods and results, learning outcomes) that they indeed address the respective parameter of the standard, such approach holds risks for inefficiency and potentially nonconformity. A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the languages in which the programme is implemented (Latvian and English), and generally comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (annex 3.2.7), however needs some improvements on a) connecting teaching and assessment methods to learning outcomes; b) specification on compulsory literature; and c) concising the amount learning outcomes of the study courses, which is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Diploma sample for completing the study programme is in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents (Regulation Nr. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 3.2.1).

However, it should be noted that ISMA needs to make updates in accordance with the latest amendments to Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers, effective as of April 3, 2024

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

Not applicable

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Acknowledgement signed by the ISMA Rector verifies that the proficiency level in the state language of the academic staff involved in delivering the study programme meets the requirements of the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language (Regulation Nr. 157 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 2.3.3).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Acknowledgement signed by the ISMA Rector confirms that the teaching staff who are involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2 level knowledge in English in accordance with the European Language Assessment Levels (annex 2.3.4).

However, during the interviews, it was observed that some lecturers struggle with fluency in English. Therefore, additional trainings to improve their proficiency level may be considered.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement and requirements of the Mandatory Provisions To Be Included In The Study Agreement (Regulation Nr. 70 of the Cabinet of Ministers)(annex 2.1.5).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA has signed agreements with several institutions: Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, Rezekne Academy of Technologies and Transport and Telecommunication Institute. The agreements include provisions for continuing studies in the case of termination of the study programme implementation (annex 2.1.3). At the same time, in the light of strengthening ISMA operation in Fergana branch, experts would suggest ISMA to consider ideating and exploring cooperation opportunities also with local HEI including the case of ISMA provided study programme is terminated or discontinued.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Acknowledgement signed by the ISMA Rector states that the ISMA guarantees students compensation for loss if a study programme is not accredited or the licence is withdrawn in the result of the actions (active or inactive) of ISMA and student is not willing to continue studies in another study programme (annex 2.1.4).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

**Assessment of the requirement [8]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Fully compliant with all the requirements. With few suggestions for further improvements e.g. the amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice. Given that ISMA has visibly and surely worked well on issues after evaluation and recommendations 2 years ago, the shortcomings identified by experts are more to be seen as a place for further improvement - recommendations shall be binding for ISMA. These places for improvement do not conflict with the general compliance of criterions.

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

Professional bachelor study programme "Business Administration in Tourism" (code 42345) with the qualification to be obtained - Business administrator (Latvian - Uzņēmuma vadītājs) generally complies with the normative regulatory enactments as well as holds the competitiveness within socio-economic aspects of higher education.

Experts identified the compliance, the strengths, as well as several weaknesses of the programme

however, no such deficiencies have been identified that cannot be eliminated during the 2-year accreditation period. The identified weaknesses are transformed into recommendations further below in the report.

Major strengths: ISMA pays attention to alignment of indicators and major detailed parameters of the study programme including their internal alignment to one another, to StF and ISMA strategy, national regulations and supranational guidelines as well as to socio-economic trends and demand. The study programme aligns with industry needs, labor market demands, and scientific trends, ensuring its content remains relevant and applicable. The curriculum is periodically updated to reflect legal requirements and occupational standard. Faculty members often have industry experience, providing students with real-world scenarios and enhancing the practical aspects of their education. The programme employs various teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, case studies, and project work, catering to different learning styles and promoting student-centered learning. Well-organized internships, providing students with practical experience and industry connections. Collaborations with local and international employers ensure that internships are relevant and effective. The final thesis topics are closely tied to industry trends, with employer participation ensuring that research is both relevant and practical. This collaboration strengthens the connection between academic research and real-world business challenges. Availability of well-equipped lecture halls with modern learning essentials and flexibility in classroom setups. Use of dedicated spaces for practical training near the ISMA cafeteria and integration of specialised systems training, such as Hotelinco and Amadeus into relevant study courses. Current student enrollment numbers meet the requirements for financial sustainability in both Riga and Fergana. The resources and provision of the study programme mainly meet the criteria for effective implementation.

Major weaknesses: ISMA`s approach to analyse the programme`s compliance to the occupational standard holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity (list of knowledge from the occupational standard is aligned only with the respective study courses). A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods. The comparatively high number of courses sometimes leads to syllabus overlap and redundancy. The current programme`s content structure does not clearly explain the principles for allocating ECTS among courses - standardising this process could enhance the balance and structure of the programme. The compressed schedule and intense teaching format in Fergana can be overwhelming for both students and faculty. Additionally, the curriculum doesn't always align with Uzbekistan's legal, cultural, and economic context, leading to a lack of localised relevance. The Fergana branch lacks specific course adjustments to cater to Uzbekistan's unique legal, cultural, and economic context, e.g. courses like "Labour Law," "Accounting and Taxes," and "Legal Regulation of Enterprise Activity" would benefit from a more tailored approach to better meet regional needs. While the infrastructure and essential technical needs are adequately provided, there are shortcomings concerning small amount of English resources at the ISMA Riga library; limited remote access to scientific databases for students, as well as the low enrollment of students in the Latvian streams and significant expenses associated with implementing the study programme at the ISMA Fergana Branch.

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

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

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

### Short-term recommendations

- 1) To update the programme`s compliance to the occupational standard showing not only the relevant study course to the parameter of the standard, but also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods. Such a more conventional approach would diminish the risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity with the standard as well as will strengthen the overall study quality system from top to bottom.
- 2) The amount of learning outcomes shown in all of the study courses is too high and scattered, and thus should be compiled to 10-15 bullets according to conventionally used practice. Limited remote access to scientific databases for students.
- 3) Tailor courses to reflect the specific legal and tax frameworks in Fergana to improve the programme's contextual relevance. This involves adjusting courses like "Labour Law," "Accounting and Taxes," and "Legal Regulation of Enterprise Activity" to meet Uzbekistan's unique legal and cultural environment.
- 4) Revise the condensed schedule in Fergana to allow for deeper learning and better retention. Consider extending the teaching time frame and hiring permanent local teachers to reduce logistical issues and stress on commuting faculty.

### Long-term recommendations

- 1) Just for consideration to pay attention to - the qualification to be obtained "Business Administrator" sounds possibly less than Latvian origin (Uzņēmuma vadītājs), so experts would just suggest to consider the NKS suggested english formulation of the qualification to be obtained - Commercial Manager (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) or Manager and operator of small business (ISCO) instead of Business Administrator - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.16. p.13 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023. Or consider other possible equal translations - e.g. Manager of an Enterprise; Company manager; Use AIKA HEI platform to look for case practices (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=site%2Fprogram%2Flist>).
- 2) Increase the elective courses to offer students more flexibility in tailoring their education to their interests and career goals.
- 3) Implement a more structured approach to identify and resolve syllabus overlaps. Merging courses like "Business Communication" and "Event Management," could help reduce duplication and improve coherence.
- 4) Develop clear criteria for allocating ECTS among courses to ensure a balanced and consistent structure.
- 5) To address low enrollment of students in Latvian streams, explore the possibility of merging Latvian streams with English streams.

