

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: EKA University of Applied Sciences

Study field: Law

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## Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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Summary of the assessment:

EKA's strategic documents of the study direction "Law" correspond to international research and study management trends. EKA's top management receives substantial support from the academic community in implementing the vision and mission of the institution. In general, the management (administrative) structure of study direction is clear, reflects common international practice and is currently well suited to the study direction. The meetings with the different focus groups during the on-site visit have shown the full involvement of the Director in all management processes of the study programme and his commitment to its success. However, the wide range of operational functions assigned to the head/director jeopardizes the success of the development of the study programme. Additionally, the current decision-making process in the study direction is mainly based on individual decisions (mostly by the head/director), without a direct participation of relevant stakeholders and students in the decision-making process at the study direction level.

EKA has a quality assurance system, including all relevant documents. EKA conducts several surveys and uses available data to improve the quality of the study programme. However, students' participation in surveys is low. Additionally, there is no evidence of employers' direct participation in the development or modification of the study programme. Students and teaching staff showed that both groups are generally aware of the importance of academic integrity and relevant internal regulation; however, there are no specific operating rules to ensure academic ethics during online assessment. These rules may primarily cover the types of the assessment online that might need to be invigilated and recorded, the storage of the recorded data for the purpose of investigation, etc.

EKA ensures that the improvement, development and efficient implementation of the study programme can be guaranteed by acting in a very informal way, addressing individual needs of the students. EKA has set up a functional and user-friendly e-learning system that makes the study process very flexible, especially for part-time students, who are the institution's main target group. EKA knows the needs of its students and has a well-functioning support system that responds to their needs.

EKA as an institution has a stable financial situation, but the number of students in the study direction is still relatively small. The budget consisting mainly from a single source (student fees) pose a risk to the sustainable development of the study programme and, in particular, the study direction. In order to increase the number of students in the programme, EKA should also endeavor to make the institution more attractive and thus increase the number of students who choose the institution as their first choice for their studies. EKA has a suitable infrastructure and the material and technical arrangements necessary for the implementation of the study programme (except for library resources).

EKA attracts the teaching staff required for the study direction and the study programme, and this is done in a sufficiently transparent manner and process open to the public scrutiny, in accordance with Latvian law. The workload of the teaching staff is not balanced enough to ensure the teaching staff involved in the scientific activities. From the perspective of the integration of scientific research elements and results in the curriculum of the programme, the relation between scientific research in the study direction and the study process has been defined and ensured, and it is efficient.

The mobility of the teaching staff and students is insufficient. Most of teaching staff members are in general involved in research, however, only some publications are published in English in internationally recognized peer-reviewed journals in the field of law.

The most productive researchers teaching in the programme are, unfortunately, not in the field of law. The number of publications in Scopus and WoS databases still remains low and usually produced by the same staff members. More teaching staff members specializing in the field of law employed permanently could ensure better research results.

A wide range of cooperative educational activities and field trips to various institutions demonstrate a comprehensive and effective informal network of partners working together in practice. The list of formal international education partners is solid for a relatively small institution like EKA. However, a considerable number of partnerships do not work in practice. No clear strategy for improving possibilities of internationalization for the students and professors. EKA offers 7 subjects in English or other foreign languages to incoming students. The list is relatively small, however, it is understandable due to limited human resources of the institution. EKA offers the courses that are oriented towards a large number of students studying law worldwide (focus on International, EU and comparative law), however in this way it competes with numerous institutions worldwide.

The content of the programme is relevant and complementary; it complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the sector and scientific trends. However, the study programme could be further developed to meet the interests of students better. The regulations on the assessment of students' achievements and learning outcomes leave the teaching staff the freedom to choose the evaluation methods based on the specifics of the course and the type of study.

#### Main strengths:

1. Evident support to the EKA's managerial staff from the academic community
2. Strategic documents of the study direction is in line with international trends of research and study management
3. The procedure for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students is transparent and efficient
4. Quality policy has been established and is available to everyone on the web-page of the EKA
5. Due to the small number of students, EKA is capable of maintaining a rather informal and very much personalized approach to students, which leads to a better overall quality of studying experience
6. EKA has a functional and user friendly e-learning system which makes the process of studying very flexible, accessible and in particular valuable in the current COVID19 pandemic
7. Data for quality assurance is gathered and evaluated regularly, and the EKA management responds to these surveys. Students' responses have been positive in all the main fields and issues related to studies and studies' management (administration)
8. Infrastructure is constantly developed and meets the needs of the students
9. The students' support system is based on the needs of the students and is functioning well
10. Scientific research is stimulated by providing methodological and informational support
11. Methodical conferences and seminars are organized on a regular basis
12. Wide range of ongoing cooperative educational activities
13. Efforts to implement experiential learning (field trips)

#### Main weaknesses:

1. Limited involvement of the stakeholders in the decision-making processes at the level of the study direction
2. Limited involvement of the students in decision-making processes at the level of the study direction
3. Students' participation in the quality assurance surveys is quite low and should be increased to ensure the objective feedback on the quality of the programme
4. No effective follow-up from the Alumni since there is no effectively functioning structure tying-up alumni community
5. No diversity in budgetary incomes, which, given still relatively small number of the students, may impede the development of the study direction
6. The number of available books and databases in the field of law in the EKA library is not sufficient

7. Unbalanced allocation of responsibilities resulting in excessive workload of the head/director
8. The workload of the teaching staff lacks transparency and risks to be unbalanced
9. Support for legal research is not well-tailored and targeted. The teaching staff, which is the primary target audience, was not fully aware of how the system functions
10. Small number of publications in the field of law
11. Lack of international scientific projects
12. Teaching staff outgoing mobility is insufficient, there is no clear plan for its improvement
13. Due to the small number of students and structure of students (mostly part-time) there is no credit mobility for studies

