

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: University of Latvia

Study field: Arts

Experts:

1. Aigars Ceplītis (Chair of the Experts Group)
2. Costas Mantzalos (Secretary of the Experts Group)
3. Ana Vivoda
4. Barbara Freiberga (Employers' Confederation of Latvia)
5. Katrīna Freimane (Student Union of Latvia)

Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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As a part of the University of Latvia, one of the leaders in natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, equipped with the state-of-the-art research facilities, and being at the centre of intellectual life of Latvia (SER, p.4), Professional Bachelor Studies Programme (hereinafter - PBSP) "Art", offering two majors-Environment Designer and Communications Designer- is well positioned to be a key player in providing the local and international pool of the professional for the design industry.

An integral part of the Faculty of Education, Psychology, and Art (FEPA), the largest faculty of the University of Latvia that implements several study fields, the PBSP "Art" places a great deal of emphasis "on the formation of a creative personality with a broad mental outlook, critical thinking and analytical skills to state the current processes and forecast processes in design" to ensure a research-based and innovative approach that corresponds to the needs of Latvian and global labour, and as reflected in the National Development Plan of Latvia 2021-2027 (SER, pp.34-40).

The overall structure of the programme is academically solid enough, to be competitive beyond the national borders, as reflected, first of all, by fairly well-organized academic management scheme, its caliber of outstanding teachers, and the positive responses from the former and current graduates with respect to the programme itself, its essence and the impact it has had on their lives not the least related to the quality of the teachers referred to.

The strength of the programme lies in its coherent management structure that ensures sustainability and viability of the programme, which in itself is commendable, but still needs improvement. Thus, SWOT analysis (SER, p.20), an important part of the ontology the way the programme "Art" functions, and the indicator of competitiveness of the programme in the EU, has been written up by the study programme. Judging from the responses, given during the university visit, there are still some questions as regards to each individual contribution

All students came across positively towards their studies. They have been consistently praising the teaching staff and the structure of the programme, but they also stressed the need to alter the existing economy courses to a course cycle that would cover more design management and entrepreneurship, particularly for freelancers. The current economic courses are not sufficient; there is a lack of business courses, based on real life settings, on how to SELL IDEA to a client, and how to navigate the industry from the monetary perspective. Only in Latvia art is art, for the rest of the world "art" means business, even if state supported, the state itself does not have money, the taxpayers do, which brings to the fact that the programme director should seriously reevaluate how the business courses are taught and prepare students for the market rules.

In spite of the very positive attitude to the programme by the students, the drop-out rate is not sufficiently curtailed. A number of students in the programme, starting with its opening in 2008, has gradually decreased which can be partly explained by the economic crises which started in 2008. The drop-out of students in full-time studies during the reporting period is on average 7% (on average 14% after the first study year, 8% - after the second study year, but after the third study year, there is an increase of 1.6% of students). The 7% drop-out rate is very low compared to the national average drop-out rate (according to publicly available information, in 2019, the drop-out rate was on average 10-20%, depending on the sector). In part-time studies, the drop-out rate is higher - on average 18% (on average 30% after the first study year, 5% - after the second study year, 6% - after the third study year, and 32% - after the fourth study year). After the first study year or during it one third of students understand that they cannot combine studies with their work,

the study load is too big or there are not sufficient financial means, but after the fourth year when students have to start working on the diploma work the most frequent reason of the drop-out is the lack of time and the inability to do two things parallel, i.e., to combine employment with the research (SER, pp.120-121). Explaining reasons why students drop out of the studies for some time or do not complete studies lies primarily in inability to combine studies with work because the majority of students, especially part-time students are working full time or part-time jobs. Another factor influencing the changes in student numbers is the possibility to choose study programmes with a bigger number of state budget study places (SER, pp.120-121), although there is a promise to increase the allocated state budget places in 2021/2022 academic season.

The programme director has demonstrated how the two professional majors - Environment Designer and Communications Designer - of the programme differentiate, with the joint as well as the specialized courses in Graphic Design and in Interior Design. The Programme Director exhibits a strong grasp of the ontology of the programme, i.e., the division of the design majors - Communication Designer and Environmental Designer - is defined in the "Map of Professions Included in the Design and Creative Industries Sector of the Art Industry Structure" (https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKSK_maksla.pdf), according to which occupational standards are being developed.

As PBSP "Art" acquires two professions - Interior Designer and Graphic Designer - and these professions are included in the map as specializations of Environmental Designer and Communication Designer, then, according to regulatory enactments, the study programme must meet both the occupational standards (OS) and professional qualification requirements (PQR) of the specializations. The self-assessment report compares the programme with both OS and PQR. Changes in the structure of design professions (map of professions) have been made by the responsible state institutions in recent years, and the programme is subject to the requirements of regulatory enactments.

In the parameters of PBSP "Art" and in communication with potential or existing students (from the moment of creating the programme), only the names of specializations are used - Interior Designer and Graphic Designer.

However, while these names are internationally recognizable they may be confusing to the international body of students and the local pool of candidates, since the names for division of the two majors - Communication Designer and Environmental Designer-are not the ones given in Diploma, i.e., "Professional Bachelor's in Arts and Graphic Design" ("Profesionālais bakalaura grāds mākslā un Grafikas dizainers).

In addition, as far as branding is concerned, attention should be paid to the way the programme is positioned. It is felt though that the programme lacks somehow an Art and Design identity that could possibly make it stronger in establishing itself on the map of the global Art and Design institutions. The exceptionally good aspect of the programme, and there are many, indeed, at times, are muted but the confusing aspects brought into the foreground, which was reflected in the meeting with a small number of employers limited only to the mostly graphic design field. Although the participants were quite positive towards the possible employment with graduates from the study programme, it was felt that the small selection of the employers' team, did not provide adequate knowledge on the relationship between the study programme and the creative industry in relation of course to the employability of its graduates, which brings to the next very important aspects: internationalization and alumni support.

The need to establish an international profile is very strong, at a higher management level, and

there is a constant pressure towards achieving this goal. Out of 31 lecturers attracted to the study field, 20 are elected to the academic positions of the University of Latvia, and they are 2/3 of the total number (SER, Annex "Basic information about the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field"). The faculty has two international lecturers, but, while the salary issue can be a hindrance, there is a room for improvement to solidify the programmes' international potential.

International contacts should be further developed not just on per project bases but somewhat formalized within academic framework to create synergies not only within the university (i.e. with psychology and education) but also to link up with other Art and Design institution (i.e. the Latvian Academy of Art and Design, etc.), and come in a creative friction and constant debate in areas related to the Art and Design academia.

The notion to develop the international profile of the programme of study needs to be further reinforced by much more collaborations and partnerships on global scale that will eventually result in higher mobility activity, particularly with the foreign entities: once the international branding of the programme is celebrated, the local the Latvian Academy of Art, and alike, will come unto the board more willingly.

While the limited funding ERASMUS + can be considered, and perhaps the stress level some of the teachers may feel while traveling abroad, this trajectory should be sustained and the programme should aggressively pursue and expand the scope of its international teachers. Very few faculty members do teach abroad, namely due to the insufficient ease of the use of the English language, but they should be encouraged to travel outward nevertheless.

The triangulation between faculty, industry, and administration should be balanced out. While the faculty is composed of a few fully elected faculty members and working professionals who may provide a strong link to the industry, the link with the administration has a great deal of potential to be strengthened. The vulnerable aspect is the interest of the working professionals in their own respective careers, whereby teaching while energising is not the focus for them. It was surprising to hear (during the university visit), that some of the teachers, albeit seasoned professionals, did not feel particularly connected to the PBSP 'Art', only to the course they teach and to the students.

The technical support for the programme is laudable. During the tour of the facilities around the premises, the committee had seen a few studios for drawing and painting as well as design studios, the IT facilities with Mac and PC based platforms (including appropriate software for Graphics and Interior such as the Adobe Creative suite, Autocad, Archicad, 3D Studio Max, Maya etc), fabrication lab with an excessive number of 3D printers. It is evident that these facilities are more than satisfactory for the study programme under evaluation, and display optimism in the success of the programme.

1. Management of the Study Field

Analysis

According to the self-assessment report (hereinafter - SER), the University of Latvia (hereinafter - University or UL) has defined both its main directions of strategic development and how they correspond to the needs of the economy and development trends.

The University points out (SER, p.34) that the demand for highly qualified, knowledgeable designers

has not decreased in recent years, as evidenced by the results of employer surveys and interviews with industry specialists (employers most often point out that companies have and will require UI / UX designers). The University bases its conclusions on the demand for design students in the labor market on the forecasts of the Ministry of Economics of Latvia, which envisages the fastest growth in the number of employees in commercial services, concluding that the development of digital design products is closely related. It is emphasized that with the development of information and communication technologies, the design profession with the ability to solve non-standard problem situations, using the opportunities offered by new technologies, was able to figure out technological solutions both in their use and in the creation of new, innovative products.

SER widely discusses the study of the "Art" programme in other universities, as well as emphasizes that the University of Latvia offers a relatively large number of traditional design learning methods - sketching, drawing, painting, etc., which allows to develop creativity.

(SER, p.37) analyzes data on jobs and the amount of remuneration in each of the study programme "Art" directions (Graphic Design and Interior Design), which allows to see the economic potential of each study field and students' opportunities in the future within the Latvian economy.

When describing the directions of the study programme "Art", as well as defining the future trends of Graphic Design and Interior Design, SER has an imbalance between the future visions of the programme. The vision of the future of graphic design is clearly stronger, more achievable and more clearly defined. During the two-day sessions, meeting with the Study Directors, lecturers and students, it became even more crystallized and confirmed. Graphic design was presented very strongly, widely informed about and represented by strong and knowledgeable lecturers, as well as by the representatives of the vast majority of students and employers.

The University also states (SER, p.40) that the development goal of the study field is to ensure research-based and innovative design studies that correspond to the needs of the Latvian and global labor market as well as to prepare qualified specialists in the field of interior and graphic design ensuring them the respective skills, knowledge and competences. The goal of the study field conforms to the strategic goal of the UL - to ensure science-based studies applying modern and competitive education technologies, promoting a multidisciplinary and professionally oriented approach.

As described in the report, the study programme "Art" in addition to the set goals of the University of Latvia has set its own development principles (SER, pp.0-41), which are in line with the Latvian National Development Plan 2014-2020. and "Latvia's Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030". As described in the report (SER, p.47), the University of Latvia has a branched and extensive management structure that supports the study process and the development of the study field "Arts". The functions of the structural parts and administrative staff are widely described, which gives a broad insight into the responsibilities and support possibilities of the study programme.

With respect to the structure of the management of the study field and the relevant study programme to be oriented towards the development of the study field, the decision-taking is only partially efficient. According to the description of the structure, not only the administration and the teaching staff, but also students and industry representatives are involved in the operation and development of the study programme, but in conversations with students, it was established that the main support for students in the study process are teachers, who provide both informative and administrative information. Teachers also provide the opinion of employers, as they are practicing professionals in their field. In addition, the talks highlighted the clear need for a Deputy Director or Programme Coordinator, who could be a partner between industry and academia, as well as a

professional advisor since in meeting with employers' representatives and alumni, it became clear that cooperation in this area was not satisfactory developed.