6) To optimise high transportation and business trip costs for the implementation of the study programme at the ISMA Fergana Branch, consider recruitment and employment of local academic staff at the Branch.

7) In the light of strengthening ISMA operation in Fergana branch, experts would suggest ISMA to consider ideating and exploring cooperation opportunities also with local HEI including the case of ISMA provided study programme is terminated or discontinued.

## II - "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. Professional master study programme "Business Administration" (code 47345) with the qualification to be obtained - Organisational Manager (Latvian - Organizācijas vadītājs based on ISMA SER Annex 3.3.1.Diploma\_paraugs\_Mag\_Vad.docx and 3.3.1.Diploma\_Master\_BA.docx), and the degree to be obtained "Professional Master's degree in Business Administration" implemented in 3 diverse formats - Full time studies, Part time extramural studies, Distance learning; 2 variations in languages - Latvian and English, and in 4 length variations respectively - 1 year 1 month (66 ECTS), 1 year 5 month (66 ECTS), 2 years (120 ECTS), and 2 years 5 months (120 ECTS), fully - content-wise, administratively and legally LQF-EQF-wise, code-wise and Latvian Industry qualification structure/map-wise - complies with the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property".

The title of the programme "Business Administration" together with the qualification to be obtained - Organisational Manager fully meets the conventional perception of business studies at master level. The name and also the study content of the StP relates to the code 47 345 according Latvian Education Classification (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.322, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitiba-klasifikaciju>), meaning that first two digits `47` notes that the StP is professional master programme (level 7 of Latvian and European Qualification Framework) and the last three digits `345` notes the StP belongs to the group of programme in "Management and administration".

The qualification to be obtained - Organisational Manager is fully aligned with the Latvian Industry qualification structure/map (see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_uznemejdarbiba.pdf)) according to the Map of professions included in the structure of the business, finance, accounting and administration (wholesale and retail trade, commercial sciences) sector by the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023. A minor remark for consideration about the NKS suggested english formulation of the qualification to be obtained - Chief Executive (ISCO, ESCO), Managing Director, CEO (Chief Executive Officer) (ISCO) (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) instead of Organisational Manager - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.21. p.16 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023.

2.1.2. - The programme is overall offered in 10 forms with different study languages (Latvian and English), different types (formats) and respectively their length and ECTS amount (SER, p.93-97 and

Programme parameters on AIKA e-platform at <https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=expert%2Fstudy-direction-programs%2Fview&id=2489&key=4146>):

1. Full time studies; 1 years, 1 months; Latvian
2. Part time extramural studies; 1 years, 5 months; Latvian
3. Part time distance learning (ISMA in its SER uses the term extramural studies distance education); 1 years, 5 months; English
4. Full time studies; 1 years, 1 months; English
5. Full time studies; 2 years, 0 months; Latvian
6. Part time distance learning (ISMA in its SER uses the term extramural studies distance education); 2 years, 5 months; English
7. Full time studies; 2 years, 0 months; English
8. Part time studies; 2 years, 5 months; English
9. Part time extramural studies; 2 years, 5 months; Latvian
10. Part time studies; 2 years, 5 months; Latvian

The detailed parameters of the study programme include:

- level and type - Professional master study programme - same for all forms.
- title - Business Administration - same for all forms;
- code - 47345 - same for all forms;
- degree to be obtained - Professional Master degree in Business Administration - same for all forms;
- professional qualification - Organisational Manager (Latvian - Organizācijas vadītājs) - same for all forms;
- aims (goal at SER p.92) - same for all forms: "To prepare competent, innovative and systemically thinking, lifelong learning-oriented and competitive leaders of organizations in the global market, who are able to predict the industry development trends, manage and promote the improvement of an organization and its employees" (SER, p.22 and 92, and on AIKA e-platform at <https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=expert%2Fstudy-direction-programs%2Fview&id=2489&key=4146>); and slightly rephrased (..to prepare competent, self-improvement oriented and innovation-minded managers of different levels and fields, who are competitive in a dynamic global marketplace) in SER p.131 within section 3.1.2..
- objective (tasks at SER p.92) - same for all forms (SER p.92 and on AIKA e-platform at <https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=expert%2Fstudy-direction-programs%2Fview&id=2489&key=4146>). The programme has settled on four major tasks, which are well formulated, comprehensive and aligned to the goal (aim) of the programme.
- learning outcomes (study results at SER p.93 and on AIKA e-platform) - same for all forms. The study results (learning outcomes) of the study programme are conventionally defined and formulated in six general outcomes / results: one in the set knowledge and understanding, three for skills and two competence.
- and admission requirements (SER, p.93-97 and on AIKA e-platform) - distinct and distinguishable for respective forms and types of StP:

For the shorter term study programme (66 ECTS; Full time 1 year 1 months in Latvian and English; Part time extramural studies 1 years 5 months in Latvian, and Part time extramural studies distance education 1 year 5 months in English) the admission requirements include:

- first-cycle higher education and sixth-level professional qualification in the branch of economics or management, or equivalent education;
- second-level professional higher education in the branch of economics or management, or equivalent education, until October 11, 2022;
- Master's degree in the branch of economics or management;

- And respectively for studies in English - At least level B2 of the English language proficiency for the studies implemented in English.

The experts notice the admission requirement of Master's degree in the branch of economics or management, which seems odd for the master level programme already. Experts consider this either a technical mistake (Bachelor's was meant instead of Master's) or ISMA's specific considerations for attracting high quality candidates with existing master degree for the professional master degree programme. In case of the latter, this requirement would benefit if supplemented by a clarifying remark.

For the longer term study programme (120 ECTS; Full time 2 years in Latvian and English; Part time distance learning 2 years 5 months in English; Part time 2 years 5 months in Latvian English, and Part time extramural studies 2 years 5 months in Latvian) the admission requirements include:

- Bachelor's or Master's degree and/or sixth-level Bachelor's or Master's degree and/or 5th level professional qualification in other branches of social sciences;
- Bachelor's or Master's degree and/or fifth-level Bachelor's or Master's degree and/or fifth-level professional qualification in other branches of social sciences until October 11, 2022;
- Bachelor's or Master's degree and/or sixth-level Bachelor's or Master's degree and/or sixth-level professional qualification in other branches of science and at least 2 year experience in the field of management or economics;
- Bachelor's or Master's degree and/or 5th level professional qualification in other branches of science until October 11, 2022 and have at least 2 year experience in the field of management or economics.
- Entrance examination is mandatory to take.
- And respectively for studies in English - At least level B2 of the English language proficiency.