## **1. Management of the Study Field**

### **Analysis**

Based on the Self-assessment report, the study direction aims to prepare competitive specialists in law for Latvian and foreign markets. The aim of the study direction is defined in clear terms. However, it is relatively scarce in comparison with the ambitious mission and vision of EKA, the institutional which associates itself with “competitive, excellent education, internationally recognized diplomas, high professional quality of graduates, a developed scientific research base and highly qualified personnel”. As will be demonstrated later, in practice the study direction lacks a clear international component, has limited research capacity, which, considering the vision statement, are regarded as an essential characteristic of the activities of the institution. However, EKA has the potential to change the current status in the future. The above-mentioned weaknesses are well understood by the management in SWOT analysis, they are addressed in the strategic documents and the study direction development plan. The strategic documents of the study direction are generally in line with international trends of research and study management. Additionally, EKA’s top managerial staff has a substantive support in implementation of the vision and the mission of the institution from the academic community of the study direction. Therefore the aim of the study direction, read in conjunction with the strategic documents of the study direction, is considered to be attainable.

The need for the study direction and the programme, its comparison with other similar study programmes in Latvia, is presented scarcely in the self-evaluation report. The main focus is on a specific target group – working students choosing a part time or online studies. Despite the absence of the elaborated analysis on the labour market needs, the meetings with the students and graduates demonstrated the need for such forms of the studies in the labour market.

Generally, the management (administration) structure of the study direction is clear, reflects the usual international practice, and suits well for the study direction at the moment. The head of the study direction that is also a director of the sole study programme in the study direction is a central figure in the management and administration of the study direction and the programme. The programme director coordinates the activities of everyone involved in the programme and ensures that the programme runs smoothly. The meetings with different focus groups during the site visit have demonstrated the director's full involvement in all the processes of the study programme's administration and commitment to the success of the study direction.

It must be observed that the scope of the responsibilities of the head/director is extensive. Among other responsibilities, the head/director is responsible for finding the academic staff members, looks for and appoints the reviewers for the bachelor thesis, assisting students in the whole study process, and linking them with the university's central administration. Given a relatively small number of the

students in the study direction at the moment, the fact that the study direction contains only one programme, the highly valued enthusiasm of the current head/director, who at the same time pursues a scientific career, the study direction, and the study programme is currently administered sufficiently effective. However, the wide scope of the operational functions allocated to the head/director, a one-man orchestra in the programme/study direction, puts the success of the development of the study direction at risk. First of all, the implementation of numerous study programme director's operational functions leaves little time for the study's strategic development. Additionally, the current unbalanced allocation of responsibilities may only result in success given the head/director's high enthusiasm and commitment.

This finding is not affected by the fact that the head/director is assisted by the students' information center and guided by the studies department. The site visit left no doubts that the administrative and technical staff provides the support to meet the needs of the study programme of the study direction. However, this support, which is consultative, administrative, and technical, does not eliminate the misbalance driven by the variety of the functions allocated to the head/director.

Since the head of the study and director is the same person, the study direction contains only one programme, the decision-making procedure is not overburdened by the inclusion of numerous actors, it seems to be flexible, fast and allows resolving the issues quickly. Nevertheless, the current decision-making procedure in the study direction is mainly based on the individual decision-making, which is driven by a rather subjective perception of the study programme's needs by the head/director, without the involvement of the relevant stakeholders and the students directly in the decision-making procedures at the level of the study direction.

The students' admission requirements reflect national legal regulation as well as specific features of the study programme. The procedures are transparent (the legal regulation approved by the Senate is published online) and efficient (admission is organized twice a year; the application may opt out a joint national admission system or apply in person at the institution). The system of recognition of previously acquired formal education, including different study periods, as well as recognition of professional experience functions effectively in the practice of the institution.

However, it must be noted that a significant number of students came from other institutions, and for them, EKA was not the first choice for studying. To increase the number of the students in the programme, EKA should aim to enhance the attractiveness of the institution, thus increasing the number of the students who are choosing the institution as the first choice for their studies.

The evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students is described in the Study Regulations. The Regulations leave the room for the teaching staff to choose the evaluation methods based on the course's specificities and the type of the studies (part-time, distance). The study course descriptions demonstrate that the teaching staff uses a variety of methods. The evaluation is based on the continuous evaluation of the students' efforts to acquire different competencies - both the work during the semester and the final preparation during the exam are evaluated. The procedures are, therefore, logical and efficient.

Academic integrity principles and mechanisms are described in the Ethical and Academic Integrity Code. During the site visit, the meetings with the students and staff demonstrated that both groups are generally aware of the document and the importance of academic integrity. For detecting the plagiarism EKA uses Common Computerized Antiplagiarism Checking system, which is also used by different Latvian institutions and is a positive step in fighting plagiarism.

Contrary to the general tendencies in HEIs in Latvia and abroad, the study direction has been immune to the ethical and academic integrity violations (no violations have been observed). The meetings with the teaching staff and the students gave the impression that there might be a different attitude of the teaching staff towards handling minor infringements of academic ethics. Strong academic culture in any HEI calls for a common community approach towards even minor violations of academic ethics; therefore, even minor infringements should be recognized as an issue. Additionally, since the study direction widely uses the digital environment as the form of studies, it is recommended to set special operational rules to ensure academic ethics during the online assessment. These rules may primarily cover the types of the assessment online that might need to be invigilated and recorded, the storage of the recorded data for the purpose of examination, etc.

The evaluation group has seen the information regarding the study programme of the study direction published on EKA's website. The information complies with the official registers' information and provides a sufficiently clear understanding of the studies in the study direction for the future candidates and present students in Latvian.