The University has described in a report (SER, p.52) how the admission process is regulated, what are the admission rules and the subordinate orders that determine the procedures for a particular academic year. The description mentions situations where the prospective student has to take the centralized exams, when he / she is exempt from them and what are the additional requirements in this case. It also describes in detail the opportunities for students to study at a later stage of education (SER, p.52) or to receive recognition of prior formal and non-formal education. The university further explains how many students have used such an opportunity, showing how such an opportunity is used effectively and is indeed available. In conversations with students and graduates, it was found that this process works well and is used successfully.

According to the self-assessment report, the University has established a unified computerized plagiarism control system (SER, p.58), which limits the violation of the principles of academic integrity. Within this system, a detailed examination of students' final theses and doctoral theses is possible. The university describes that a system of actions has been developed if signs of plagiarism are detected. This system is regularly improved. The control system is currently used by 7 Latvian higher education institutions. The SER describes situations that are considered to be a breach of academic integrity, as well as what sanctions are in place.

The University's self-assessment report (SER, p.60) describes that the information posted on the University of Latvia website (in Latvian and English) provides a complete insight into the study programmes, as well as provides important additional information on study opportunities and levels, student life, events, conferences, science, collaboration and a question-and-answer section. The information provided fully corresponds to the information available in the official registers and there is a person responsible for guaranteeing this.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

When describing the directions of the study programme "Art", as well as defining the future trends of Graphic Design and Interior Design, SER has an imbalance between the future visions of the programme. The vision of the future of graphic design is clearly stronger, more achievable and more clearly defined. During the two-day sessions, meeting with the Study Directors, lecturers and students, it became even more crystallized and confirmed. Graphic design was presented very strongly, widely informed about and represented by strong and knowledgeable lecturers, as well as by the representatives of the vast majority of students and employers.

The structure of the university has been worked on for an extensive period of time and the structure and the respective study programmes are oriented towards the development of the study field. In conversations with students, it was established that the main support for students in the study process is teachers, who provide both informative and administrative information. Meeting with employers' representatives and alumni, it became clear that cooperation in this area was not developed. The negotiations highlighted the clear need for a Deputy Director or Programme Coordinator, who could be a partner between industry and academia, as well as a professional advisor.

Strengths:

1.The goals of the study field are clearly defined and the successes of the graduates are attainable through:

- a) strong, interested and knowledgeable teachers who are ready to support the development of their students outside the learning process;
- b) lecturers who are professional specialists in their field, who ensure the connection of the study programme with the real situation;
- c) strongly developed graphics study programme, with a far-reaching vision of future development;
- d) traditional design study methods offered in sketching, drawing, painting, etc., which allows to develop creativity and professionalism;
- c) readily available material, technological and informative resources and their sufficiency to promote the study process;
- d) the process of admission of students as well as opportunities for students to study at a later stage of education or to receive recognition of previously acquired formal and non-formal education;
- e) developed plagiarism detection and control system;

2. The University website contains extensive information about the study field programme, as well as additional information that gives an idea of the study process.

Weaknesses:

- 1. Within the structure of the management of the study field and its relevant study programme, the decision-taking is only partially efficient.
- 2. Professional lecturers are not proactive in improving the study programme;
- 3. The vision of the future (according to global tendencies) development of the Interior Design programme is not developed;
- 5. Computer programs to be acquired within the study programmes are not listed in one place, but under each separate study module.

2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

According to the Self Evaluation Report (SER, p.62) the University has devised and implemented a robust Quality Assurance (hereinafter - QA) policy and activity. This system for the QA exercises involves all members of the University from the top to bottom and vice versa, this includes higher management to faculty, students, alumni, and stakeholders. This policy is publicly available through the University's various publications as well as the official site.

The Self Study Report (SER, p.66) provides full details for the whole process of the QA activity and gives proof on the methods used in the collection of data as well as the evaluation, analysis and implementations, involving higher management of the University to faculty, students, graduates and stakeholders. The reviewing which follows a series of surveys conducted among students, alumni and stakeholders involves the Study Programme Director, the Coordinator of the Study Field, the Council of the Study Field, the Faculty Council as well as the University's Senate and Council.

This is performed in accordance with the procedure specified in Regulations on study programmes and continuing education at the University of Latvia and include the following steps:

- elaboration of the study programme concept in agreement with the Vice Rector and the Dean of the Faculty, and its approval by the Faculty Council;
- evaluation of the study programme concept with the assistance of experts and subsequent approval by the UL Study Programme Quality Assessment Board (SP QAB);
- elaboration of the full study programme, evaluation of the same with the assistance of experts, and subsequent approval by the Faculty Council, the SP QAB and UL Senate.

The SER lists extensively the collection and analysis of comments made for the specific study field. There seems to be a logical hierarchy and order in the collection of information going from students to faculty to director of study programme and director of study field.

The quality assurance activity is carried out on a cycle of a yearly basis. As described in the report (SER, p.74) each year the coordinator of the study field in cooperation with the study programme directors prepares a report on the operation of the study field and the programmes therein during the academic year. During the preparation of the report, statistical data is collected and analysed, and the obtained information is used for the development and implementation of the improvements to the study plan. The report includes the following data, which are collected and analysed annually:

- the list and the total number of higher education institutions (hereinafter - HEIs) in Latvia which implement study fields;
- number of study programmes in other study fields implemented by HEI, broken down by study level and indicating the total number;
- description of study programmes implemented in other study fields by HEIs;
- the number of students in the programmes, indicating the total number, the number of students matriculated in the 1st study year, the number of graduates;
- mobility of teaching staff during the reference period;
- involvement of employers in programmes during the reporting period;
- number of programme students studying abroad in exchange programmes;
- number of international students in programmes;
- summary of the results and analysis of the students' survey on the study courses of the programme;
- summary of the results and analysis of the student survey on the programme as a whole.

The University of Latvia applies the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) to ensure the quality of studies. Information on how the ESG are respected when assuring the quality of studies is well provided in the Self Evaluation Report (SER, pp. 62-79). The UL develops its Quality Assurance Policy, which is part of the strategic management of the University and complies with the Republic of Latvia regulatory requirements set for external quality assessment of higher education, gearing it towards the national and international context in higher education and research. The UL has specified clear aims and measures towards collecting data for all levels of its students and faculty in all study programmes and study fields which are integrated into a joint quality assurance system throughout the establishment. Each year the coordinator of the study field in cooperation with the study programme directors prepares a report on the operation of the study field and the programmes therein during the academic year. During the preparation of the report, statistical data is collected and analysed, and the obtained information is used for the development and implementation of the improvements to the study plan. It is also worth mentioning that the UL has established a notion for quality culture and this is something that is implemented in the philosophy for all the Quality Assurance exercises that the University is operating, reinforced by the fact that the University extends the involvement of stakeholders, employers and past students in this process.

Concrete examples of how the obtained information is used for the improvement of the Study field are described in Part III, Chapter 2 of the Self Evaluation Report.

It is noted that all the descriptions for the Internal Quality Assurance System are well laid out and analysed in the SER, proving that the gathered data (feedback, statistics) is used efficiently to improve the study field. However, this had not come out so strongly during the visit mainly because of the fact that in some of the sessions that were held during the visit the sample of persons that

constituted each session was not big enough nor diverse enough to guarantee the success of the Quality Assurance System. This sample mainly refers to alumni and stakeholders but also to some teaching staff too.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

To conclude, it was made clear by the SER that the UL has established a quality policy and has developed and maintains a quality assurance system, which contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programme. The procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programme of the study field and the feedback mechanisms have been defined and they are logical, efficient, and available for all stakeholders. This is carried out on a regular basis and there is an immediate effect on any improvement for the study programme/field. It was also made evident that the University to maintain its quality policy may involve a stronger participation from the alumni and stakeholders, allowing a stronger polyphony and diverse input.

Strengths:

1. Inclusion of all levels of participants in the quality assurance exercise;
2. The development of a holistic quality assurance culture.

Weaknesses:

1. Not a strong input from alumni and stakeholders;
2. More engagement of the teaching faculty of the study programme to the Internal Quality Assurance system.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

SER 3.1., the study field receives funds from the state budget as well as tuition fees. The factors affecting the funding are number of state funded study places, baseline cost of the study place, level of the study programme as well cost ratio in similar programmes in other HEIs. In the spring semester of 2020, the only study programme in the study field “Art” had six state funded study places. During an on site visit it was mentioned that it is planned to increase the amount of state funded study places to twelve, allocating three places in each study year.

Tuition fees for each programme in UL are determined annually based on the estimated cost of the study place, expected number of students and market situation, it is a centralised process. The core structural unit implementing the study programme plans the tuition fee revenue for the calendar year and submits it to the Department of Studies, which later collects it and submits it to the Finance and Accounting Department for the overall UL budget. The faculties concerned in collaboration with the Finance and Accounting Department plan the direct costs of study programme for the fiscal year and afterwards a draft of the UL budget prepared by the upper mentioned department is presented to the UL Senate Finance and Budget Commission by the Chancellor. The budget of UL is approved in the Senate.

After the approval, the estimated revenue and expenditure of the respective core structural unit are imported in the IT system of UL and it provides an opportunity to track the financial flow in the structural unit. The dean and executive director of the faculty are responsible for rational use of the set budget as well as implementing it.

Baseline costs, listed in SER 3.1. of the study field consists of direct and direct eligible costs of the study field, eg., teaching staff, materials, services and premises that make up 74% of the study programme cost. The calculation of the study field base cost is shown in annex "Calculation of the self-cost of the study programme", it includes a detailed description of factors influencing the self cost, as well as evaluation of the income from tuition fees and comparison of self-cost to the income based on the number of students attending the programme.

SER 3.1., the scientific activities in the study field are funded from different sources eg., base and performance funding, contractual research attracted by the faculty, state research programme resources and subsidy, as well as from faculty's self earnings from different projects. The base and performance scientific funding is allocated to UL based on 12.11.2013. 1316 "Procedure in which to calculate and allot the base funding to scientific institutions" and the amount each UL structural unit receives is determined by internal normative documents in compliance with the budget estimate approved by the UL administration. During an on site visit academic staff talked about the opportunity to take a half a year vacation for creative work once every five years.

11.06.2019. 1/148 "On confirmation of the support procedure for the scientific development of the UL" regulates the support that can be received for scientific research, eg. participation in international conferences or publishing scientific articles. Every year the faculty allocates funding for business trips related to participation in international conferences. The faculty can also apply for centralised support according to the upper mentioned UL regulations. 1/435 "On confirming the spending the expenses of one unit" envisages additional funding for writing applications to international projects. The research funding contributes to expanding the material resources of the study field as well by increasing the amount of printed books and different database subscriptions, that can later on be used by students in their study process and research.