SER p.100 says that "The admission of students to ISMA Master's study programme "Business Administration" takes place in compliance with ISMA Admission Regulations, which are approved by ISMA Senate annually in accordance with the requirements of regulatory acts and published on ISMA website [www.isma.lv](http://www.isma.lv).", however the webpage at <https://www.isma.lv/en/for-applicants/admission> does not provide a full document of ISMA Admission Regulations for the current academic year 2023/2024 or next of 2024/2025, but only for the previous academic year 2022/2023 ([https://www.isma.lv/images/FILES/ISMA\\_Uznemsanas\\_noteikumi\\_2022-23\\_EN.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/FILES/ISMA_Uznemsanas_noteikumi_2022-23_EN.pdf)).

The interrelation of major and detailed parameters of the study programme are overall justified, sufficiently analysed (SER, p.92-99), except for the Master's degree requirement. Apart from that, the StP parameters are clearly interrelated with their formulations and terminology corresponding to and strengthening one another.

In order to avoid confusions and misleading with the transformations of the higher education area ([https://www.niid.lv/prof\\_kval](https://www.niid.lv/prof_kval)), experts suggest to clarify slightly the admission requirements in relation to Master's degree and/or 5th level professional qualification in other branches of social sciences - as on the bachelor's level it is the 6th level qualification (in accordance with the latest legislation), thus it could seem confusing and misleading to the short-cycle study programmes graduate, who obtain 5th level professional qualification. Possible solution could be stating clearly or mentioning exceptions e.g. "...Master's degree and/or 5th level (short cycle (1st level) professional higher education) professional qualification .. or ..Master's degree and/or 6th level professional higher education) professional qualification.

2.1.3. SER p.99 section 3.1.1. confirms that since the previous accreditation of the study field, the name of the study programme, the code, the qualification to be obtained, the scope and duration of the studies, the admission regulations, as well as the final examination, have remained unchanged.

There have been changes in the parameters of the study programme: clarified the wording of the aim of the study programme, harmonising it with the aim of the study field; the type and form of studies are supplemented with part-time distance learning studies in the English stream, adapting to

market requirements. Experts find the ISMA`s offer of part-time distance learning studies in English justified and considerate according to the market needs (SER p.130) - in SER p.100-101 ISMA states that "So far, part-time studies have been implemented only in the form of extramural studies, but now the decision has been made to switch to part-time distance learning offer in English, creating the distance learning materials, which will allow one to fully acquire all the necessary knowledge, skills and competences of Organisational Manager, as well as will help students by maintaining closer contacts in the distance learning environment. In addition, only distance learning studies are available to the citizens of Ukraine, but the number of students at ISMA from this country is relatively large, especially in recent years.", "..the pandemic has made it necessary to learn how to organise distance learning effectively, both on the part of universities and students." (SER p.134), and "part-time distance learning studies are intended for applicants without managerial experience, therefore they have access to a wide range of learning support materials, regular consultations with teaching staff in a distance learning environment or in person working out their self-study works, etc. It should be noted that materials in the Moodle environment are available to all students." (SER p.105).

2.1.4. According to SER (p.101), ISMA conducts graduate surveys regularly, in order to find out the graduates' progress, including employment indicators, places of work and further studies. It is said (SER, p.101), that the positions indicated by the graduates are mainly related to the acquired education - business management, employment in independent business is also indicated. As can be seen from the Figure 10, the graduates of the Master's programme "Business Administration" work in the fields that are directly related to the knowledge acquired during their studies at ISMA University of Applied Sciences: 21% - 23% of graduates are employed in the field of sales, 23% - 21% work in bank sector or in companies related to finance, 14% -15% of the respondents are employed in the field of personnel management, 19% - 21% are engaged in project management in various companies. Only 7% - 6% of all respondents stated that their current profession is not directly related to business management (IT sector, public administration). The total number of students in the reporting period 2021 - 2023 is relatively stable (SER, p.102). However drop-out rates are still quite high, mainly due to academic or financial debts (SER, p.103).

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

Compliance of the professional master study programme "Business Administration" (code 47345) with the qualification to be obtained "Organisational Manager", and the Professional Master's degree in Business Administration complies with the study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" is clear and evident in legal, contentwise, and structural dimensions. The compliance is well analysed and justified by ISMA in SER.

The interrelation of major and detailed parameters of the study programme are overall justified, sufficiently analysed (SER, p.92-99), except for the Master`s degree requirement. Apart from that, the StP parameters are clearly interrelated with their formulations and terminology corresponding to and strengthening one another.

Programme`s major parameters have remained unchanged, except for one added type/form of studies: part-time distance learning studies in English, which experts find justified and considerate according to the market needs.

The economic and social justification of the professional master study programme "Business Administration" is sufficient and meaningful. The graduates are mainly employed in the field of acquired education - business management. Number of students over 2021 - 2023 is relatively stable , while the drop-out rates are still quite high mainly due to academic or financial debts.

Strengths:

- 1) ISMA pays attention to alignment of indicators and major detailed parameters of the study programme including their internal alignment to one another, to StF and ISMA strategy, national regulations and supranational guidelines as well as to socio-economic trends and demand.
- 2) Majority of graduates are employed in the field of acquired education - business administration, organization and management.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Unclear justification of the admission requirement of Master's degree in the branch of economics or management for the master level programme.
- 2) ISMA webpage does not provide the current and next year's Admission Regulations (as stated in SER p.100), but provides them for previous academic year 2022/2023 ([https://www.isma.lv/images/FILES/ISMA\\_Uznemsanas\\_noteikumi\\_2022-23\\_EN.pdf](https://www.isma.lv/images/FILES/ISMA_Uznemsanas_noteikumi_2022-23_EN.pdf)), which is disturbing given the usage of unaccredited programmes' titles.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. ISMA emphasises the topicality, practicability and applicability of their study programme - The content of the professional master's study programme "Business Administration" is designed to provide the training of such an executive, who is able to ensure the operation of an enterprise in all functional areas and to take responsibility for corporate developments from the ethical and legal point of view as well (SER p.104). The academic staff involved in and attracted to the teaching are also professionals with practical expertise in industry incl. founders and owners of companies - they introduce students to the latest industry experiences and discoveries, e.g. taking into account the recommendations of students and graduates, a professional with 20 years of practical work experience, the co-owner of a legal firm, was invited to the study course "International Law in the Field of Commercial Activity" to share her experience in legal matters in the field of commercial activity (SER p.104). Also, during the experts visit to ISMA and meeting with the StP director, teaching staff, students and graduates, the experts observed satisfaction of teachers and staff with the development direction and the sense-fulness of the professional master StP. Graduates, whose opinion might be one of the most objective noted the programme's ability to provide them with practical skills and prepare them better for the labour market with skills and understanding increasing their competitive advantage - a graduate of both levels, bachelor and master programmes: "Grateful for teachers, education, easy to get a job afterwards, had study Internship in Greece", "Practise experience [internship], autumn conference, info about companies, Erasmus in Spain, visit to hotel in Uzbekistan, teachers are friendly, responsible", "Diverse approach and up to date study and business materials, motivating study environment, reachable staff for the advice incl. for scientific papers, encouragement for PhD studies".