### **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

- The goal of the study direction is clearly defined and is considered attainable. In general, the strategic documents of the study direction correspond to international research and study management trends. EKA's top management receives substantial support from the academic community in implementing the vision and mission of the institution. Meetings with students and graduates have shown the need for a study programme on the labour market.
- In general, the management (administrative) structure of the field of study is clear, reflects common international practise and is currently well suited to the study direction. The meetings with the different focus groups during the on-site visit have shown the full involvement of the Director in all management processes of the study programme and his commitment to its success. However, the wide range of operational functions assigned to the head/director jeopardises the success of the development of the study programme.
- The decision-making process is flexible, fast and allows for a quick resolution of problems. Nevertheless, the current decision-making process in the study direction is mainly based on individual decisions (mostly by the head/director), without a direct participation of relevant stakeholders and students in the decision-making process at the study direction level.
- The admission requirements of students reflect both national legal regulations and the specifics of the programme. The procedures are transparent and efficient. In order to increase the number of students in the programme, EKA should endeavour to make the institution more attractive and thus increase the number of students who choose the institution as their first choice for their studies.
- The regulations on the assessment of students' achievements and learning outcomes leave the teaching staff the freedom to choose the evaluation methods based on the specifics of the course and the type of study. The descriptions of the study programmes show that the teaching staff uses a variety of methods.
- During the on-site visit, the meetings with students and teaching staff showed that both groups are generally aware of the importance of academic integrity and relevant internal regulation. As the study direction makes extensive use of the digital environment as a study form, it is recommended to establish specific operating rules to ensure academic ethics during online assessment.

Strengths:

- 1) Evident support to the EKA's managerial staff from the academic community
- 2) Strategic documents of the study direction are in line with international trends of research and

study management

3) Students' admission procedures are transparent and efficient

4) The procedure for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students is transparent and efficient

Weaknesses:

1) Unbalanced allocation of responsibilities resulting in excessive workload of the head/director

2) Limited involvement of the stakeholders in the decision-making processes at the level of the study direction

3) Limited involvement of the students in decision-making processes at the level of the study direction

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

### **Analysis**

Quality policy and quality assurance system formally exist at EKA. Documents are adopted and publicly available on EKA's website. The main documents which set the policy and legal framework of quality policy at EKA are: EKA Development Strategy, Guidelines on the provision of internal quality assurance system, Regulations on the preparation of study content and implementation description, updating and approval, EKA University of Applied Sciences guidelines for preparing and updating a course description. All these documents form an essential part of the quality assurance system at EKA.

EKA undertakes several surveys during the academic year to get information and feedback from various actors, but predominantly students. The survey data is efficiently used to improve the study field. Survey results are regularly discussed, and necessary measures undertaken in due time. Furthermore, to analyze and detect the main challenges self-evaluation is conducted on a yearly basis. These survey results are available to every student and employee of EKA. The data collected internally at EKA (number of students, reasons for dropping out, etc.) is used to improve the quality of the study experience at EKA.

However, it must be noted that students' participation in surveys, which is one of the main instruments for developing of the programme, is low (20,5% in February 2020). Employers' involvement in the development of the study directions and the corresponding programme is insufficient. During the on-site visit, it was made clear that employers and experts from the private sector are involved in the teaching process either as lecturers, guest lecturers or reviewers of theses. However, there is no evidence of their involvement in the development or modification of the study programme.

EKA ensures a seemingly better graduates' involvement in this regard, since 80% of the graduates last semester participated in the survey. However, the survey itself consists of a few questions, and most are employment-related. Judging by the analysis that is available on the EKA's web-page, the gained information from these surveys is limited. It would be valuable to include more specific questions regarding the study direction and programme - questions about the available resources, teaching staff, content of the study courses. If such questions are already included they should be analysed in more detail in the self-evaluation report. In addition, the Alumni do not have strong connections with EKA and there is no Alumni Club or some similar formal gathering of the alumni, functioning effectively. Such Club could be very helpful in the process of getting feedback on study programme and the overall improvement of the Institution.

EKA and in particular study programme has a small number of students (85 students in the Law programme). It ensures that the study programme's improvement, development, and efficient performance can be ensured by acting in a very informal way, sometimes in a very personalized setting. This applies to the issues related to teaching staff, study courses, individual study plans and most other issues that can arise. Such an environment enables EKA to set a high standard for operational performance of particular activities (e.g., a general rule to respond to an email in three working days). The programme's efficient administration is also demonstrated by the fact that there have been only two cases of drop-out during the 2019/20 academic year and three student's complaints that were related mostly with communication problems.

On the other hand, such practice of informal and highly personalized relations could be potentially seen as an obstacle as well, due to the fact that in such highly personalized environment, an objective and sometimes critical feedback may not be provided. Therefore, EKA should put more efforts to ensure the environment that is responsive to objective opinions from relevant stakeholders, particularly ensuring high students' participation in anonymous surveys.

Regarding the relationship with the graduates from EKA, it must be observed that there is no Alumni Club that should provide a stronger connection of graduate students with EKA and with themselves. Such a Club should serve as an efficient tool for gathering information about the study programme, its learning outcomes, and the relevance of the acquired skills. It should also provide forum for systematic and continuous feedback on the employability and skills of the graduate students.

In addition, EKA established a functional and user friendly e-learning system, which makes the study process very flexible, mostly for part-time students, who are the main target group of the Institution. This became very valuable asset in the current COVID19 pandemic.

There is a student guide available on the EKA's web-page. It is accessible without restrictions, covers most situations that might materialize during the studies, and regulations. However, some information, as noticed both by the experts' group and recognized by the students, is outdated, though the administration has a plan to solve this issue.

The standards included in Part 1 of the ESG are integrated within the internal quality system at EKA. Self-evaluation report (p. 23) provides table overview of the inclusion of the ESG in different aspects of the EKA internal quality assurance system. Analysis of the data presented in the table shows that each aspect of ESG standards has been addressed by some of the institution's activities. However, some elements of ESG should be institutionalized more systematically. This is particularly true for the involvement of external stakeholders in activities of the institution such as programme development and their alignment with the strategic objectives of the institution. The resources in the library are modest and the institution only subscribes to two databases (EBSCO & Business Register), which could create obstacles for both students and teachers' international research (see part 3 of the Report). Self-evaluation reports are produced annually, and the institution's cyclical quality assurance takes place every six years in accordance with national legislation.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

- EKA has a quality assurance system, including all relevant documents.
- EKA conducts several surveys and uses available data to improve the quality of the study programme. However, students' participation in surveys, which is one of the main instruments for developing the programme, is low. Additionally, there is no evidence of employers' direct participation in the development or modification of the study programme.