In conclusion, there is a system financing the scientific research and artistic creation in place and it is centralised in the whole UL. The support for research and artistic activities promotes the scientific development of the academic staff. A positive aspect is the additional funding available for applying to international projects, that promotes international development of the study field.

The studies of the field are organised in the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art (hereinafter - FEPA) building in Imantas 7. As seen during on-site visit, the whole building is accessible to people with movement impairments, a specific lifting device is attached to the stairs and there are also specifically equipped restrooms. In 2023 the FEPA is planning to move to another building "Rakstu māja" in UL Academic centre in Torņakalns.

There are 38 rooms available with a capacity of 12 to 200 people, most of the rooms have easily movable furniture, allowing to reorganise the class accordingly.

All study rooms are equipped with computers and multimedia projecting equipment, some rooms have an interactive board and document camera and the equipment that ensures organising video conferences. There are four computer classes - one is equipped with iMac computers and three with PC computers operating on Windows 10 containing Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus software. The computer classes are provided with the necessary software, to ensure the quality of the studies and honing students' practical skills. More than 130 000 EUR from EU funds were attracted during the

accounting period, allowing to equip two new computer classes, purchase laser cutter, renew the photo cameras and ensure the purchase of professional software licenses and their subscription for four years.

UL Library is accredited until 2022 in the status of National Library. It is possible for students to order a book or material from all of the UL libraries, any library in Latvia or even from other libraries abroad. Services, both free of charge and for a fee, offered by the library are electronic ordering or reservation or extension of the printed resources, use of the information resources, printing, copying, scanning, fax services, user training, counselling etc., described in detail in the study field assessment report 3.3. The library offers the opportunity to work or study in it and shape their study works with the help of photocopiers, printers, scanners etc. There are a total of 2958 titles in 7538 copies in the UL library collection of printed resources in Latvian, English, Russian and other languages. In cooperation with the UL IT Department, the library ensures free access to the e-resources repository of UL that is regularly replenished. The UL library also offers 34 e-resources platforms that contain e-books, reference resources, tools, eg., EBSO Academic search complete, Emerald Insight, Letonika, Oxford Journals and others stated in the SER p. 3.3.

Once a year the UL library evaluates the usage of the available databases as well as evaluates the order for new printed and electronic resources submitted by the faculty. The study process is located in the UL information system, e-studies are located in Moodle platform, available for both students and academic staff. The platform can be used to give students tasks, provide study materials and video lectures, show evaluation and study results in different courses as was shown by the on-site demonstration.

In conclusion available infrastructure, material and informative resources are sufficient and promote the study process. The software offered to students is up to date and sufficient to study as well as fulfil the requirements in the study programme of the study field "Art". Used platforms, such as on-site computer rooms and classrooms as well as Moodle offers the opportunity to diversify the study process and adjust it to specific study courses. There is a system for renewing and purchasing both material and informative resources, the faculty has also successfully used financial resources obtained through projects.

In the UL there are three academic staff groups - those who hold their academic positions for a limited period on the basis of elections, acting academic staff and visiting academics as well as hourly-paid staff.

For the elected academic positions recruitment and selection are regulated by the Regulatory enactments on academic and administrative positions at the University of Latvia that correspond to demands in the Law of Higher Education Institutions. According to it there are following academic positions in UL - professor, associate professor, senior researcher, lecturer, researcher, assistant and research assistant. The decisions on available positions are made by faculties and, if the Senate gives its approval, a public contest is announced. Applicants must meet the criteria stated in the upper mentioned normatives, deliver a public lecture that is evaluated by two reviewers, who issue their opinion of the quality of the lecture. The election is carried out by the decision making body of the relevant department - Faculty council for teaching staff and Council of the professors in the relevant field in case of professors or associate professors. Lecturers are elected for the term of six years, at the end of which the faculty decides whether to announce the open position. The faculty has two international lecturers, however attracting them depends on several aspects that were discussed during the on site visit, one of them is offered salary. The positions are an open call and applicants approach the faculty expressing their will to work in it.

Both in the self-assessment report as well as during on-site visit, it was possible to see that academic staff have a lot of different professionals, working in the respective fields. Most of the academic staff met during on-site visit work in the field of graphic design and interior design. However, the relationship between academic staff and students often excludes the decision-making body of the faculty and does not follow any procedure, being rather non-formal and excluding the ability to evaluate the information flow between students, teaching staff and the decision-making body. Faculty council, Department of Art and Technology meetings, ensuring the quality of selected lecturers.

The Department of Art and Technology ensures the involvement of academic staff in delivering the courses, and the head of the department is also responsible for the distribution of the teaching loads. The loads differentiate between academic staff members from 0,25 to a full load - it can be explained by the fact that some specific study courses are delivered for small groups of students. Every five years academic staff members can take a half a year vacation for creational activities, such practice provides the opportunity for the staff members to continue their artistic pursuits.

During the accounting period, academic staff have participated in scientific conferences and artistic innovation/creation activities, eg., participation in 21 international art exhibitions, implementation of digital and interactive projects, development and rebranding trademarks in Latvia, Europe and Russia, design of 46 books, creating promo catalogues and other activities stated in detail in the SER p. Participation in professional organisations both in Latvia and internationally has also increased, promoting professional development as well.

One of the aspects stipulated by the UL Development strategy 2016-2020 is the advancement of the UL academic staff professional development system. As part of developing the system, UL Department of Studies conducted an electronic survey to gather the information on academic staff's professional development needs. A centralised UL academic staff professional development system is introduced by amending internal normatives and offers academic staff professional development opportunities. The UL Department of Studies and the Adult Education Centre of the FEPA provide informative, methodological support as well as counselling to academic staff. The upper mentioned centre offers a vocational development programme "Didactics of Higher Education: modern theories and practices" as well as other continuing education programmes mentioned in the self-assessment report part 3.5. All offered programmes have been developed by analysing the professional development needs of the academic staff in context with higher education trends.

The UL academic staff has the opportunity to improve their English skills by completing the continuing training programme "Professional English language Course for Academic Staff" and several of the academic staff members have already used it. In the self-assessment report part 3.5., the academic staff development system is effective and being used by academic staff members of study field "Art" to improve their skills and competences.

The incoming and outgoing mobility of the academic staff is relatively low, stated both in SER p. Since year 2014/2015 only three incoming guest lecturers have come to the FEPA and 9 academic staff members have gone abroad for exchanges. During on site visit only one of the academic staff members attending was about to go on Erasmus+ exchange programme. It can be explained by several factors - restricted funding, language barrier of the academic staff as well as personal issues, such as inability to take a leave for half a year from their job in the field or family related considerations. However, the mobility has positive dynamics and the development plans of the field envisage measures for its improvement.

In conclusion - the attraction of highly skilled academic staff is implemented and the opportunity to apply for academic positions are open and available, however, it could be improved by inviting field professionals to apply for open positions. The process of electing academic staff members is carried out on different levels, making it transparent and ensuring the quality of the elected staff. The academic workload and research, as well as artistic creation workload, is balanced, a lot of teaching staff members are also working in the field and they are provided with an opportunity to take a vacation for their creative pursuits. The amount of local and international artistic projects stated in the self-assessment reports suggests that academic staff members are active in their artistic endeavours. The development needs of academic staff were assessed through a survey and they are offered various continuous education courses and training, to improve their knowledge, skills and competencies.

The students of the UL have access to academic support, career development support and psychological support. The academic support provides students with information and advice on study issues for the entire time of studies. It is managed centrally by the UL Department of Student Services and the responsible people within the faculties - director of the study programme, study advisor, trustee, mentor, coordinator, academic staff. It includes student interest representation by student council, informing students about different aspects of the study process and study programme. Students can also get a mentor - a senior student that tells the student more about the study process.

Career development support provides opportunities to develop soft skills of the students, improve their abilities and experience, as well as help to develop the ability to make career concerning decisions. There are several services provided by the Career Centre, the institution responsible for career development support - individual counselling, workshops for career planning, electronic resources that contain information about career planning issues, labour market situation, job and internship vacancies.

The psychological support is provided by the Department of Student Services. Students have the opportunity to consult with psychologists, receive psychological support in case of personal or study issues. The counselling can be done both on-site or through a call.

Other support mechanisms include special events for integrating exchange students, professional assessment of infrastructure accessibility, trustees that follow students' learning outcomes and help to adapt to higher education as well as develop the study skills of students.

All students can apply for different scholarships and grants to cover their living expenses or fund their creative work. The study field provides paper and cardboard for all students, however, they need to have their own materials, eg., acrylics or watercolour to fulfil the demands of base study courses. The students can apply for a one-time scholarship up to 400 EUR to cover expenses associated with materials for the study process. To develop their own project ideas, students can apply to the Business incubator.

In conclusion, students receive sufficient support from different institutions.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

In conclusion the resources and provision of the study field are sufficient and promote the study process. Several key aspects are tackled - accessibility, psychological support. Procedures for planning budget, electing staff members, renewing resources and materials are transparent and efficient. Several continuous education programmes are offered to the academic staff and are used

and effective. Many of the academic staff members are working professionals and it improves the connection between the field and the study field. The support offered to students is sufficient, it offers various opportunities from counselling about the study process to applying for scholarships and different grants. The communication between the decision making body of the study field and students is insufficient, since most of it stays in non formal communication between students and academic staff members. The participation of academic staff in mobility programmes is low and needs to be improved.

Strengths:

1. Processes such as budget planning, academic staff election, academic staff competence assessment and improvement are well regulated and transparent;
2. Premises are suitable for people with functional impairments;
3. Academic staff election process is done in different levels, ensuring the quality of the staff;
4. Students can receive psychological, career development and academic support;
5. The available material, technological and informative resources are sufficient and promote study process;
6. Many academic staff members are working professionals;
7. UL offers opportunities to academic staff for continuous education and they are used;
8. There are support mechanisms for promoting scientific research, creative, artistic activities and participation in different projects;
9. Involvement in international projects is emphasized by allocating additional funding for applying to international projects.

Weaknesses

1. Mobility of the academic staff is low;
2. Attracting skilful academic staff is not proactive and could be improved by inviting competent field representatives to apply to the open positions;

4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

According to the Self Evaluation Report (SER, p. 99), the scientific research in the Study field is directed towards the exploration of topical design challenges in Latvia and in the world, focusing on the labour market, the development of user-centred projects, the design thinking, creative and technological innovations, as well as the theoretical aspects of art and design and education. This is of direct and high relevance.

The relation between scientific research and/or artistic creation in the study field and the study process are well defined and ensured, and it is efficient, being integrated in the study process in the study programme. This is made evident through the encouragement of different exhibitions – solo exhibitions of the academic staff and group exhibitions, exhibitions of students' works and displays of free creative projects which were regularly organized in the faculty premises (for example, in 2018 students had a competition exhibition "The Green Latvia" . The Self Evaluation report provides evidence of an international involvement of both faculty and students in the field of scientific research and/or artistic creation.