The content of the master StP is topical and the courses are interconnected and complementary (also observed by experts during the visit's meeting with master StP teaching staff), courses and study path corresponds to the objectives of the programme; teachers and the directors pay attention to the planned learning outcomes, as well as purposefully acts on meeting the needs of the industry, labor market and also scientific trends - course description and also course's contents, and discussions, and tasks incorporate using also teacher's scientific publications on the respective topics.

The compliance of the study programme with the State Education Standard ISMA provides at SER Annex 3.3.3.Compliance\_educ\_stand\_BA\_Mag.docx, while the compliance of the qualification to be acquired to the professional standard is provided at SER Annex 3.3.4.Compliance\_prof\_standart\_Mag.docx. While the compliance to state education standard is

shown in detail, the compliance analysis of the occupation standard by ISMA is provided generally, i.e., ISMA has well extracted the list of knowledge the occupational standard necessary for performing professional tasks to which and aligned them against the respective study courses of the programme. Although it can be found and concluded via study course descriptions (including their topics, thematics, tasks, assessment methods and results, learning outcomes) that they indeed address the respective parameter of the standard, such approach holds risks for inefficiency and potentially nonconformity. A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course's skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods. Also, in relation to "Environment, Labour and Civil Protection" course - it should not be included in the study programme plan and compliance analysis even as an elective course (there just should be an indication in the study plan, that it must be obtained if not mastered at a previous level) as stated in Cabinet regulation (Ministru kabineta 2023. gada 13. jūnija noteikumi Nr. 305 "Noteikumi par valsts profesionālās augstākās izglītības standartu". <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342818>) section 35: Ja studējošais Vides aizsardzības likumā un Civilās aizsardzības un katastrofas pārvaldīšanas likumā noteiktās prasības nav apguvis iepriekšēja cikla studiju programmā, viņš tās apgūst papildus maģistra studiju programmai. i.e. this particular course in master programme comes in addition to the rest of the study programme.

2.2.2. ISMA clearly recognizes and emphasizes that master students should demonstrate not only their abilities and competence to solve practical challenges of business administration, but also to conduct theoretical research and apply the latest achievements and knowledge of business administration in a their master's thesis, which is an integral part of the study programme and one of the main forms of controlling the learning outcomes ("..the most important feature of Master's thesis is that it is a scientifically practical study", SER p.106). Therefore, the requirements for the development of master thesis include the need of a study of a current problem of scientific practicality; must be based on the study of theoretical and specialized literature, evaluated and used the latest scientific research and publications on the particular problem; must process published and unpublished data and information sources, materials, conduct experiments, surveys, and analyze observed facts by applying modern research and data processing techniques. In order to demonstrate their scientific research skills, Master students are encouraged to present their study and research, also in some cases transformed to a publication and/or presentation at conferences and seminars and to add expert reviews that also has an impact on the assessment of the Master's thesis and the award of the Master's degree. (SER p.106).

Overall, based on the experts meetings with ISMA and StP's representatives (management and teaching staff ), with students and graduates, as well as taken into account the description analysis in SER, experts see the awarding of a master degree with the professional qualification well balanced between usage and application of the achievements and findings of the relevant field of science and the industry practical topicalities.

The requirements for the development of master thesis, including those of in-depth content-wise analysis and the procedural setting, are equal for all 10 implementation options of the programme, thus the awarding of the master degree and the professional qualification upon completion of each of the programme's implementation options is based on the scientific and applied achievements and findings within the field of business administration.

2.2.3. ISMA academic staff, course teachers use various conventional and modern trending study implementation methods also in the master level studies with the aim to ensure meaningfulness in studies and their justified relevance to professional qualification of "Organisational Manager" to be obtained. In addition to methods described in SER (p.104), the experts also addressed this issue

during the visit to ISMA and meetings with various representatives, in this case particularly, the StP director and teaching staff. Asked about the study implementation and teaching methods they find innovative, ISMA representatives named various, e.g. Business games, and Simulation games, Drama in studies (for better understanding the cultural differences), Mirror platforms, case studies, Q&A sessions, individual tests and assignments, also oral exams due to AI factors, also feedback from students and its high relevance in study implementation lit up on several meetings and also in SER (e.g. p.104, 107, 137), also many online tech tools are used - clouds, high performance computing, Google tools and applications, Kahoot, Logo design apps, online lectures, video lectures, online tests using various innovative tools and applications, such as sli.do, Socrative.com. ISMA emphasises that the selection and choice of a study method is linked to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme, backing it up with examples in SER p.107. Furthermore, "Teaching staff regularly shares their experience with using new, modern teaching methods, developing e-environment opportunities, developing creative thinking, and similar issues during the annual "Open Learning and Distance Education" conference, which was held for the 21st time in January 2023." (SER p.124).

The above-mentioned methods do not, however, show in the study course descriptions. Furthermore, a good higher education practice has shifted now towards clearly connecting both, the teaching and the assessment methods to learning outcomes (study results).

Also, in all of study course descriptions in English within the section of "Planned learning outcomes:" particularly "Knowledge" part - there is missing the key verb according to Bloom's taxonomy (see sentences "In compliance with the Standard students shall be able to:") such as e.g. "use", "understand", "know" a.o. - This is clearly a technical error, though rather important to fix as clear definition of learning outcome of a study course is important for meaningful studies, and also as flawless as possible impression before students (who sees the course descriptions) is important.

2.2.4. The professional master study programme`s study plans (SER Annex 3.3.6.Curriculum\_Study\_Programme\_Mag.xlsx - 4 sheets in the file with respective study plans for various ECTS amount/length formats of the programme) provisions several Internship (traineeships). The longer full time 2 years and the part-time 2 years 5 months 120 ECTS amount programme provisions Professional traineeship in the 2nd semester (2nd and 3rd for part time studies) in the amount of 30 ECTS as well as the Qualification traineeship in the 1st and 3rd semesters (4th semester for part time studies) in the amount of 9 ECTS.

The shorter full time 1 year 1 month and part time 1 year 5 months 66 ECTS amount programme logically envisages just the qualification traineeship in the 1st and 2nd semesters in the amount of 9 ECTS.

The description and tasks of both traineeships are provided in course descriptions (SER Annex 3.3.7.Study\_course\_descriptions\_Mag\_BA.docx); both course descriptions for the 30 ECTS Professional traineeship and the 9 ECTS Qualification traineeship are identical.

The procedure for the organisation, implementation and defence of traineeship is regulated by ISMA Traineeship regulations (SER Annex 3.1.8.Traineeship\_regulations.doc).