- EKA ensures that the improvement, development and efficient implementation of the study programme can be guaranteed by acting in a very informal way, addressing individual needs of the students.
- EKA has set up a functional and user-friendly e-learning system that makes the study process very flexible, especially for part-time students, who are the institution's main target group.
- The standards contained in Part 1 of the ESG are integrated into EKA's internal quality system.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Quality policy has been established and is available to everyone on the web-page of EKA.
- 2) Due to the small number of students, EKA is capable of maintaining a rather informal and very much personalized approach to students, which leads to a better overall quality of studying experience. This is something that EKA could build upon and position itself on the education market.
- 3) EKA has a functional and user friendly e-learning system which makes the process of studying very flexible, accessible and in particular valuable in the current COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4) Data for quality assurance is gathered and evaluated regularly, and EKA's management responds to these surveys. Students' responses have been positive in all the main fields and issues related to studies and studies' management (administration)

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) Employer involvement in the development of the study direction and programme is not sufficiently effective
- 2) Student participation in the quality assurance surveys is quite low
- 4) There is no continuous follow-up from the Alumni since there is no effectively functioning structure that bind the alumni community

### **3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field**

#### **Analysis**

EKA's budget is formed mainly from the tuition fees (p. 24). EKA states that the cost-per-student is 1466.96 EUR per year, so the study fee covers most of that (p. 24). Although the costs of the study programme is indicated the same for all forms of study programme, it is worth noting that the tuition fees are different: for full-time studies - 1680 euros per year, for part-time studies - 1560 euros per year (p. 24). The difference in tuition fees for different study forms is not explained in the self-evaluation report.

The biggest part of the EKA's expenses (62,72%) are salaries, including qualification development (p. 24). EKA has developed a system to determine the financial resources required for implementation of the study direction and the relevant study programme. The amount of financial resources required for EKA study direction and programme is determined according to a pre-defined methodology. The self-evaluation report indicates income and expenditure items.

At the moment, EKA has a stable financial situation and all studies are fee-based. A significant risk to financial stability is posed by the fact that the source of funding is mainly tuition fees. Having unstable number of students in the study direction one-source budget poses the risk to sustainable development of study programme. The Institution admits in the self-evaluation report that the financial provision for the study programme was sufficient thanks to the shared resources with the other study directions at EKA (p.24). Therefore, the institution has to ensure the diversity of the financial sources, for example, implementing research projects in the field of law or generally the projects for infrastructure developing.

The institution finances scientific research and professional development. The costs for science and scientific activity in the study direction constitutes around 7% of the total budget of the study direction (p.24). Scientific research is stimulated and supported by paying participation in conferences, e.g. traveling expenses, participation in the conferences and some (undefined) premium for indexing articles in the Scopus or WoS databases. The financial support for encouraging scientific research is a positive development. However, the existing structure of the support can hardly be called a system. Neither the procedure, nor the criteria for getting the support, not its extent is clear from the self-evaluation report. During the site visit, the teaching staff demonstrated the awareness of the possibility to get funding for research activities. However, it was not clarified how big the support might be, which teaching staff members are eligible for this funding, if there is a transparent procedure to apply for the funding.

Generally, EKA has appropriate infrastructure and the material and technical provision required for the implementation of the study direction, except for the library resources in the field of law. The premises serves well the needs of the study direction (apart from the common premises, the courtroom is available). The premises are available for staff and students, the expansion of the premises is planned. All classrooms are equipped with computers and projectors to run the classes. E-environment for the studies is well-developed.

The number of books and databases in foreign languages is insufficient. There are also few databases specialising in the field of law in foreign languages available in the library (the only database with subscription is EBSCO). During the visit, EKA presented additional information that EKA uses a number of Open Access databases, a list of which is available on EKA website. The number of books in foreign languages does not satisfy the study's needs either (only 17 acquired during the reporting period). The standard procedure for the improvement of the library stocks is described in the self-evaluation report. However, the experts are not convinced that it the procedure is followed in practice. Alternatively, it may show that the use of international research outputs is not encouraged in the study process in practice. Having access to international research is also crucial for encouraging quality research of the teaching staff. Given that half of the professors are visiting professors having limited possibilities to go for research mobility due to other obligations, the inclusion of more teaching staff in research activities, resulting in the publication of articles in international journals, might be mission impossible without substantive library resources in foreign languages at the home institution.

Over the last years, a number of the teaching staff members changed due to the transformation of the programme from professional to academic. The procedure of employing the teaching staff is clear and transparent, it is regulated by the Regulations on the Election in Academic Positions.

Additionally, it is doubtful if the academic and research workload of the teaching staff is balanced. The self-evaluation report reveals that the academic staff's workload includes the teaching of the study courses, methodological work, scientific research, and creative activities. The proportion of these elements is not clear from the self-evaluation report. Neither the teaching staff during the site visit could explain in more elaborated way the composition of his/her workload. Since research results demonstrate that not all staff members consistently do the research, it remains unclear how the missing research element in the teaching staff member's overall workload is compensated. Additionally, some instructors teach 4 or 6 subjects, making it almost impossible for them to do research.

There is a procedure to identify the teaching staff's professional and didactic improvement needs. It is mostly done reactively by evaluating the work of the teaching staff (quality of teaching, e-

materials, etc.). Additionally, the Institution systematically organizes traditional events for qualification improvement of its academic staff (scientific seminars, methodological seminars, methodological conferences, etc.). It is also reported that the Institution offers the courses in line with the identified training needs. However, it remains unclear how these needs are identified on an individual basis proactively. The outcomes and efficiency of the implemented measures are assessed, it is demonstrated by the convincing list of the examples of the measures and the results achieved.