The Self Evaluation Report lists various activities of research participation as well as artistic creation involving both faculty and students. These activities concentrate in interdisciplinary levels about art and culture, manifestation of the visual culture and the visual literacy phenomenon etc. The report

also lists specific projects (international) in which faculty and students were involved in the last 5 years. Notably and according to the Self Evaluation Report (SER, p. 102) this activity includes among others:

- the European Art and Culture Education Observatory, the confirmation agreement was signed with the UL (the UL cooperation representative), with the participation of UNESCO Latvian National commission, representatives from the Latvian Academy of Culture and Latvian Music Academy.
- Participation of students in a study visit in Berlin; for improving the professional competence in the frame of study courses History of Art I and Design History I a group of students visited Bauhaus 100 anniversary exhibitions and participated in creative workshops
- Various participations in International Exhibitions by the teaching team. All in all, the academic staff of the Study field have participated in 21 international art exhibitions (SER, p. 103)

The University supports the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research and/or artistic creation, by providing financial support as well as other support such as leave of absence (sabbatical), mobility etc. According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, lecturers have the opportunity to use six calendar months of academic leave for scientific research or scientific work outside their workplace once during the election period (this also applies to creative work). Furthermore members of the teaching staff have the possibility to apply for funding for lectures and travel exchanges to other Universities (Augsburg (Germany) and Copenhagen (Denmark) with related study programs in 2019 and 2020, (SER, p. 104) as well as funding for art production and exhibitions (this opportunity was used to finance the creation of works and the organization of an exhibition, (SER, p. 104). Additionally the UL's research trend is connected with manifestations of visual culture. The aim of researching visual literacy as a phenomenon is:

- to form the scientific research school of visual literacy in long term in Latvia,
- to actualize the importance of visual literacy in the improvement of all key competences defined by the European Council in the context of lifelong learning and
- to create internationally recognized innovative research ideas and lasting values in long term thus promoting the development of the art science field at the University of Latvia and European education context in general.

The University supports the involvement of the students in scientific research and/or artistic creation, by providing encouragement and support in various national and international competitions and exhibitions. Faculty members have actively engaged in exhibiting students' works and their participation in different competitions:

- Exhibition of students' works in school/university design programmes Design arena 2019, 18.10.2019 - 20.10.2019, Latvia, Curator (the exhibition "Design arena 2019" since 10.2019 travels around design education institutions of Latvia).
- LDS competition School award in design 2019, 01.09.2019 - 04.10.2019, Latvia, Organizer
- Exhibition of students' works in of school/university design programmes Design Island 2018, 01.08.2018 - 04.10.2018.
- LDS competition School award in design 2018, 14.05.2018 - 24.09.2018, Latvia, Organizer
- Exhibition of students' works in of school/university design programmes Design Island 01.05.2017 - 15.10.2017.
- LDS competition School award in design, 01.05.2017 - 20.09.2017.

Further opportunities to involve students in research and artistic activity are listed in the Self

Evaluation Report (SER, pp. 105-106).

The study process has been looking into providing innovative solutions into its activity and this has mainly concentrated on focusing on the new technologies. Various new synergies were implemented with local as well as international fields to achieve the innovation goal. According to the Self Evaluation Report (SER, p. 107) a collaboration with Accenture Latvia has resulted in the development of the study course 'Design of digital products' where students encounter the mechanisms of creating and testing innovations in a direct way, considering the wishes and needs of product users (e.g., during the course students make prototypes of applications for smart gadgets going through a full design thinking cycle).

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

During the 2-day visit it was positive to note that the description of Scientific Research and Artistic Creation is in line and meets the criteria listed in the Self Evaluation Report. In short the directions of scientific research and/or artistic creation in the study field comply with the development aims of the UL and they are relevant to the study field and the relevant industry. The relation between scientific research and/or artistic creation in the study field and the study process is defined and it is efficient. The UL has managed to establish International cooperation in the field of scientific research and/or artistic creation within the study field and the relevant study programmes and has developed mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff as well as students in scientific research and/or artistic creation.

Strengths:

1. Interdisciplinary research activity;
2. Involvement of students into research projects and artistic activity;
3. The notion to get involved in research connected with visual culture in order to increase the visual literacy.

Weaknesses:

1. Faculty and student involvement in scientific research and/or artistic creation at a more international level outside the geographical boundaries of Latvia needs to be further encouraged, exploited and implemented.

5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

The Self-evaluation report (SER) states a regular cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, the Latvian Association of printing businesses (LPUA) - enabling opportunities for students and academic staff to participate in the events – conferences, seminars, exhibitions, competitions of students' works, etc. organized by the education working group of the European Federation for Print & Digital Communication Intergraf, with Latvian Association of Book Publishers and Latvian Association of Press Publishers, Latvian Advertisement Association and Latvian Packaging Association, Latvian Designers' Association, UNESCO Latvian National commission, National Culture heritage office, Latvian National culture centre, foundation "Iespējamā misija", as well as the IT109 consortium Accenture Latvian branch, "Jelgavas Tipogrāfija", Ltd., local municipalities of Latvia and their educational institutions (SER, p. 109).

Enforcing further internationalizations and broadening the cooperation network, the academic staff of the UL Professional Bachelor Study Programme (hereinafter - PBSP) "Art" in cooperation with the Latvian Designers' Association organized an international conference devoted to the latest developments in design and related fields in October 2020, gathering participants from Latvia, Great Britain, Germany, Australia, Russia, Byelorussia and Estonia (SER, p. 109).

There is also well established cooperation with several local companies looking for employees and trainees in the design field, for instance the Latvian Association of printing businesses (LPUA). There are several funded project collaborations; the project "Conception of transformable systems of exhibition expositions" with the UL Foundation, project "Religious text as a contemporary environmental object" with Evangelic Lutheran church of Latvia and others (SER, p. 109-110)

The listed collaboration with employers' organisations is satisfactory; it is surely improving learning outcomes, student's acquaintances with the working environment, boosting their motivation and the quality of the study process in general.

On the other hand, the list of cooperation agreements with higher education institutions/ colleges outside Latvia is quite limited, (Annex - List of cooperation agreements), even though there are new cooperation agreements in development perspective - Augsburg University (Germany), Tallinn Art Academy (Estonia), Copenhagen Royal Art Academy (Denmark), according to the Self-evaluation report (SER, p. 110). Broadening cooperation networks as a possibility to activate the attraction of guest lecturers thus improving the methods of implementing the study courses and diversifying of the study forms is important and necessary.

Incoming and outgoing academic staff mobility rate is low; there was no academic staff mobility during the academic year 2016/2017, and only one outgoing in the following year. Interestingly during pre-pandemic and pandemic period academic staff mobility was slightly higher. As expressed in the meeting with the academic staff, teachers are interested in mobility programmes, but largely overburdened with obligations to be able to participate.

There are visible efforts to increase academic staff incoming mobility, the UL is inviting foreign lecturers (as from Australia) and plans future cooperation. Further cooperation opportunities are being discussed with PhD in Arts and Film Studies (Zhejiang University) from China, PhD candidate in Art History (University of Tours) from France, PhD Arts, Theatre and Multimedia Technologies Luca Bochicchio (University of Genova) from Italy, and MA Contemporary Art Creation, Doctor of Arts candidate (Aalto University) from Finland (SER, p. 111).

The number of foreign exchange students in the study programme in comparison with the previous accreditation period has increased several times, which is clearly visible from the statistical data; from only one student in 2014/2015 to 30 in the last year, in spite of pandemic circumstances (Appendix - Statistical data on student mobility). As the exchange students in the programme were mainly from the Far East countries, due to pandemic of Covid-19, the number of exchanges is expected to drop.

University is increasing courses offered in English continuously, with the intent to attract more foreign students. The courses are offered in English (in case of a larger group of students) or bilingual, joining the existing students group. Foreign students are generally interested in study courses of practical line - Drawing I, Painting I, Composition in design I and II, Interior designing I and Graphic programs I and II, because these courses can be attended with little or no prior knowledge.

Low outgoing student mobility rate is due to difficulties to balance work and university obligations, as 51% of the students work during study: 37% of them are full time employed and 14% are engaged in temporary jobs. (The Self-evaluation report, p. 45). General students 'mobility experiences are highly positive and often lead to new working opportunities (as detected during meeting with graduates).

The students independently choose the place of doing the professional internship or are offered the position by the faculty. The internship (practice) consists of Research Practice I and II (4 CP), Plein Air I and II (4 CP) and Professional Practice in design I, II and III (total 15 CP), lasting 15 weeks. Completing each stage of the professional internship with the employer (together 3), the student submits a report on the internship – a Portfolio (A4 size). The submitted portfolios are presented and publicly discussed at the end of each part of the internship in the final seminar.

The UL delivered several proposals for master's level study programme (Social Design programme and Design for Science and Education programme) that were not licenced. Currently the UL is developing the possibility of licensing an interdisciplinary master's level program, a module in the study programme of education "Technology Innovation and Design for Education", which would be implemented together with foreign cooperation partners. Thanks to the participation in ENO (The European Network of Observatories in the Field of Arts and Cultural Education), several potential partners were obtained and an interdisciplinary master's study programme is planned to develop in the next planning period (SER, p. 113).

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

During the assessment visit to the UL and meeting with various participants, conclusions proved to be in tune with the SER, information on the described collaborations were extended and elaborated, despite the fact that meeting with employers did not gather adequate representatives. Internalisation and activating mobility are recognized as weaker points by the UL and there are detected plans to improve it. The master's level programme proposals were unsuccessful in previous attempts, but there is a detected plan to develop an interdisciplinary programme, relying on cooperation inside UL.

Strengths:

1. High students motivation;
2. Good communication and cooperation between students and teachers, developed through various project collaborations;
3. Elaborated collaboration with professional institutions in Latvia;
4. High percentage of employment of students and graduates in professional field before and/or shortly after graduation.

Weaknesses:

1. Low activity of mobility programmes: students' in-coming mobility has increased several times, but outgoing students and academic staff mobility is still low; teachers express problems of being overburdened, while students lack motivation for mobility programmes
2. Internalization of the programme is necessary – efforts to establish international profile;
3. Enforcing further collaboration with professional institution is needed, not just on project to project base (for instance graduates express lack of advertising and presentation skills) .

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

Analysis

After recommendations received from experts in the previous accreditation of the PBSP “Art” several changes have been introduced in the Study field. The plan of the study programme has been adjusted, improvements are clearly visible. The programme control and governance system has been improved; establishing a new structural unit – Department of Art and Technologies and introducing changes in the composition of the Board of Study programmes (since 2020 – Board of the Study field).

Previous accreditation also recommended providing Master’s degree study, involving Latvian and foreign teachers in art lectures, which hasn’t been implemented, due to compliance with the education reform currently taking place in Latvia. Several attempts to open a Master’s degree have not been successful, but the UL is developing the possibility of licensing an interdisciplinary master’s level program, which would be implemented together with foreign cooperation partners.