The traineeship objectives of a student in cooperation with the chosen supervisor of the Master's thesis may be supplemented or adjusted according to the theme of the Master's thesis to be developed (SER p.109). ISMA Career Centre is involved within the organisation and administration of the traineeships, as well as their development and updates for next periods. Also, members of ISMA Student Council are also invited to cooperate, and they are also conducting a continuous survey among students about their wishes and opportunities for traineeships in different companies (SER p.109). Every year at the end of November, ISMA organises the international conference "Internship and Employment", where students get acquainted with potential employers from Latvia and abroad; At the end of the conference, each student has the opportunity to talk to company representatives, ask any questions they might have, and apply for traineeship. Students also pass traineeship abroad

through the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme (SER p.110). Experts noted during the meetings with students and graduates, that quite some students had had the traineeship abroad and evaluated it as a very valuable experience, which increased their competitiveness and competence. ISMA states that Traineeship objectives are related to the learning outcomes to be achieved within the study programme based on the knowledge, skills, and competences defined in the Occupational Standard and acquired during the study courses. This interrelation and requirements are clearly defined in the descriptions of traineeships (SER. p.110).

Overall, the internships (traineeships) foreseen in the study programme are well defined and organised with encouraging and helpful additional activities by ISMA (e.g. conference) to increase the opportunities offered to students. With the cross-structural cooperation between StP and ISMA Career Centre the organisation and administration of the traineeships are effective. The tasks of the internships are related to the learning outcomes achievable and complies with the requirements of regulatory enactments, but the latter would still need an improvement (see weaknesses and recommendations).

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2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. The topics for master students' final thesis are mostly students' initiated with help of their teachers, StP director and further adjusted, specified together with supervisors (based on experts meeting with StP directors). Being a professional study programme with both teaching staff and also students having the real-life application drive also in studies, the topics are truly chosen relevant to the study programme and the field. Topicality is the first factor in determining the subject of a Master's thesis (SER p.111). According to ISMA SER p.11-112, majority of the master thesis in the last three year have been development within the area of "Development of a company's strategy" (17% of all master thesis in 2023), "Improvement of operational efficiency" (16%), "Development of a company's marketing strategy/plan" (12%), "Improvement of company's marketing communication" (11%), and "Development of new product/service of a company" (10%). Furthermore, given that the final semester for the development of master thesis follows the semester devoted to placement (professional or qualification internship), in most cases, the interrelation between the chosen topics of the final theses and a current employer or the chosen traineeship placement is assured (SER p.113).

The abovementioned as well ISMA's broader analysis (SER p.111-114) clearly shows that the topics of students' final theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme.

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

The content of the master StP is topical and the courses are interconnected and complementary (also observed by experts during the visit's meeting with master StP teaching staff), courses' contents, and discussions, and tasks incorporate teacher's scientific publications. ISMA has in detail transparently shown StP's compliance with national regulations on state education standard's and professional (occupational) and qualification requirements.

Experts see that the awarding of a master degree with the professional qualification is well balanced between usage and application of the achievements and findings of the relevant field of science and the industry practical topicalities.

The requirements for the development of master thesis, including those of in-depth content-wise analysis and the procedural setting, are equal for all 10 implementation options of the programme.

ISMA teachers use various conventional and modern trending study implementation methods with the aim to ensure meaningfulness in studies, however, they lack clear show in the study course descriptions. Good higher education practice of connecting the teaching and assessment methods to learning outcomes (study results) is not yet met.

The internships (traineeships) foreseen in the study programme are well defined and organised with encouraging and helpful additional activities by ISMA to increase the opportunities for students. Cross-structural cooperation between StP and ISMA Career Centre makes the organisation effective. The description of the internships are related to the learning outcomes, but needs some improvement (distinction between types and also review of Compulsory literature). The topics of master theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme. Often the topics are related to traineeship placement business area or problematics.

Strengths:

- 1) ISMA teachers and other academic staff, being also professionals in the industry, do apply various conventional and modern trending study implementation methods with the aim to ensure meaningfulness in studies
- 2) Engagement of ISMA Career Centre within the organisation and administration of the traineeships.
- 3) Annual ISMA conference "Internship and Employment" to provide students with opportunities of meeting employers from Latvia and abroad, and to apply for traineeship. Also, the opportunity of having the traineeship abroad through the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme.

Weaknesses:

- 1) ISMA`s approach to analyse the programme`s compliance to the occupational standard holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity (list of knowledge from the occupational standard is aligned only with the respective study courses). A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods.
- 2) Course descriptions do not specifically distinguish teaching and assessment methods and criteria also connecting them to the learning outcomes.
- 3) In all of study course descriptions in English within the section of "Planned learning outcomes:" particularly "Knowledge" part - there is missing the key verb according to Bloom's taxonomy (see sentences "In compliance with the Standard students shall be able to:") such as e.g. "use", "understand", "know" a.o. - This is clearly a technical error, though rather important to fix.
- 4) Identical course descriptions for the 30 ECTS Professional traineeship and the 9 ECTS Qualification traineeship.
- 5) Unrealistic amount and scope of Compulsory reading for traineeships in their course descriptions. Also the list of Compulsory reading includes outdated sources e.g. <http://www.liaa.gov.lv/lv/uznemejdarbibas-abc/likumdosana>

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Courses` contents, and discussions, and tasks incorporate the teacher`s scientific publications. The topics of master theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme. Often the topics are related to traineeship placement business area or problematics. Also, ISMA has in detail transparently shown StP`s compliance with national regulations on state education standard`s and professional (occupational) and qualification requirements (SER Section III.3.2. Annex 3.3.3.Compliance\_educ\_stand\_BA\_Mag.docx, and SER Section III.3.2. Annex 3.3.4.Compliance\_prof\_standart\_Mag.docx).

## 2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

### Analysis

2.3.1. Based on the findings from SER (p.114-115) and observations of the site visit, the resources necessary for the study programme implementation are adequately provided. Overall, the resources available for the study programme are identical to those of the study field and a more comprehensive description can be found in the analysis section of the study field (1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field).

Students enrolled in the master's "Business Administration" programme have access to the ISMA library and its resources. As was evident during the site visit, the library provides ISMA students copies of textbooks and other study materials, as well as students have access to online resources such as the Moodle system, electronic library containing digital books, and electronic databases. Additionally, specialized equipment and software, such as Vensim PLE are used to complement theoretical content and consolidate the knowledge acquired through some of the study courses (SER, p. 114). However, in general, the implementation of the study programme does not require specialized laboratories or other specific resources. The lecture rooms are equipped with all the modern learning essentials, such as computers, projectors, TVs, interactive whiteboards, and more (SER, 114). During the visit, it was evident that the classrooms where study programme lectures take place are well equipped. They use various classes and setups depending on the needs of each subject. For instance, they have different types of tables and movable chairs with attached small desks, allowing for easy transformations for group works of different sizes, increasing efficiency of the learning process. Generally, students expressed that the accessibility of study materials and resources is satisfactory, except for the possibility to access scientific databases (EBSCO and Scopus) from home.