Only five teaching staff members had teaching experience in different European universities over the reporting period. Due to the exchange of experience, outgoing mobility without doubts contributes indirectly to the improvement of the study process; however, it has to be sustained and encouraged continuously.

EKA knows the needs of the students and has a well-functioning support system responding to the needs. The students get informational, methodological, career, technical, and financial support. The site visit has shown the students' and alumni overall satisfaction with the services provided by the Institution in the field.

### **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

- EKA has a stable financial situation, but the unstable number of students in the study direction and the budget from a single source pose a risk to the sustainable development of the study programme and, in particular, the study direction.
- EKA has a suitable infrastructure and the material and technical arrangements necessary for the implementation of the study programme (except for library resources). Additionally, EKA has a plan and is already actively improving the study premises and environment. EKA has a cooperation agreement with Alberta College on the joint use of infrastructure and material and technical equipment.
- The library and databases are available to students, while at the same time the number of foreign-language books and databases is insufficient. The library has few foreign-language databases and books in the field of law to fully meet the needs of the study programme and, in particular, study direction.
- EKA attracts the teaching staff required for the study direction and the study programme, and this is done in a sufficiently transparent manner and process open to the public scrutiny, in accordance with Latvian law.
- EKA systematically organizes the events to improve the qualifications of teaching staff. It also offers the courses in accordance with the training needs identified. However, it remains unclear how these needs are proactively identified on an individual basis.
- The workload of the teaching staff is not balanced enough to ensure the teaching staff involved in the scientific activities. The mobility of the teaching staff is insufficient. Only five lecturers had teaching experience at different European universities during the reporting period.
- EKA knows the needs of its students and has a well-functioning support system that responds to their needs.

Strengths:

- 1) The financial provision for the study direction is currently sufficient
- 2) Infrastructure is constantly developed and meets the needs of the students
- 3) Study IT systems are good and supportive for students and teachers
- 4) The students' support system is based on the needs of the students and is functioning well

Weaknesses:

- 1) There is no diversity in budgetary incomes, which, given still relatively small number of the students, may impede the development of the study direction
- 2) Support for legal research is not well-tailored and targeted. The procedure, the criteria for getting the support and its extent lacks transparency and clarity. The teaching staff, which is the primary target audience, was not fully aware of how the system functions
- 3) The number of available books in the field of law in the EKA library is not sufficient and availability of databases in the EKA digital environment should be wider
- 4) Teaching staff outgoing mobility is insufficient, there is no clear plan for its improvement
- 5) The workload of the teaching staff lacks transparency and risks to be unbalanced

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

##### **Analysis**

EKA University has its “Scientific and Creative Activity development strategy” that identifies four priorities, with specific directions of action for each priority: EKA staff; EKA scientific reputation; Research and creative activity in the study directions; and Infrastructure. The implementation of these indicators is analyzed at the end of each study year, with prepared reports on the scientific and creative activities. The directions of scientific research in the study direction comply with EKA’s development aims and are relevant to the study direction and the relevant industry. Directions for scientific research are defined every year. Methodical conferences and seminars are organized on a regular basis.

The relation between scientific research in the study direction and the study process has been defined and ensured, and it is efficient. Research directions are formulated in accordance with the area of the study direction, research interests of the academic staff and current events in the study direction area. Research directions are confirmed by the Study Council. Study course descriptions (syllabus) are well written, according to the united draft, literature sources are included. Scientific research results are integrated in the study courses of each teacher. However - study course descriptions (syllabus) are updated once per 3 years, sometimes they are updated more regularly, so the newest results of research hardly can be included.

International cooperation has been developed with several partners in projects and by participation in international scientific conferences. Since 2014, EKA has organized an international scientific conference in collaboration with the Walsh College (the United States). In 2017 joined the University of Economics in Katowice (Poland). Since 2020 international partners are attracted to the conferences to ensure more publications in scientific journals that are indexed in the internationally indexed databases Scopus and Web of Science. However, international cooperation have potential to be more developed (see: part 5. Cooperation and Internationalization).

EKA has developed mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research. The involvement of the academic staff in research activities is stimulated by providing methodological, informational and financial support (the latter discussed in part 3: resources and provision of the study direction) for the preparation of publications and participation in conferences. Scientific Department regularly recommends teaching staff conferences and journals for publication and assists in organizing process.

Although the self-evaluation report states that the results of scientific activity are analysed every year, thus it is target-oriented, it does not elaborate how this evaluation is done. This question has not been answered clearly during the site visit. The number of publications in Scopus and Web of

Science databases remains small (five in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020). Due to teachers' extensive workload (lectures, supervising, administrative work) it may be hard to find time for research. Additionally, analyzing the scientific publications of the lecturers, it should be noted that part of the research outputs submitted for evaluation are not in the field of law.

EKA has developed mechanisms to promote the involvement of the students in scientific research. The study course "Research organization" is mandatory for all students. Students are offered to participate in a student's conference, which they successfully do. The self-evaluation report mentions one research of student that was used by a joint working group of several universities to conduct a study on Basic Competencies of the Financial Literacy for Adults. During the site visit, the group of the experts realized that not all students were involved in the research process - part-time students do not use the opportunities to the full extent, because they are permanently working. The graduates neither confirmed broad involvement in research activities. However, it is planned to continue to organize activities on Fridays, Saturdays and evenings to adjust to the students' work time.

As to innovative solutions in the study process, the Moodle system, which is adapted to the requirements of EKA studies, is widely used.