The pre-existing cooperation with professional art/ design organizations in Latvia and abroad (Latvian Association of Printing companies (LPUA), Latvian Artists’ union (LAU), European Network of Visual Literacy (ENViL), European Network of Observatories in the Field of Arts and Cultural Education (ENO) was broadened and diversified. The meeting with study programme director, as well as the meeting with the academic staff indicated established cooperation with Latvia Art Academy, strongly recommended by previous assessment. The list of cooperation agreements with higher education institutions/ colleges outside Latvia is quite limited, but a clear development plan is detected.

Implementing several supporting mechanisms, including financial support for lecturers for artistic and scientific activities are important improvements, should be continued and when possible increased.

Previous accreditation has also recommended activating mobility programmes; students’ in-coming mobility has increased several times (Annex to SER - Statistical data on foreign students and teachers) and that is due to the increasing offer of separate courses in English. Outgoing students and academic staff mobility is still low and needs further activation.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Recommendations provided during previous assessment were taken into consideration seriously, according to the SER and the Experts’ visit to the UL. Improvements to the structure of the study programme are visible and developing a masters’ level programme is in progress.

Regarding internalisation policies and activating mobility programmes, inviting foreign lectures had a positive impact on increasing attractiveness of the study programme and it should be more intensified in the future. Outgoing mobility of students and teachers should be more stimulated.

Strengths:

1. Attractiveness of the study programme, high interest of the students in spite of the tuition fee;
2. Increasing interest of foreign students and academic staff.

Weaknesses

1. Noticeable communication gap between student and teachers and governing bodies;
2. The modules of graphic design and interior design are not adequately balanced in the study programme; there is evidently much more interest in graphic design module.

7. Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

- 1 Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study field quality management is ensured in accordance with the quality assurance mechanism and procedures established by the University of Latvia Chapter II, according to (SER, p.62).

The activities targeting the advancement of the study field are planned for a period of six years and guided by the UL Development Strategy, sector and labour market trends, study outcomes by students, relevant stakeholder needs, as well as internal and external (accreditation, licensing) quality assessment recommendations. A detailed mechanism is laid out in (SER, pp. 62-65).

While the contribution of the industry (former graduates or working professionals) to the development of the programme needs improvement, and the business course cluster offered in the programme needs to be revised (partial compliance), it has no bearing on R1 as being fully compliant

- 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

Justification: The design, internal approval, supervision and periodic inspection of the UL study programmes is set in accordance with the relevant external regulations of the Republic of Latvia and the UL internal regulations. The regulations include the description of the study programmes and continuing education programmes implemented by the University of Latvia and their structure, as well as the rules of programme development. The Regulations stipulate that the design of the study programme concept and the full study programme development may be initiated by the UL staff representatives and employees, the UL collegial decision- making institutions, as well as non-UL members (e.g. employers).

The University of Latvia's Quality Policy sets out a set of quality principles, goals and actions required to achieve them, which the University of Latvia implements in accordance with internationally recognized standards in higher education and organization management. The quality management system is implemented in accordance with the TQM (Total Quality Management) principles. The internal quality control of the study field is carried out by the directors of the study programmes, the director of the study field, the council of study field, the dean, the faculty councils, SPQAB and, in case of external quality assessment, the UL Senate. A detailed list of the procedures is given on (SER, p.31)

- 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

Justification: With respect to the QA system, (SER, p.66) provides full details for the whole process of the QA activity and gives proof on the methods used in the collection of data as well as the evaluation, analysis and implementations, involving higher management of the University to faculty, students, graduates and stakeholders. The reviewing which follows a series of surveys conducted among students, alumni and stakeholders involves the Study Programme Director, the Coordinator of the Study Field, the Council of the Study Field, the Faculty Council as well as the University's Senate and Council.

This is performed in accordance with the procedure specified in Regulations on study programmes and continuing education at the University of Latvia and include the following steps: elaboration of the study programme concept in agreement with the Vice Rector and the Dean of the Faculty, and its approval by the Faculty Council; evaluation of the study programme concept with the assistance of experts and subsequent approval by the UL Study Programme Quality Assessment Board (SP QAB); elaboration of the full study programme, evaluation of the same with the assistance of experts, and subsequent approval by the Faculty Council, the SP QAB and UL Senate.

While formally compliant, and notwithstanding the internal approval of the study program, there needs to be a more formalized cooperation between the design industry and the program's development. Currently, the contribution of the industry (former graduates or working professionals) to the development of the program is unconvincing, its is the boat visible in business course cluster offered in the programme

- 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 made public.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Procedure for Developing and Updating Study Courses at the University of Latvia" (UL Order No.1 / 277 of 10.08.2018) stipulates that the description of each study course includes the planned learning outcomes and the criteria for their assessment, as well as publication in the e-learning environment (SER, p.33).

- 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

Justification: In order to ensure modern and effective HR management practice in the organization in accordance with the UL strategy, vision, mission and values, the UL has developed and implemented the "Human Resources Management Policy of the University of Latvia" (UL Senate Decision No 264 of 28.01.2019). It describes the principles and procedures of the University of Latvia in personnel selection, employment relations, provision of motivation system and personnel development. In order to ensure purposeful professional development of the UL academic staff, the University of Latvia elaborated "University of Latvia Academic Staff Development Action Plan 2018-2020" within the framework of the project operational programme "Growth and Employment" 8.2.2. Specific Objective "Strengthening Academic Staff of Institutions of Higher Education in Strategic Specialization Areas" (SER, p.33).

- 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

Justification: The Procedure for Organizing Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the University of Latvia (UL Order No. 1/334 of 22.08.2016) stipulates that the Department of Studies of the University of Latvia organizes surveys for students, graduates and employers centrally each academic year.

The summary of the results of the course and lecturer work is available at three levels: lecturers, study programme directors, deans.

The results of the study surveys are described and analysed in the annual reports of study fields. Information about student achievements is collected at the LUIS (SER, p.33).

- 7 1.6. The higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their quality assurance systems.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The functioning of the system of internal quality assurance of the study fields of the University of Latvia is determined by the "Procedure for the preparation of annual reports of the study fields of the University of Latvia".

The UL study fields are being reaccredited within the set terms.

In order to promote the quality and competitiveness of UL study programmes, the "Order of the University of Latvia Foundation for Quality Improvement of Studies" (UL Order No. 1/149 of 20.04.2018) provides opportunities to receive support within the framework of UL projects for the quality improvement of study programmes and process (SER, p.34).

- 8 R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia is very extensive as evident by (SER, pp.107-110), yet, cooperation with foreign entities in EU and EU academic institutions outside the Baltic States lacks the scope, and if PBSP "Art" wants to stay competitive it needs to focus on foreign markets more.

- 9 R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: PBSP "Arts" is part of the humanities bloc, in which the scientific research is performed in compliance with the needs of the national economy of Latvia. The scientific research in the Study field is directed towards the exploration of topical design challenges in Latvia and in the world, focusing on the labour market, the development of user-centred projects, the design thinking, creative and technological innovations, as well as the theoretical aspects of art and design and education. The scientific research at FEPA enjoys a special role, it is directed towards the solution of education, pedagogy, social, design etc. issues and ensures research-based studies that comply with the market requirements. The faculty also organizes the Students' scientific conference and several annual international scientific conferences in which there also participate the academic staff and students from the Study field. Different events to promote the artistic creation (e.g., annual exhibitions of study works) (SER, p.99).

- 10 R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The HEI fulfilled the first recommendation introducing changes in the governance of the Study field and optimizing the structure of the programme. The requirement of providing a Master's degree programme study has not been fulfilled and the mobility programmes still need further activation.

8. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

1. Improve the communication between administration, the higher level management team on the study field level, the elected and non-elected faculty members, not limited to the students. Meetings with the student council need to be tailored in a more productive framework relevant to the design industry with clear residual strategic goals defined.
2. The rapport between the faculty, particularly the unelected one that works extensively professionally but of a significant importance to the programme, and the programme administrative staff needs to be strengthened and, perhaps, formalized in a more effective official framework.
3. Focus the improvement of the study field with the international markets as the key target.
4. Focus the improvement of the study field with expanding cooperation with professional and industry organizations outside Latvia.

Long-term recommendations

- Improve the academic staff mobility by identifying reasons for the low participation and planning ways to tackle them as well as monitoring the results of used tools and support mechanisms.
- Be more proactive in attracting highly skilled academic staff by inviting skilled field professionals to apply to the open positions.
- Continue developing an interdisciplinary master's level programme through cooperation foreign partners.
- Improve branding of the study field as a part of Design and Arts cluster, visible internationally and highly recognized nationally, particularly amongst the established institutions, academia, and industry.

II. "Art" ASSESSMENT

II. "Art" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

The name of the study programme "Art" is in compliance with the Minister Cabinet Regulation No. 322 of 13 June 2017, with respect to the "Third, fourth and fifth classification levels (educational thematic groups, thematic areas and program groups) and its comparison with the Classification of the Education and Training Sectors (ISCED-F 2013)"[1] as well as in line with the occupational standards (hereinafter - OS) and professional qualification requirements (hereinafter - PQR), implemented in accordance with two professional qualification requirements – Interior Designer (code – 2166 02) and Graphic Designer (code – 2166 03) where Interior designer is specialization of ENVIRONMENT DESIGNER, but Graphic Designer is specialization of COMMUNICATION DESIGNER.

The overall structure of the programme is academically solid enough, to be competitive beyond the national borders, as reflected, first of all, by fairly well-organized academic management scheme, its caliber of outstanding teachers, and the positive responses from the former and current graduates with respect to the programme itself, its essence and the impact it has had on their lives not the least related to the quality of the teachers referred to.

While Communication Designer's OS and Graphic Designer's PQR have been approved by the

Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council 09.06.2021meeting[2], the Environment Designer's OS and Interior Designer's PQR reflects Environment Designer's OS and Interior Designer's PQR have not been approved yet, therefore Interior Designer's OS is aligned with 2008 OS[3], even while the new standard is being considered.

In either case, Communication Designer's (hereinafter - CD) (5th level of professional qualification (hereinafter - PQL) corresponding to the 6th of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (hereinafter - LQF))[4] and Environment Designer's (hereinafter - ED) (5th PQL corresponding to the 6th of the LQF)[5] aims, objectives, and learning outcomes, are interrelated with the overarching goal the study programme "Art" to promote the improvement of students' professional and academic competences in order to be competitive in the contemporary arts industry, driven by the need for the originality of artistic ideas under the changing social economic conditions in the local and international labour market (SER, p.117). Particularly, the CD's tasks in identifying the system of cultural-historical and aesthetic backgrounds and elements of communication design, identifying the means of artistic expression in design development, or improving the selected communication design sketches in accordance with the customer's requirements or project needs, and ED's tasks with respect to research of architectural design, construction and situation of the object, the development of draft project of environmental design object, or in identifying the construction and finishing materials and techniques used in the situation analysis of engineering networks and equipment, just to name a few, as laid out in "Compliance of the study programme "Art" with occupational standards (OS) and professional qualification requirements (PQR)" Both occupational standards and professionals standards may are all but rooted and interrelated with the fundamental functions of arts and the title of the programme.