Starting in the upcoming academic year, this programme will also offer distance learning option. All students enrolled in the distance learning format will have equal access to the resources provided by ISMA.

In summary, it can be concluded that the study infrastructure mainly meets the needs of students and ISMA's existing material and technical base provide the necessary requirements for the implementation of the study programme.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. Financial resources for the implementation of the study programme primarily come from the tuition fees paid by students, since ISMA is a private higher education institution and does not receive government funding for its operations.

ISMA has calculated that for the study programme to be financially profitable, it needs a minimum of 5 full-time students in both 66 ECTS and 120 ECTS programmes, 3 students in distance learning studies in both 66 ECTS and 120 ECTS programmes, and 3 students in extramural studies in both 66 ECTS and 120 ECTS programmes per academic year, regardless of the language of instruction (SER, p. 120). The current student enrollment numbers for this programme are sufficient to sustain a study process without financial losses. In 2023, there were 87 students enrolled in full-time intramural studies, with 4 studying in the Latvian stream and 83 in the English stream, and 12 students enrolled in part-time extramural studies, all studying in the English stream (annex 3.3.2). Since distance learning studies are set to start in the next academic year, there are no available statistics regarding student enrollment numbers.

Just like with both bachelor's study programmes, there is a small number of students enrolled in the full-time Latvian stream with only 4 students. Correspondingly, it is suggested for ISMA to assess the sustainability of maintaining Latvian stream and perhaps consider implementing study programme only in English.

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

Resources and provision for the study programme mainly meet the requirements for effective study programme implementation. Overall, the resources available are the same with those available for the study field. Students have access to ISMA library, online resources, and well-equipped lecture halls, as well as specialized equipment and software, including Vensim PLE, which are used in certain study courses, ensuring that students' study needs are met. Additionally, students who plan to study in distance learning in the upcoming academic year will have the same resource access as on-site students. However, challenges outlined in the analysis section of the study field also apply to the study programme, such as the limited amount of English language resources in the library and non-existent remote access to scientific databases for students. ISMA's study programme financing relies mainly on student tuition fees due to its status as a private higher education institution. To ensure financial sustainability, minimum enrollment targets have been established, which are currently being met in both 66 ECTS and 120 ECTS programmes. Similar to both bachelor's study programmes, the low enrollment in the Latvian stream of the programme could be problematic in sustainability in the future, and its continuation should be reassessed.

### Strengths:

- 1) Availability of well-equipped lecture halls with modern learning essentials and flexibility in classroom setups.
- 2) Integration of specialized software like Vensim PLE, enhancing the practical application of theoretical knowledge.
- 3) Equal access to resources for students planning to study in distance learning.
- 4) Current student enrollment numbers meet the requirements for financial sustainability in both 66 ECTS and 120 ECTS programmes.

### Weaknesses:

- 1) Low enrollment level of students in programme`s Latvian stream.

## Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

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

The resources and provision of the study programme mainly meet the criteria for effective implementation. While the infrastructure and essential technical needs are adequately provided, as well as there is an integration of specialized software in the study process, there are shortcomings concerning factors outlined in the analysis section of the study field (small amount of English resources at the ISMA Riga library; limited remote access to scientific databases for students), as well as there are aspects that are slightly challenging, such as the low enrollment of students in the Latvian stream, which is directly related to financial sustainability of the study programme.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. As it is stated in SER p.87, ISMA academic positions are filled in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, through the election procedure stipulated by ISMA's

“Regulations on election into academic positions”. The Regulations include the qualification and eligibility criteria for the teaching staff in accordance with Articles 28, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, and 40 of the “Law on Higher Education Institutions”. Out of 14 lecturers that are involved in the implementation of the Master’s study programme "Business Administration", 6 hold the position of the lecturer, 1 - assistant professor (docent), 5 - associate professor, 7 - professor, 1 is guest lecturers from Business establishments. All the teaching staff members except one are PhD holders. Results of scientific activities as it was confirmed during the panel meetings with programme students and teaching staff are incorporated into the study courses (for example, The development of the innovative capacity of Latvia). Qualification of the academic staff allows to encourage students to get involved into preparation of scientific publications.

Professional development of the lecturers since the last accreditation was supported by the several seminars and workshops on their professional competence, scientific research, intercultural communication, ect.

2.4.2. The changes in composition of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the master study programme are proactively planned and are related to the development plan of the programme, which states that 100% of the lecturers must have a doctoral degree by 2026. In 2020/21, only 68% of the lecturers of the Master's programme had a doctoral degree (SER p.123), in 2023 - the number of PhD holders increased to 13 (out of 14) (SER p.121) or 93%.

Several ISMA teaching staff members have been working in the Master's study programme for many years, for example M.Živitere, V.Riaščenko, Z.Oborenko, V.Gopejenko, J.Čaiko. Z.Oborenko obtained her Ph.D during the reporting period.

The recent (2021-2024) changes in the composition of the teaching staff has a positive effect on the quality of the study programme. ISMA has both formal and informal measures in place to adjust to the changes and manage risks as well as to ensure compliance with the regulatory enactments that are currently well met and in some cases exceeds the requirements, e.g. the requirement of professors and asoc.professors engaged in the programme (SER p.152)

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. The list of academic staff involved in the whole StF is provided by ISMA in SER Annex 2.3.1.Info\_Teaching\_staff\_Management.xlsx. 14 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the professional master study programme (SER p.121), the list of which can be extracted (filtered) from SER Annex 2.3.1.Info\_Teaching\_staff\_Management.xlsx. The list of teaching staff involved in the courses` conduct in the professional master study programme can be also obtained from the study plans of the professional master study programme (SER Annex 3.3.6.Curriculum\_Study\_Programme\_Mag.xlsx) and from the course descriptions at SER Annex 3.3.7.Study\_course\_descriptions\_Mag\_BA.docx. The publications of the teaching staff of the whole StF are provided in staff`s CVs (SER Annex 2.3.2.Teaching\_staff\_CV\_Vad.pdf), and also the list of the publications of the teaching staff of the whole StF over the reporting period is provided in SER Annex 2.4.2.ScientificWorks\_2020-2023\_BA.docx.