### **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

- The directions of scientific research in the study direction comply with EKA's development aims and are relevant to the study direction and the relevant industry.
- The relation between scientific research in the study direction and the study process has been defined and ensured. However, it is not fully ensured that the latest research achievements are included in the study course descriptions.
- International cooperation has been developed with several partners in projects and by participation in international scientific conferences. International cooperation have potential to be more developed.
- EKA has developed mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research. Scientific Department regularly recommends teaching staff conferences and journals for publication and assists in organizing process.
- Although the self-evaluation report states that the results of scientific activity are analysed every year, thus it is target oriented, it does not elaborate how this evaluation is done. Part of the research outputs submitted for evaluation are not in the field of law. EKA has developed mechanisms to promote the involvement of the students in scientific research. But not all students are involved in the research process - part-time students do not use the opportunities to the full extent.
- As to innovative solutions in the study process, the Moodle system, which is adapted to the requirements of EKA studies, is widely used.

Strengths:

- 1) Scientific research is stimulated by providing methodological and informational support
- 2) Full-time students are involved in scientific research, but only a small part of all students is full-time students
- 3) Methodical conferences and seminars are organized on a regular bases
- 4) Scientific research results are integrated in the study courses of each teacher

Weaknesses:

- 1) Small number of publications in the field of law

2) Lack of international scientific projects

## **5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

The list of EKA's formal cooperative partnerships in Latvia is relatively moderate. However, a wide range of cooperative educational activities with and field trips to various institutions (e.g., Competition council, the Government of Latvia, the Ombudsman office, etc.) demonstrates a comprehensive and effective informal network of partners cooperating in practice in the field of law. The activities mentioned above contribute effectively to achieving the aims of the programme and the study direction.

Although the study direction's specific features and the relevant study programmes are not mentioned among the main criteria for starting cooperation, the examples of cooperation demonstrate the partners' direct relevance to the study direction.

As mentioned above, EKA's vision foresees multiculturalism and readiness for the global market. However, the study direction is struggling to bring in the internationalization in the studies and research. The formal international educational partners list is solid for a relatively small institution like EKA. Formally, the current network of the partnerships allows intensifying international activities both in the field of studies and research thus contributing to the development of the study direction. However, a significant number of partnerships do not work in practice.

The meetings with the staff during the site visit showed an understanding of the challenge. However, they also demonstrated the lack of a clear strategy for increasing internationalization possibilities for the students and professors. There is no mobility of students in the programme (neither incoming nor outgoing). The lack of mobility may be partially explained by the dominance of part-time students in the programme. This is aggravated by limited students' linguistic capabilities demonstrated during the site-visit and the lack of the vision of how to encourage students' mobility and internationalise the curriculum of the programme. EKA could also attract very few staff members for teaching in the study programme (one coming for teaching) using usual mobility programmes. The lack of internationalization in the curriculum is mitigated by some internationalization activities at home (International academic week, staff training week, etc.) where the students and the staff can get international experience without mobility abroad. No clear strategy for improving possibilities of internationalization for the students and professors. EKA offers 7 subjects in English or other foreign languages to incoming students. The list is relatively small, however, it is understandable due to limited human resources of the institution. EKA offers the courses that are oriented towards a large number of students studying law worldwide (focus on International, EU and comparative law), however in this way it competes with numerous institutions worldwide.

The traineeship is not a compulsory part of the study programme any more since the programme is a research programme. Although the rules for organization of a traineeship as an element of studies are clear, the small number of cooperation agreements for traineeships might be one the main reasons why an insignificant number of the students opt out traineeship as an elective subject. During the site visit the programme associates (employers) confirmed a high value of traineeship in development of students' competencies, therefore the group of the experts recommend to consider the means to encourage the students to choose the traineeship for tailoring their practical skills (see also part 2 of Report for the assessment of the study programme). This is in particular relevant for

the students of a full-time studies, where the students might not have working experience by the time when they start the studies.

No joint programmes are envisaged in the study direction.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

- A wide range of cooperative educational activities and field trips to various institutions demonstrate a comprehensive and effective informal network of partners working together in practice. The examples of cooperation show the direct relevance of the partners for the study direction.
- The list of formal international education partners is solid for a relatively small institution like EKA. Formally, the current network of partnerships allows for an intensification of international activities both in studies and research and thus contributes to the development of the study direction. However, a considerable number of partnerships do not work in practice. There is no student mobility within the programme. The lack of internationalisation of the curriculum is mitigated by some internationalisation activities at home, where students and staff can gain international experience without international mobility.
- During the on-site visit, the programme associates (employers) confirmed the high value of a traineeship for the development of students' competences. The low number of cooperation agreements for traineeship could be one of the main reasons why an insignificant number of students choose a traineeship as an elective.

Strengths:

- 1) Wide range of cooperative educational activities
- 2) Efforts to implement experiential learning (field trips)

Weaknesses:

- 1) Due to the small number of students and structure of students (mostly part-time) there is no credit mobility.
- 2) No clear strategy for improving possibilities of internationalization for the students and professors

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

### **Analysis**

EKA University contributed to the analysis of the recommendations and their implementation in view of the specific features of the direction and programme.

The previous assessment procedure of direction was done in 2017. In this assessment procedure in total 26 recommendations were given. All recommendations were given for the study programme, no recommendation was for study direction.

Not all recommendations were fully implemented. Regarding recommendations, which have been only partially implemented, the outstanding points were included in the development plan of the study direction, for example, integration of mobility into the curriculum (Recommendation 10), students participation in competitions and research of employers (Recommendation 18), students

participation in the European Law Students' Association (ELSA) events and mootcourts (Recommendation 19).

It was not possible to change the admission requirements to the programme (Recommendation 16) as they are laid down by law.

Recommendation to increase the number of EKA personnel with a specialization in private law, with expert knowledge in international commercial law (Recommendation 12) lost its topicality due to the changes in the programme from professional to academic.

After the 2017 evaluation process, the programme was significantly changed, taking into account 26 recommendations and taking into account changes in the regulatory framework in Latvia.

The main changes made: 1) the programme was transformed from a professional to an academic study programme; 2) the name of the programme was changed to "Law"; 3) as the type of programme changed, the content of the programme changed as well, in accordance with the requirements of the academic education standard; 4) descriptions of study courses and assessment of the study results were improved; 5) the teaching staff was changed from professional to more with legal education and experience in the field of law; 6) a larger number of students was admitted.