The interrelation is well reflected in the admission requirements for the professional bachelor of art study programme "Art" (SER, p.123), namely, applicants may receive a total of 1,000 points for this examination, evaluated by a board of programme academic staff, including the programme director, but not limited the structure of geometric shapes, composition and layout, shadowing, form of objects and shadowing. In addition, those deficient in any areas of entrance exams may prepare for the entrance exam, by participating in ten (10) lesson preliminary courses.

Since the last accreditation in 2013, there has been an adjustment in the parameters of the study programme with respect to study goals, tasks and results. As indicated in SER, these changes do not "affect the substance of these parameters, but clarify the wording. Learning outcomes, for example, are defined as the knowledge, skills and competences that students have the opportunity to acquire by learning the content of the programme and that are necessary for their professional activity" (SER, p.120). The expected learning outcomes of the PBSP "Art" is given in Appendix "Mapping of study courses for attaining the study outcomes", their analysis is presented in Part III, Chapter 2.2 (SER, p.55), such as, but not limited to, students succeed in, as regards knowledge: 1) understanding about the most important concepts and regularities of the graphic/interior design domain, knowing the means of expression characteristic to the design language, 2) knowledge about the problems of graphic/interior design and its related spheres and understanding about the formation mechanisms of the possible solutions; as regards to skills: 1) implementing the design idea, orient in the range of traditional and digital visualization technologies and the offer of materials, 2) performing professional, user-centred and innovative action in design domain, applying theoretical knowledge and research results, taking into consideration key principles of the design process; as regards to competences: 1) implementation of the graphic/interior design project, perform the authorship supervision, controlling the quality of work of producing the design product and its correspondence to the conception, the aesthetical and technical quality as well as requirements of the environment protection and safety norms, 2) performing the work individually or

in a team, make decisions according to the competence, solve conflict situations taking responsibility for the results of one's own work or the team (28 study courses) (SER, p.127).

The program director, while fairly new to the programme stewardship (during the visit the committee was informed the new appointment has been a year), has respected the recommendations given by employers and specialists of the field, by placing emphasis on the development of strategic and innovative skills, the development of cooperation and participation skills within the industry via a cluster of new courses, including but limited to constantly attracting a high caliber teaching staff.

The mapping of the courses reflects the national standard of professional higher education, the international trends of implementing such a bachelor's study programme in comparison with educational institutions of West European countries and Baltic countries, and the coherence in course cycle strategies with emphasis on professional, user-centred and innovative approach in design discipline, while applying theoretical knowledge and research through a number of advanced courses (SER, p.126).

Because the PBSP "Art" is implemented in the form of full-time regular studies (4 years) and part-time regular studies (4 years and 5 months), it gives good alternatives for both working professionals and fresh high school graduates to pursue their respective careers. The majority of the students pay for their education, and, as such, many work parallel to their studies: in real life scenarios, the split between part-time and full time studies allows for flexibility to finish their studies in the case of financial or other unexpected hardships.

[1] <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitiba-klasifikaciju>

[2] <https://www.visc.gov.lv/lv/profesiju-standarti-un-profesionalas-kvalifikacijas-prasibas>

[3] <https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/ps0414.pdf>

[4] See "Compliance of the study programme "Art" with occupational standards (OS) and professional qualification requirements (PQR)

[5] See "Compliance of the study programme "Art" with occupational standards (OS) and professional qualification requirements (PQR)

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The visiting assessment confirms the Self-Evaluation Report's (SER) of the Study field "Arts" (PBSP) claim that the title of the study programme "Art" is "directly connected with the professional degree that is awarded to students – it is the professional bachelor's degree in art" and that the goals, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are derived from the occupational standards (Interior designer and Graphic designer) (SER, p.122).

Strengths:

1. The caliber of teachers: a few fully elected faculty members in conjunction with those who provide a strong link to the local and international design industry.

2. The impact of quality in teaching reflected: with respect to learning outcomes of knowledge, such as proficiency in the most important concepts and regularities of the graphic/interior design domain (a), harnessing skills by means of performing professional, user-centred and innovative action in design domain (b) as well as in acquiring competences (c) by means of producing the design product with high aesthetical and technical quality, individually or in teams.

Weaknesses

With respect to the indicators describing the Study Programme itself, no statistically significant weaknesses were identified; some are related to the triangulation of how successful is the impact of the curriculum on students' respective careers (see "Assessment of Study Field" section for explanation).

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

The descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the traineeship, and the final thesis are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. Moreover, the study plan as also described on the University's site is quite compatible with most international Art and Design institutions.

The specific study programme is a Bachelor Degree programme with 2 specializations;

- Graphic Design
- Interior Design

Going through the Self Evaluation Report, there was an initial confusion whether the programme's structure and content could ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meet the needs of the relevant industry for both specializations. This was made clear during the visit where the team of Experts was presented with a table of the programme and its courses for both specializations. It is clear that the programme is structured well and the inclusion of the various courses for each of the 2 specializations confirm the necessary tools needed for professional Graphic Designers and professional Interior Designers. From the table that was provided during the visit, it became evident that the pathway for each specialization is well defined, including the appropriate courses for each field. For the Graphic Design specialization there are a series of courses including Typography, Layout, Digital Graphics, Animation, Web design, Advertising, Packaging and Branding, which constitute a substantial volume of teaching and learning input. For the Interior Design specialization here are a series of courses including Ergonomics, Architecture, Digital Construction, Lighting Design, Modelling, Materials and Finishing Techniques, which constitute a substantial volume of teaching and learning input.

Study and Assessments methods are in tune with the programme's learning outcomes and are compatible with international Art and Design Educational practices. The emphasis on the student-centric teaching and learning experience is to be commended. This is also quite evident (students' and alumni's opinion) when considering feedback for the future development of the programme. It was also interesting to observe the use of juries for students' assessments which involve teams of diverse teaching staff, allowing a more all-rounded input and feedback to students.

While students come across as positive towards their studies, and have been praising the teaching staff and the structure of the programme, they also stressed the need to alter the existing economic courses, in order to cover more design management and entrepreneurship, particularly for freelancers (business courses, particularly in "selling the ideas" are not sufficient). The current and former students have not been enthusiastic about business courses offered, and the programme director has to be reminded that art, in the real world setting, is and remains strictly business; someone has to pay for services, and the students must be well prepared for challenges in the

market.

With respect to the programme's goals, the SER team has also stressed the importance of the interdisciplinary approach towards teaching and research and emphasis on developing critical thinking and digital technologies. However, the SER report or course structure mapping did not reflect a strong presence of either critical studies courses or courses in virtual and extended reality.

According to the report (SER, p.142) all surveys (students/graduates/employers) are analysed and evaluated making comparisons from year to year so that the management of the study field and the study programme can implement certain changes that can improve the quality of studies. The report provided a full detailed analysis of these questionnaires and comments and also provides details on the implementation of such improvements.

The mobility scheme through Erasmus+ is in place and quite active. The learning Outcomes achieved during mobility are recognised. There are statistical data on both incoming as well as outgoing students but it is also made clear that at the time of preparing the SER which it was the time that the pandemic of COVID-19 had spread, most of the interested persons to embark on a mobility had to postpone and still remain on stand still until the situation is clear again. In general though it was evident that the mobility scheme needs to be further reinforced and promoted so that it can add up to the further internationalization profile of the programme and the study field in general. A good practice will be the creation of a pool of students who have participated in the Erasmus+ mobility scheme, to act as promoters within the department.

During the 2-day visit it became evident that in some respect some parts of the everyday activity of faculty and students may not really run in line with the written report, especially within the area that relates to incoming and outgoing mobility. There was an evident feeling after meeting with staff and students that although the mobility scheme is in order and available, there is a reluctance towards taking up this opportunity. Despite the fact that the area of Mobility and Internalization falls under another section of this report, it is also considered a crucial and significant activity in relation to the programme content too.

Additionally it may also be recommended that the study programme needs to reinforce its identity further so that it can stand out stronger as a design area within the general department in which it resides - being primarily concerned with Education and Psychology programmes. A multidisciplinary approach to meet the learning outcomes may also be considered and encouraged by (informally) linking up students and faculty with other art and design programmes and institutions and by trying to run common projects among them.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

As stated earlier in this report most findings from the Self Evaluation Report are in line with most international higher education standards. The study programme/study field complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the relevant industry and the scientific trends. The samples of students' work provided by the UL (including thesis work) were of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. The evaluation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are taken into account and the outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students, employers, and graduates are used to improve the quality of studies. While students came

across a positive towards their studies, they also had suggestions for improvement especially in the areas of Marketing and Entrepreneurship.

Strengths:

1. Student-centric teaching and learning
2. Assessments involving diverse teaching teams (juries)
3. Multidisciplinary approach to the implementation of the programme's learning outcomes.

Weaknesses

1. Lack of solid business course cycle. It is suggested to alter the existing economic courses, in order to cover more design management and entrepreneurship, particularly for freelancers.
2. Establish and develop a stronger design identity for the study programme within the department and the University in general.
3. The inclusion of project briefs of a more international profile to the study programme and study field needs to be further developed, exploited and established.
4. The Latvian language only programme is limiting, which severely limits the incoming foreign students and student exchange within the ERASMUS+ network

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

There are 38 rooms available with capacity from 12 to 200 people, most of the rooms have easily movable furniture, allowing to reorganise the class accordingly. The building has a library with a reading room, wi-fi is accessible in all of the building. There is also a canteen, sports hall and a hall for dance rehearsals, large yard and outdoor sports field. Four rooms are equipped as studios - three for drawing, one for painting. Students are provided with easels, drawing tables, stage lights and other equipment. There is adjacent room for props and a collection of plaster models. There are separate rooms for different study courses and a special room for modelling and material study classes. For animation courses a studio equipped with a light table and paper perforator is available.

Each student has an individual locker for storing personal materials. In study courses Drawing I-VII, Plain Air I and II and Design Composition I, II students are provided with paper and cardboard as well.

Additionally to the software and technical supply mentioned in the part 3 of study field assessment report, in three computer classes SPSS data statistical processing software is installed. The available software includes Adobe Professional visualization packet, software for data processing, eg., SPSS 22, AQUAD 7, AMOS, PARSCAL scale forming packet, Maya Design Studio interior design software, ArchiCAD and others, providing sufficient amount of software for the students.

Technological provisions include eight colour and more than 20 black and white laser printers, three scanners, six photocopiers, tools for functional testing, laser cutter, several cameras, background screens and a set of flashes. To organize exhibitions and display study works, FEPA purchased a pendant system that is set up in the premises. There is also a special room equipped with more than

ten 3D printers. Additionally students have free access to the computers located all over the premises both PC and iMac.

Description of UL Library can be found in SER p. 3.3. It consists of eight sectoral libraries. It is possible for students to order a book or material from all of the UL libraries, any library in Latvia or even from other libraries abroad. Library is open 9 AM to 9 PM, and some of the libraries are open 24/7. Services, both free of charge and for a fee, offered by the library are electronic ordering or reservation or extension of the printed resources, use of the information resources, printing, copying, scanning, fax services, user training, counselling etc., described in detail in the SER p. 3.3. It also organises different informative and educational seminars for students, researchers and academic staff. The library offers the opportunity to work or study in it and shape their study works with the help of photocopiers, printers, scanners etc.