ISMA emphasises also the strategic role of scientific publishing as one of its strategic priorities - Excellence in research with the objective O.2.6. - Promote the publication of publications of academic staff and students in internationally recognized scientific journals and collections of papers, as well as encourage presentation of papers at scientific conferences, and O.2.7. - Analyse opportunities to include collections of ISMA scientific publications in internationally relevant databases and develop a plan of activities to be undertaken, and O.2.8. - Develop and implement a system of support for the production and publication of scientific publications (support for editing articles, translating them into a foreign language (s) and publishing), and O.2.9. Promote the publication of scientific publications and research data in Open Access (SER p.10). Number of

internationally recognized publications and Number of joint publications of lecturers and students at ISMA conferences are also two of ISMA's strategic indicators of the Academic and general staff performance as well as of the Achievements and evaluation of results within ISMA Quality Assurance Policy (SER p.19). One free publication per academic year is available to all ISMA faculty and students (SER p.39) as part of ISMA's international cooperation in the field of scientific and applied research are scientific journals "Baltic Journal of Economic Studies" (<https://www.isma.lv/en/science/publications/baltic-journal-en>, and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/issue>) and "Economics&Education" (<http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/issue/view/151/310>) publishing at <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/> 4 times a year and indexed in Copernicus, as well as in other popular databases of scientific articles (SER p.15 and <http://www.baltijapublishing.lv/index.php/econedu/indexed>).

As a result, ISMA's academic staff is active in scientific publishing, visibly at collective level more than at individual, and it is evident, that each member of the academic staff in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions - the publications mentioned in the very ISMA SER (e.g. p.46 - Ravil I. Mukhamediev, Yelena Popova, Viktors Gopejenko (2022); Dehtjare J., Mironova J., Balode I. (2002); Djakona,V.,Lapaine,T., Riaschenko,V.(2022); p.48, p.49-50, p.121 - Riashchenko V., Živitere M.; Spica I.; Linde I.; Živitere M.; Odinkova T.; and Djakon D., Verdenhofa O., Riaschenko V. as examples of the scientific activity of the teaching staff used in the improvement of the study process), as well as the ones presented in staff's CVs and also in the list of the publications of the teaching staff over the reporting period (SER Annex 2.4.2.ScientificWorks\_2020-2023\_BA.docx) are published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions and further in databases accepting editions only with peer-review - these include SCOPUS, WoS, ProQuest, MDPI, Sciendo and other.

Also, according to the staff CVs and largely based also on the experts' meetings with ISMA representatives during the visit, it is clear that all teaching staff has relevant professional practical experience, which crucially contributes to the programme.

2.4.5. As it is stated in SER p.124 and confirmed at the panel meeting with the academic staff of the programme, mutual cooperation of the teaching staff is implemented in three directions: - cooperation in the development and updating of study programme and study course descriptions; - cooperation on the improvement of methodological work; - collaboration in scientific research. Implementation of those 3 cooperation directions has formal and informal ways. The formal ensurance of interdisciplinary relation and harmonisation of common requirements for the achievement of learning outcomes, elimination and unnecessary overlapping of study content is achieved via regular discussions at Coucil or departamental meetings where the content of the study courses is discussed and approved. Informal individual meetings of the teaching staff allow them to share experience and coordinate their work. Agreements on the improvement of methodology or on the idea of common research might be reached both informally and formally (Collaborative research includes such areas as innovative management solutions to enhance business competitiveness, application of artificial intelligence, sustainable tourism, educational management)

Since April 2019, ISMA has launched a new initiative, which is also aimed at promoting lecturers' cooperation in pedagogical-methodological work. April 23-26, 2019 ISMA hosted the first Erasmus + Staff Teaching and Training Week at ISMA University(SER p.43 and 154 and at <https://www.uma.es/relaciones-internacionales/noticias/isma-university-first-erasmus-staff-week-2019/>). In an informal setting, participants had the opportunity to discuss current issues in higher education, develop recommendations for student mobility, and share experiences on the specificities of learning delivery in Ukraine, Lithuania, Portugal and other countries. The event was highly appreciated by the teaching staff members and would be welcomed in the future.

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

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses.

The recent (2021-2024) changes in the composition of the teaching staff has a positive effect on the quality of the study programme. ISMA has both formal and informal measures in place to adjust to the changes and manage risks as well as to ensure compliance with the regulatory enactments that are currently well met and in some cases exceeds the requirements, e.g. the requirement of professors and asoc.professors engaged in the programme (SER p.152)

As a result of ISMA`s strategic prioritisation of scientific publishing, and its following institutional and procedural nudge and support as part of ISMA Quality Assurance Policy, ISMA`s academic staff is active in scientific publishing, visibly at collective level more than at individual, and it is evident, that each member of the academic staff in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed international scientific editions.

A mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme has been established and used in efficient way.

Strengths:

- 1) High number of PhD holders among academic staff involved in the implementation of the programme (13 out of 14) or 93%.
- 2) ISMA`s strategic prioritisation of scientific publishing, and its following institutional and procedural nudge and support as part of ISMA Quality Assurance Policy, ensures ISMA`s academic staff`s active engagement in scientific publishing in peer-reviewed international scientific editions.

Weaknesses:

- 1) None.

## Assessment of the requirement [7]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification of the academic staff meets and exceeds the legal requirements for the implementation of professional master study programme.

## 2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme meets the parameters and provisions outlined State Academic Education Standard and is in detail shown in ISMA SER Annex 3.3.3.Compliance\_educ\_stand\_BA\_Mag.docx

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The StP is generally compliant to the occupation standard of "Organisational Manager" which is generally shown in ISMA SER Annex 3.3.4.Compliance\_prof\_standart\_Mag.docx. Although it can be found and concluded via study course descriptions (including their topics, thematics, tasks, assessment methods and results, learning outcomes) that they indeed address the respective parameter of the standard, such approach holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity. A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course`s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The courses descriptions are well in place - SER Annex 3.3.7.Study\_course\_descriptions\_Mag\_BA.docx (ENG) and 3.3.7.Studiju\_kursu\_apraksti\_Mag\_Vad.docx (LV), however needs improvements on a) connecting teaching and assessment methods to learning outcomes; b) specification on compulsory literature; c) distinction of descriptions for both traineeships; and d) concising the amount learning outcomes of the study courses.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA SER Annex 3.3.1.Diploma\_paraugs\_Mag\_Vad.docx and 3.3.1.Diploma\_Master\_BA.docx). However, it should be noted that ISMA needs to make updates in accordance with the latest amendments to Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers, effective as of April 3, 2024.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA Rector verifies (SER annex 2.3.3.Acknowledgment\_language\_UD.pdf), that the proficiency of the state language of academic staff meets the national legal requirements. Experts observed no risks during the visit.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

ISMA Rector verifies (SER annex 2.3.4.Acknowledgment\_English\_UD.pdf), that the staff`s proficiency of English meets B2 level. Experts observed no risks during the visit.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

SER Annex 2.1.5.pielikums. Studiju ligums.docx (in Latvian).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

SER Annex 2.1.3.Acknowledgment\_continue\_studies\_BA.pdf (ENG), and Annex 2.1.3.Apliecinajums studiju progr partrauks\_Vad.pdf (LV).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

SER Annex 2.1.4.Acknowledgment\_compensation\_UD.pdf (ENG), and Annex 2.1.4.Apliecinājums zaudejumu kompensacija VAD.pdf (LV).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

## Assessment of the requirement [8]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The programme overall complies with legal regulations and requirements for higher education, still needs several improvements within course descriptions.