In 2018 the study programme EKA used procedure "Change approval in accredited study direction" during which 9 recommendations to the programme were provided.

Recommendations were taken seriously, most of them were implemented. The recommendations, which were partially implemented, were included in the development plan of the study direction, for example, to ensure student mobility abroad as a part of the curriculum (Recommendation 10), to encourage a better engagement of the academic staff and students in scientific activities (Recommendation 18), to include moot court into the programme, expanding collaboration with the European Law Students' Association (ELSA) (Recommendation 19), ect. Recommendations that were not implemented were indicated as impossible due to the regulatory framework or as out of date due to changes in the programme.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

Recommendations were taken seriously, most of them were implemented. The recommendations, which were partially implemented, were included in the development plan of the study direction. EKA has contributed to the analysis of the recommendations and their implementation in view of the specific features of the study field and study programme in Law science.

Strengths:

1) The implementation of partially implemented recommendations was included in the development plan of the study direction

Weaknesses:

1) The implementation of the recommendations is described formally.

## **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:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** Bases on the shortcomings indicated below (see 1.2; 1.4; 1.6, R.2-R.4)

No permanent forum dealing with the overall quality assurance system at the programme/study direction level; employers' involvement in the development of the study direction and programme is not sufficiently clear; numerous issues in the programme are solved by one person – a programme director; the workload of the teaching staff lacks transparency and risks to be unbalanced; support for legal research is not well-tailored and targeted; the procedure, the criteria for getting the support and its extent lacks transparency and clarity; the qualification assurance system is reactive rather than proactive; wide scope of the operational functions allocated to the head/director, puts the success of the development of the study direction at risk; low students' participation in the quality assurance surveys; lack of library resources; risk to financial sustainability of the programme due to absence of the diversity in budget resources; no credit mobility; unclear strategy for improving possibilities of internationalisation for the students and professors; lack of a clear vision for internationalisation of studies' curriculum; the implementation of the recommendations is described formally, very few examples are given.

- 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:** Quality policy has been established and is available to everyone on the web-page of the HEI (see part 2 of the Report).

- 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:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** There is no permanent forum dealing with the overall quality assurance system at the programme/study direction level; employers' involvement in the development of the study direction and programme is not sufficiently clear; numerous issues in the programme are solved by one person – a programme director. See part 1 of the Report.

- 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:** The procedure for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students is transparent and efficient. See part 1 of the Report

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** The workload of the teaching staff lacks transparency and risks to be unbalanced. Support for legal research is not well-tailored and targeted. The procedure, the criteria for getting the support and its extent lacks transparency and clarity. The teaching staff, which is the primary target audience, was not fully aware of how the system functions. The qualification assurance system is reactive rather than proactive. See part 2 of the Report.

- 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:** Data for quality assurance is gathered and evaluated regularly, and the HEI management responds to these surveys. See part 2 of the Report.

- 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:** Partially compliant
- Justification:** Wide scope of the operational functions allocated to the head/director, puts the success of the development of the study direction at risk (see part 1 of the Report); low students' participation in the quality assurance surveys; lack of library resources (part 3 of the programme); risk to financial sustainability of the programme due to absence of the diversity in budget resources (see part 3 of the Report).
- 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:** Partially compliant
- Justification:** No credit mobility; unclear strategy for improving possibilities of internationalization for the students and professors; lack of a clear vision for internationalization of studies' curriculum (see part 5 of the Report)
- 9 R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).
- Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant
- Justification:** Lack of international scientific projects; small part of research outputs submitted for evaluation are in the field of law (see part 4 of the Report)
- 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:** Fully compliant
- Justification:** The implementation of the recommendations has been carried out. However, it should be noted that the implementation of the recommendations is described formally (see part 6 of the Report).

## 8. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

1. To update study course descriptions (syllabus) every year so that the newest results of the research can be included.
2. To establish specific operating rules to ensure academic ethics during online assessment.
3. To increase the availability of books and databases in the library in the field of law.
4. The survey system should ensure a higher rate of student participation in giving feedback on the study programme's quality. To this end, the Institution is free to choose any strategy regarding the best practices in the country and the region (e.g., mandatory survey for students to be matriculated to the next study semester; mandatory survey about the subject before seeing exam results).

### Long-term recommendations

1. To include student representatives (the student council) in the analysis of these surveys to give additional support to the management of the EKA and study direction to increase the quality and development of the studies.

- |  |
|--|
| 2. To review the scope of responsibilities of the head of the study direction/director of the study programme so that he/she could contribute to the development of the study direction more effectively.  |
| 3. To create a permanent forum exclusively dealing with the overall quality assurance system at the programme/study direction level. Such a forum (e.g., study direction or programmes committee) could comprise internal actors (teachers, students, administrative personnel, high management) as well as the external stakeholders (alumni, employers, e.g., judiciary and public administration). It could effectively involve the relevant stakeholders and students in the decision-making processes at the study direction level. |
| 4. To review EKA's study direction "Law" development plan, including a plan of activities to achieve the KPIs of internationalization.   |
| 5. To develop and formalize a transparent system of research support, which would include a competitive procedure, clear criteria, and the types of support  |
| 6. To ensure the study's financial sustainability, to diversify the budgetary resources. To attract other finance sources than the tuition fees by developing research projects with professional organizations, participating in public tenders to provide certain services, etc.   |
| 7. To focus on the improvement of the students' linguistic skills.   |
| 8. To increase number of cooperation agreements for traineeships   |

## II. "Law" ASSESSMENT

### II. "Law" ASSESSMENT

#### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

The study programme is called "Law" and leads to the degree of "Social science bachelor's degree in law". The study programme's characteristic is the aim to give students a strong core of general diversified law culture through a clear structure of compulsory, restricted elective and elective courses. The programme brings a broad range of expertise essential for the lawyer's knowledge-base, together with competencies of research and practical involvement, thus better enabling further specializations. The acquired qualification level corresponds to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) 6. Since this is academic bachelor study programme, there are no options to get professional qualification.