There are a total of 2958 titles in 7538 copies in the UL library collection of printed resources in Latvian, English, Russian and other languages with the compliance of the information resources to the “Arts” study field. In cooperation with the UL IT Department, the library ensures free access to the e-resources repository of UL that is regularly replenished with digital versions of scientific papers, publications etc. by authors from UL. The UL library also offers 34 e-resources platforms that contain e-books, reference resources, tools, eg., EBSO Academic search complete, Emerald Insight, Letonika, Oxford Journals and others stated in the study field assessment report part 3.3.

In conclusion available infrastructure, material and informative resources are sufficient and promote the study process as well create the prerequisites for achieving the learning outcomes. The software offered to students is up to date and sufficient to study as well as fulfill the requirements in the study programme “Art”. Used platforms, such as on site computer rooms and classrooms as well as Moodle offers the opportunity to diversify the study process and adjust it to specific study courses. The premises are accessible to people with mobility impairments, expanding the amount of potential students, and are in a successful location.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The study provision is sufficient, promoting achievement of the learning outcomes. The available resources are up to date and ensure a qualitative study process. Different technological and informative materials as well as studios create an opportunity to develop and explore different styles and techniques.

Strengths:

- Premises are suitable for people with functional impairments;
- The available material, technological and informative resources are sufficient and promote study process;
- The variety of available materials and tools diversifies the study process.

Weaknesses

Air conditioning in the rooms is substandard or lacking. During the visit on site, the gaps in amortization and utility of the equipment were visible. Perhaps, it is an exclusive event, but under hot and humid weather conditions, the equipment should not be running at full capacity.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

Based on the information provided by (SER, p.62), the review of study courses, regular surveys and measurements, and self-assessment are regularly provided for the programmes of the University of Latvia. Cooperation with employers, professional organizations, informal surveys, focus group discussions, student surveys on the quality of the study course, as well as career monitoring of graduates are organized. The higher education institution (SER, p.99) also envisages the provision of science-based studies, including the promotion of scientific activities of students and staff. For development purposes, the faculty organizes Student Scientific Conferences and annual international conferences, as well as regularly organizes events to promote artistic creativity. The faculty provides access to databases of scientific publications. In order to promote the quality of the study programme implementation, the faculty organizes several courses aimed at introducing the essence of scientific work (SER, pp.100-101), as well as works in several research directions, actively involves students in international research and international projects. The involvement of teaching staff in scientific research or artistic creation is also encouraged (SER, pp.104-106).

In order to popularize the study programme (SER, pp.106), innovative marketing tools (for example, videos, etc.) are used, in the creation of which students are involved.

The composition of the academic staff (SER, p.152) during the reporting period has increased qualitatively, because the number of assistant professors who deliver specialization courses (four new assistant professors have been elected), and stabilized because several acting lecturers have been elected in the lecturer's position. The Study field and the study programme are characterised by a comparatively stable staff – many academic staff have worked for many years at the FEPA. There have been little changes in the academic staff during the reporting period and the positive feature is that the staff has been renewed.

The qualification of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with achievement of the aims and learning outcomes. The study courses of the programme are delivered both by the elected academic staff and the invited specialists from the field (as it is anticipated in the professional programmes). According to (SER, pp.153-154), all the elected academic staff in the Department of Art and Technologies (hereinafter - DAT) have at least the master's degree in the respective sphere and the majority of them are involved in the implementation of the study programme. Two of the DAT academic staff who are involved in the implementation of the study programme have a doctor's degree in pedagogy, one member a doctor's degree in philology the doctoral theses was worked out interdisciplinary also in the art field), one member in philosophy, two are pretenders to the scientific degree and three are doctoral students. All are experienced professionals in the fields of design and art: of the faculty involved in the programme, 7 are qualified in the field of graphic design and 4 in the field of interior design or architecture. SER has stressed that in all, "there are invariably approximately 30 academic staff (in academic year 2019 /2020 – 31), among whom there are several representatives from the field (practitioners) involved in the implementation of the programme. 32% of the academic staff involved in the implementation have the doctor's degree. The academic staff from the faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Social Sciences, etc. are involved in delivering separate study courses. The academic staff involved from other faculties deliver study courses "Intellectual property law" and "Sustainable development and environment". Five academic staff involved in the study process from other departments or faculties have a doctor's degree in the science corresponding to the delivered course". Of 31 academic staff, 5 are professors/ associate professors, 5 assistant professors, 10 lecturers, 5 acting lecturers, 1 acting professor, 1 acting assistant professor, 4 hourly-paid lecturers.

The composite of the teaching staff is professionally distinguished, as reflected by their standing in

the respective industries, fairly extensive publishing, a strong record of national and international exhibitions, collaborative work within the industry and a number of recognizable awards and recognitions nationally and internationally.

Students are very positive in their responses with respect to the knowledge they gained from the teaching staff.

According to the Law on Scientific Activity Section 1 (4), a creative activity includes science, research and innovations, which effectively makes both publishing and artistic work to be scientific undertaking.

According to (SER, pp.103-105), The academic staff of PBSP "Art" have participated 61 times in art and design exhibitions, plein air paintings and projects in Latvia, and 12 times - in exhibitions abroad in compliance with the specifics of the Study field. Eight academic staff members have had solo exhibitions (latest data as of 01.06.2020). Many academic staff members have performed different organizational responsibilities – organised exhibitions, incl. exhibitions of students' works.

For instance, one of the assistant professors participated with his creative works in medal art in international group exhibitions in Ottawa, Canada, in 2018 (FIDEM XXXV Art Medal Exhibition, "Women and Women in the Natural Science", Canadian Museum of Nature); Torun, Poland, in 2018 (X Baltic medal art triennial "The Unity of Baltic States", Muzeum Uniwersyteckie, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika); in National History museum of Byelorussian Republic, Minsk, in 2019, in Local history museum of Vitebsk district, in 2019, in summer of 2020 there will be a world scale exhibition in Tokyo, Japan, in the frame of the FIDEM (International Medal Art Federation) congress; a Chairperson on the international scientific conference of the Latvian Designers' association and the UL "Design.Experience. Challenges 2020" is an active member of the international professional organization actively Design Research Society un Design Thinking Group, Aivars Plotka, a winner of several book art competitions "Zelta Ābele" [The Golden Apple-tree], has participated in the international project creating a unique facsimile edition – 10 identic copies for the historic album "Terra Mariana 1186-1888" (author Gustav von Manteuffe) which was created in close cooperation with Vatican where the original copy is kept (it was presented also in the First Visual literacy week), while Austra Celmiņa-Ķeirāne – member of the NGO "Latvian Quilt" which is the member organization of the European Quilt Association, she regularly participates in the international quilt festivals, competition and exhibitions. In all, the academic staff has participated in 21 international art exhibitions, which is Comparing to the previous accounting period, the academic staff have participated more actively in different projects and scientific conferences (19 academic staff with 124 reports in Latvia and 9 academic staff with 53 reports abroad). 6 academic staff publish actively their articles in scientific publications and Austra Avotiņa is the author of 5 art books (data as of 01.06.2020).

The overview on the scientific research and artistic creation of the academic staff is added in Appendix "List of lecturers' publications, patents, and artistic creative works" to SER.

According to SER (SER, p. 155) the cooperation of the academic staff involved in the study programme is regular. For example, there are regular department meetings in which the staff discuss issues connected with improving the study courses, the promotion of cooperation, the professional development of the academic staff, students' proposals and complaints as well as other topical issues related to the study process.

The lessons of specialized study courses are regularly organized as open lessons in which also other academic staff take place getting an insight in how colleagues monitor the study process, what

methods are applied and possible connection between the study courses.

The academic staff update regularly the content of the study courses, adjusting it to the new requirements and trends; the courses are implemented in such a way as to prepare graduates maximum well for the professional activity.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The related criteria have been met for the most part, particularly in the following areas:

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of PBSP “Art” complies with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments to enable the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and its relevant study courses.

The measures undertaken by the University of Latvia to avoid negative effects on the quality of the implementation of PBSP “Art” are sufficient and sustainable given a routine evaluation of the programme.

There is a mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members are in place, which contributes to the improvement of the study courses/ modules and their correlation; with that being said, the collaboration between the administration and the external teaching staff (non-elected faculty members) should be improved.

The vulnerable aspect lies in the fairly understandable but somewhat self-serving interest by the working professionals in their own respective careers, whereby teaching in itself, while energizing to the students, is not the primary focus for them.

While the faculty is composed of a few fully elected faculty members and working professionals who may provide a strong link to the industry, some of the best teachers, as commented by the students, are not a part of elected faculty, nor are particularly interested in becoming, in part due to the low pay scale offered by the school.

There needs to be some reinforcement within the management structure of the upper echelon of the department by means of allocating ‘responsibilities’ to all the members of the faculty in the direction as well as in the promotion of the study field and the programme.

Encouragement to perform at the peak academic capacity is unexplored. There needs to be a fostering of the academic environment where everybody (from faculty to students, to graduates, and to other stakeholders) feels important, informed and plays a significant part of a larger whole by living and breathing in art and design.

Strengths:

1. The composite of the teaching staff is professionally distinguished
2. Good learning outcomes. Students are very positive in their responses with respect to the knowledge they gained from the teaching staff.
3. PBSP “Art” features a well-organized academic management scheme and the course structure.

Weaknesses

1. External non-elected members are not sufficiently engaged with the development process of the programme.
2. Their link to the administration still has a great deal of potential to be strengthened.
3. Low interest from some teachers in showing initiative to proactively participate in the improvement and development of PBSP “Art” in accordance with the latest world trends.
4. The programme director’s academic and administrative load appears excessive.
5. Encouragement to perform at the peak academic capacity is unexplored.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Art"

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: University of Latvia has provided a Sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme in PDF format, under Annexes chapter (SER, p.157). The sample diploma is aligned with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued, namely, Law on Higher Education Institutions [1], sections: Section 7. Legal Status and Attributes of Higher Education Institutions and Colleges; Section 58. Final Examinations and State Examination of Studies; Section 59.1 Diploma Register

The sample of the diploma follows requirements set in Cabinet regulations No 202 Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents [2].

[1] <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>

[2]

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/256157-kartiba-kada-izsniedz-valsts-atzitus-augstako-izglitiba-apliecinoss-dokumentus>

2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: University of Latvia has provided a copy of the Agreement between Latvian Academy of Art and University of Latvia, signed by both rectors of respective schools bearing the official seals, dated with 26.11.2007, and confirming the uptake of students in case of discontinuation of PBSP "Art".

3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: University of Latvia has provided a copy of CONFIRMATION letter, based on the Cabinet Regulation No. 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations Regarding Licensing of Study Programmes", Sub-paragraph 13.4., confirming that students of the University of Latvia will be guaranteed compensation in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme "Art" (42214) of the Study field "Arts" is not accredited or the license is revoked due to the actions or omissions of the higher education institution.