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

Professional master study programme “Business Administration” (code 47345) with the qualification to be obtained - Organisational Manager (Latvian - Organizācijas vadītājs), and the degree to be obtained “Professional Master's degree in Business Administration” generally complies with the normative regulatory enactments as well as holds the competitiveness within socio-economic aspects of higher education.

Experts identified the compliance, the strengths, as well as several weaknesses of the programme however, no such deficiencies have been identified that cannot be eliminated during the 2-year accreditation period. The identified weaknesses are transformed into recommendations further below in the report.

Major strengths: Majority of graduates are employed in the field of acquired education - business administration, organization and management. ISMA teachers and other academic staff, being also professionals in the industry, do apply various conventional and modern trending study implementation methods with the aim to ensure meaningfulness in studies. Engagement of ISMA Career Centre within the organisation and administration of the traineeships. Annual ISMA conference “Internship and Employment” to provide students with opportunities of meeting employers from Latvia and abroad, and to apply for traineeship. Also, the opportunity of having the traineeship abroad through the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme. Integration of specialized software like Vensim PLE, enhancing the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Current student enrollment numbers meet the requirements for financial sustainability in both 66 ECTS and 120 ECTS programmes. ISMA’s strategic prioritisation of scientific publishing, and its following institutional and procedural nudge and support as part of ISMA Quality Assurance Policy, ensures ISMA’s academic staff’s active engagement in scientific publishing in peer-reviewed international scientific editions. High number of PhD holders among academic staff involved in the implementation of the programme (13 out of 14) or 93%.

Major weaknesses: Unclear justification of the admission requirement of Master’s degree in the branch of economics or management for the master level programme. ISMA webpage does not provide the current and next year’s Admission Regulations (as stated in SER p.100), but provides them for previous academic year 2022/2023, which is disturbing given the usage of unaccredited programmes’ titles. ISMA’s approach to analyse the programme’s compliance to the occupational standard holds risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity (list of knowledge from the occupational standard is aligned only with the respective study courses). A more conventional approach that additionally strengthens the overall study quality system from top to bottom would be to add also the relevant study course’s skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, Competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods. Course descriptions needs several improvements - they do not specifically distinguish teaching and assessment methods and criteria connecting them to the learning outcomes; course descriptions for the 30 ECTS Professional traineeship and the 9 ECTS Qualification traineeship are identical; unrealistic amount and scope of compulsory reading for traineeships in their course descriptions; also the list of compulsory reading

includes clearly outdated sources.

## Evaluation of the study programme "Business Administration"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## 2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration"

### Short-term recommendations

- 1) Review the necessity, formulation or justification of the admission requirement "Master's degree in the branch of economics or management" for the professional master study programme.
- 2) In order to avoid confusions and misleading with the transformations of the higher education area ([https://www.niid.lv/prof\\_kval](https://www.niid.lv/prof_kval)), experts suggest to clarify slightly the admission requirements in relation to Master's degree and/or 5th level professional qualification in other branches of social sciences - as on the bachelor's level it is the 6th level qualification (in accordance with the latest legislation), thus it could seem confusing and misleading to the short-cycle study programmes graduate, who obtain 5th level professional qualification. Possible solution could be stating clearly or mentioning exceptions e.g. "...Master's degree and/or 5th level (short cycle (1st level) professional higher education) professional qualification .. or ..Master's degree and/or 6th level professional higher education) professional qualification.
- 3) Update ISMA webpage to provide current and next year's Admission Regulations (as stated in SER p.100).
- 4) To review and specify the Compulsory reading materials for the Professional traineeship and Qualification traineeship, marking the real specifics instead of the whole Labour Law and legal framework ABC by LIAA.
- 5) The 30 ECTS Professional traineeship and the 9 ECTS Qualification traineeship course descriptions should be separately specified in their tasks and learning outcomes respective also to the amount and length of the traineeship.
- 6) To update the programme's compliance to the occupational standard showing not only the relevant study course to the parameter of the standard, but also the relevant study course's skills, attitudes, professional knowledge, competence, level of qualification, topics and thematics, and assessment methods. Such a more conventional approach would diminish the risks for inefficiency and potentially unconformity with the standard as well as will strengthen the overall study quality system from top to bottom.
- 7) Systematically improve study course descriptions, incl.: a) connecting teaching and assessment methods to learning outcomes; b) specification on compulsory literature; c) distinction of descriptions for both traineeships; and d) concising the amount of learning outcomes of the study courses to 10-15.

### Long-term recommendations

- 1) To address low enrollment of students in Latvian streams, explore the possibility of merging Latvian streams with English streams.

2) Consider PINTSA NKS suggested English formulation of the qualification to be obtained - Chief Executive (ISCO, ESCO), ManagingDirector, CEO (Chief Executive Officer) (ISCO) (based on International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO) instead of Organisational Manager - see [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_uznemejdarbiba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_uznemejdarbiba.pdf) point 2.1.21. p.16 of the Vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council`s (Latvian - PINTSA, Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome) Minutes No. 2 of April 5, 2023.

3) Consider engaging industry, employers, companies in a systematic setting the list of master thesis offered topics for students.

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

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

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

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:	Fully compliant	ISMA has an adequate Quality Management System defined in ISMA Quality Assurance Policy. Experts find the criterion R1 compliant to the requirements - ISMA has quality mechanisms and procedures in place and they are working largely productively. Besides, it was clear that ISMA has worked well on these issues after assessment and recommendations 2 years ago. At the same time experts identified some shortcomings (more as a place for improvement) that led to recommendations for improvement, which shall be binding for ISMA. These places for improvement do not conflict with the general compliance of the R1 requirement.
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Fully compliant	4 staff members are experts of the Latvian Council of Science. Noteworthy part of teachers has their publications in the literature part of the course descriptions. Teachers incorporate research projects, publications and conference results in the study process (see SER Section 2.4. pp.45-51).

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Requirement Evaluation</b>		<b>Comment</b>
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Fully compliant		ISMA has strong cooperation with employers from Latvia which contributes to the achievement of the aims of the study field. However incoming teaching mobility is low ((SER Annexes 2.5.4. Incoming-Outcoming Staff_2021-2023)
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.	Fully compliant		ISMA had clearly and fundamentally addressed the vast majority of previous recommendations - fundamental changes and improvements had been made and thus the quality and compliance of the StF and its StPs improved. Few of the previous recommendations which will be partly repeated in this report (access to online infrastructure; research motivation policy) are either being currently solved or addressed otherwise to be solved.

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

<b>No.</b>	<b>Study programme</b>	<b>R5</b>	<b>R6</b>	<b>R7</b>	<b>R8</b>	<b>Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)</b>
1	Business Administration (42345)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
2	Business Administration in Tourism (42345)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
3	Business Administration (47345)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good

#### **The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts**

There are no dissenting opinions of the experts.