4. 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

Justification: University of Latvia has provided a copy of Description_of_study_courses.docx under Annexes section (see SER, p.157). The document breaks down the course structure with respective faculty members who are predominantly Latvian. The proficiency of languages is also evident in CVs attached, which would indicate proficiency level for each faculty member (Biographies of the Academic Staff (Curriculum Vitae Europass) under annexes). There is only one (1) guest lecturer listed in Statistical_data_on_foreign_students_and_teachers.docx. The impact on compliance is insignificant.

- 5 5. 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.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

- 6 6. 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.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: N/A for this study programme

- 7 7. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: N/A for this study programme

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: University of Latvia has provided a copy of the Agreement according to University of Latvia decree No. 1/141 of 06.05.2014. which complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.

The sample of study agreement also follows requirements set in Cabinet regulations No. 70 Mandatory Provisions (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/152072-studiju-liguma-obligati-ietveramie-noteikumi>).

- 9 9. 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 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: University of Latvia has provided a descriptions of the study courses and the study materials prepared in the languages in which the study programme is implemented: Latvian, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education. While the detailed description of courses is on Latvian, the mapping and structure of courses is given both in Latvian and English (<https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=expert%2Fprocedure%2Fannex&id=215>).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: (in process of full compliance) PBSP “Art” is in partial compliance with the Minister Cabinet Regulation No. 322 of 13 June 2017, with respect to the “Third, fourth and fifth classification levels (educational thematic groups, thematic areas and program groups) and its comparison with the Classification of the Education and Training Sectors (ISCED-F 2013)” as well as in line with the occupational standards (OS) and professional qualification requirements (PQR), implemented in accordance with two professional qualification requirements – Interior Designer (code – 2166 02) and Graphic Designer (code – 2166 03) where Interior designer is specialization of ENVIRONMENT DESIGNER, but Graphic Designer is specialization of COMMUNICATION DESIGNER. While Communication Designer's OS and Graphic Designer's PQR have been approved by the Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council 09.06.2021 meeting (<https://www.visc.gov.lv/lv/profesiju-standarti-un-profesionalas-kvalifikacijas-prasibas>) the Environment Designer's OS and Interior Designer's PQR reflects Environment Designer's OS and Interior Designer's PQR have not been approved yet, therefore Interior Designer's OS is aligned with 2008 OS (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/ps0414.pdf>). Because the new standards for Environment Designer's OS and Interior Designer's PQR have not been approved yet, PBSP “Art” and its major Interior Designer's OS is temporary compliant with the old standard (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/ps0414.pdf>). Notwithstanding the divergence, in assessing the compliance with both old OS (currently in force), and project of the new standard (submitted for approval) provided by UL during assessment procedure, the experts agree that programme complies with both old standard and project of new standard, as a matter of fact. The question whether the matter of fact should suffice to call the programme fully compliant, according the regulations, as expounded on above, should be left to Study Quality Committee.

- 11 11. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: N/A for this study programme

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Full Compliance with the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 512, August 26, 2014 “Regulation on the second level professional higher education national standard” , namely compliant in the following areas: Volume of the study programme (CP), duration of implementing the study programme, parts of the program and their volume, incl. the final work, contact hours (%), compulsory content according to the requirements of the standard, compliance with the requirements defined by the Environment protection law and Civil protection and disaster management law, the awarded degree, possibilities of continuing studies, key principles and order of assessing the acquisition of the study programme, description of study internship (see Annex Compliance of the study programme “Art” with the national education standard”)

- 13 13. The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: N/A for this study programme

- 14 14. Each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions (if they have worked for a shorter period of time, the number of publications shall be in proportion to the work period), or artistic creation achievements (for instance, exhibitions, films, theatre performances, and concert activity), or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Full Compliance:

According to (SER, pp.152-153) the Study field and the study programme are characterised by a comparatively stable staff with some graduates of the PBSP "Art" to have joined the teaching staff, whereby 1/3 of the total number in staff have the doctor's degree, 20 members have the master's degree (mainly in art), one lecturer has the bachelor's degree and the necessary work experience in the field to deliver courses in the professional bachelor's programme. According to (SER, pp.99-106). Description of the Study Direction (4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation) both the elected faculty and the contract work force have very extensive publishing and artistic record, mostly on the national level.

15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: In assessing the compliance of the study programme with the requirements prescribed in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments, PBSP "Art" is compliant. Section 10 (partially compliant) is a matter of technically and not the requirements prescribed, hence, they do not have bearing on full compliance.

Requirements (R6-R8)

- 1 R6 - The compliance of the study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: According to (SER, p.151) PBSP "Art" also has four rooms at its disposal which are equipped as studios – three for drawing (functionally dividing one big hall of the faculty). Each student has two individual closets with a locker to keep them. Students are partly provided with paper necessary for works in study courses. There are separate rooms for composition, designing, perspective and ergonomics classes as well as a special room for modelling and material study classes. To organize exhibitions and to display study works, in 2019 with the funding received from the FEPA Students' council the programme purchased the pendant system which was set up in the corridors of the second floor and the reading hall of the library in the faculty. The Macintosh based learning environment and the substantial amount of Windows based design software, supported by an excessive amount of 3D printers, are ample to provide excellent learning outcomes.

- 2 R7 - The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: According to (SER, pp.153-154), the academic staff having the master's and doctor's degrees in art and design as well as many of them work, not just, in academia, but as professionals in the industry. All the elected academic staff in the Department of Art and Technologies have at least the master's degree in the respective sphere, 2 of the academic staff who are involved in the implementation of the study programme have a doctor's degree in pedagogy, one member a doctor's degree in philology, while being experienced professionals in the fields of design and art; out of the faculty involved in the programme, 7 are qualified in the field of graphic design and 4 in the field of interior design or architecture.

The state language knowledge of the academic staff involved in study programme complies with the regulations about the knowledge of the state language and the English language is cited at least as B2. Overall, 30 academic staff members are professionals, and 32% of the academic staff involved in the implementation have the doctor's degree.

- 3 R8 - The study programme leading to the master or doctoral degree is based on the advances and findings in the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: N/A for this study programme

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The related requirements, as set forth in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education or other regulatory enactments applicable to the study programme subject to the assessment, have been met, and no significant identified deficiencies, which cannot be eliminated within the accreditation term, have been found. While there are no identifiable deficiencies that cannot be eliminated within accreditation term, the risks to the sustainability of the programme remain and should be addressed; please, refer to the weaknesses section for a detailed breakdown.

Strengths:

1. PBSP "Art" has a strong publishing and exhibition record for the last six years, including international editions, exhibitions, as required by the regulations and the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.
2. PBSP "Art" has excellent facilities, equipment, and technical support to ensure good learning outcomes.

Weaknesses

1. Allocation of state budget places is low. Currently students pay for their education, which is a positive in so far as it makes them serious about their investment, but it also makes the programme less competitive, as it needs to compete with the programmes that offer free education. The programme is realized exclusively in Latvian, and that limits the pool of potential candidates in the shrinking market.
2. The programme has an even academic contribution load. Professionals working in the art and design industries, have a stronger link to their professional careers, more so than in their contributions to the programme "Art"; the rapport is stronger between students and faculty rather than between the administration and the faculty.
3. The programme has weak alumni support. The school certainly has many outstanding graduates who collaborate amongst themselves, but still there is a room for improvement in linking the current students to the former and interlinking them all to the industry at large. The programme and LU should make every effort to bring their alumni on board, not just on funding issues, but also in advising the programme director how the programme should develop further.
4. Emphasis on international markets should be strengthened. The programme currently focuses too much on supplying the local work force, but, in reality, the future of the programme lies in the foreign marketplace. The PBSP "Art" should increase, first of all, international component both amongst the incoming and outgoing teaching staff and students, and, second, make ongoing adjustments to the programme to increase the demand outside the borders of the Baltic States.

Evaluation of the study programme "Art"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Art"

Short-term recommendations

1. Improve the communication between administration, higher level management and faculty, not limited to the students, or organising meeting with the student council in a more productive framework relevant to the design industry, and make it less formal.
2. The rapport between the faculty, particularly the unelected one that works extensively professionally but of a significant importance to the programme, and the programme administrative staff needs to be strengthened and, perhaps, formalized in a more effective official framework.
3. Expand critical studies in freshman or sophomore years, and introduce virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and extended reality (xR) courses, because, while the market for some graduates will be in Latvia, the ever increasing demand is global, and the programme will fair better outside its national borders. Distance learning, where VR, AR, XR, is a major component in design, should be a near future strategy, hopefully in the next two years.

Long-term recommendations

1. Improve the academic staff mobility by identifying reasons for the low participation and planning ways to tackle them as well as monitoring the results of used tools and support mechanisms.
2. Be more proactive in attracting highly skilled academic staff by inviting skilled field professionals to apply to the open positions.
3. Improve branding of the study field as a part of Design and Arts cluster, visible internationally and highly recognized nationally, particularly amongst the established institutions, academia, and industry.

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
<p>Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:</p>	<p>Fully compliant</p>	<p>The study field quality management is ensured in accordance with the quality assurance mechanism and procedures established by the University of Latvia Chapter II, according to (SER, p.62). The activities targeting the advancement of the study field are planned for a period of six years and guided by the UL Development Strategy, sector and labour market trends, study outcomes by students, relevant stakeholder needs, as well as internal and external (accreditation, licensing) quality assessment recommendations. A detailed mechanism is laid out in (SER, pp. 62-65). While the contribution of the industry (former graduates or working professionals) to the development of the programme needs improvement, and the business course cluster offered in the programme needs to be revised (partial compliance), it has no bearing on R1 as being fully compliant</p>
<p>R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.</p>	<p>Fully compliant</p>	<p>The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia is very extensive as evident by (SER, pp.107-110), yet, cooperation with foreign entities in EU and EU academic institutions outside the Baltic States lacks the scope, and if PBSP "Art" wants to stay competitive it needs to focus on foreign markets more.</p>

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).	Fully compliant		PBSP "Arts" is part of the humanities bloc, in which the scientific research is performed in compliance with the needs of the national economy of Latvia. The scientific research in the Study field is directed towards the exploration of topical design challenges in Latvia and in the world, focusing on the labour market, the development of user-centred projects, the design thinking, creative and technological innovations, as well as the theoretical aspects of art and design and education. The scientific research at FEPA enjoys a special role, it is directed towards the solution of education, pedagogy, social, design etc. issues and ensures research-based studies that comply with the market requirements. The faculty also organizes the Students' scientific conference and several annual international scientific conferences in which there also participate the academic staff and students from the Study field. Different events to promote the artistic creation (e.g., annual exhibitions of study works) (SER, p.99).
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.		Partially compliant	The HEI fulfilled the first recommendation introducing changes in the governance of the Study field and optimizing the structure of the programme. The requirement of providing a Master's degree programme study has not been fulfilled and the mobility programmes still need further activation.

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

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Art (42214)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

No dissenting opinion