A bachelor graduate is also expected to be able to carry out professional duties. Although no professional qualifications are obtained when graduating from this study programme, a survey of graduates from the study programme shows that many students start employment during the course of studies and continue after graduation.

The programme is organized as part-time, full-time, or part-time extramural studies distance education. A positive trend indicates an interest of students in choosing part-time distance studies, which can be explained by: 1) the possibility to connect work with studies, as studies take place on Saturdays; 2) the opportunity for students from the whole country to choose this form of studies; 3) a more balanced study plan, which also requires more extensive studies.

All parts of the programme are taught in Latvian.

The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are clearly defined. The study programme is compliant with the provisions that are set out in the Latvian Law on Institutions of Higher Education. It also complies with other related Latvian laws and Regulations. The title of the program ('Law', code: 43380) correlates with the learning outcomes set for the programme and the title is related to the various applicable Regulatory provisions in Latvian law. When taught in a full-time mode, the duration of the study programme is three years; in part-time and distance learning formats it lasts three years and six months. The name of the study programme, the degree to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are interrelated.

The study programme ensures the possibility of continuation of studies in master (academic and professional) study programmes following matriculation regulations.

### **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

The study programme is compliant with the provisions that are set out in the Latvian Law on Institutions of Higher Education. The title of the study programme correlates with the learning outcomes set for the programme and is related to the various applicable Regulatory provisions in Latvian law. The name of the study programme, the degree to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are interrelated. The acquired qualification level corresponds to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) 6.

Strengths:

- 1) The robust structure of studies, allowing students to comprehend a general diversified law culture, together with an competencies to research and practical involvement, enables further specialisations in law
- 2) The variety of forms of study, with a trend to offer part-time distance studies.

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

### **Analysis**

The study courses (syllabus) descriptions are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Clause 55). They are standardized for all study courses. The aim, tasks and results are formulated well. Teachers review on a regular basis the content of their courses and the content of independent work, the methods of teaching and evaluation, and the bibliography. The study courses include current industry affairs and scientific trends. The study programme complies with national academic education standards. A mapping of the study programme has been performed, comparing the entire study programme's achievable results with the achievable results of each study course. Study courses cover all sub-sectors of law.

The programme complies with the requirements of Section 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions - not less than five professors and associate professors altogether, who are elected to academic positions in the relevant higher education institution, take part in the implementation of the compulsory part and the limited elective part of academic study programmes.

However, the study programme could be further developed to meet the interests of students better. Students are not interested in choosing a traineeship (see also part 5 of the Report), because instead they can choose to take two interesting theoretical study courses. There is no motivation to

participate in the study course "Introduction to Studies" since no credit points are awarded for it. All students' efforts should be evaluated, therefore the course which forms part of the curriculum should be allocated with credit point. The necessity for students to work during their studies results in a length of studies and drop-outs.

The study programme is also implemented in the e-environment Moodle platform, where special solutions and tools are used to give online lectures, record and place materials. Materials are updated on a regular basis and recorded on-line lectures are provided. In future is it planned to include the master's study program in the study direction.

The content of programme is relevant and complementary, and it 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 study implementation methods, including 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.

The outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students, employers, and graduates are used to improve the quality of studies. Data from students are collected regularly (surveys in every semester). However, due to the small number of student surveys (see part 2 of the Report), the obtained data do not provide a complete overview of student satisfaction with studies. Data from graduates are collected once - immediately after graduation. The growth of graduates and their career development trends are not traced (see other related issues in part 2 of the Report). Data from employers are not obtained through surveys, they are obtained mainly through individual conversations.

There has been no mobility of the students in the reporting period. The lack of mobility may be partially explained by the dominance of part-time students in the programme. This is aggravated by limited students' linguistic capabilities demonstrated during the visits and the lack of the vision of how to encourage students' mobility and internationalize the curriculum of the programme. There are no incentives in the structure of the programme (for example by building a designated mobility window) for the students to benefit from the international experience during the mobility for studies. Since EKA aims to prepare competitive specialists in law not only for Latvian, but also to foreign markets, EKA should explore all the possible ways to encourage students' mobility for traineeships or studies.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

1. The content of the programme is relevant and complementary, and it complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the sector and scientific trends. The study courses (syllabus) descriptions are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The study programme complies with national academic education standards. Required number of professors and associate professors take part in the implementation of the programme. However, the study programme could be further developed to meet the interests of students better. Students are not interested in choosing the traineeship, because it is not required by the standard of academic education, and instead they can choose to take two interesting theoretical study courses. The necessity for students to work during their studies result in a length of studies and drop-outs.

2. The study implementation methods, including 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.

3. The outcomes of the surveys are used to improve the quality of studies. Data from students are collected regularly. Data from graduates are collected once after graduation, but the growth of graduates and their career development trends are not traced. Data from employers are not obtained through surveys, they are obtained mainly through individual conversations. The achievements of the programme should be evaluated with the participation of employers.

4. There has been no mobility of the students in the reporting period. The lack of mobility may be partially explained by the dominance of part-time students in the programme and limited students' linguistic capabilities.

Strengths:

- 1) The study programme complies with national academic standard
- 2) The study courses cover all sub-sectors of law
- 3) Although it is an academic program, students are also offered the opportunity to choose an internship

Weaknesses:

- 1) The necessity for students to work during their studies result in a length of studies and drop-outs
- 2) There are no incentives in the structure of the programme for the students to benefit from the international experience during the mobility for studies

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

#### **Analysis**

EKA has the necessary infrastructure and material and technical support for the implementation of the study programme. Students have access to auditoriums that are equipped not only with the tables and chairs needed for study needs, but also with multimedia equipment and stationary presentation equipment. The university staff, i.e. academic, general and students, can use both the study rooms and the computer class, as well as the library. EKA also provides an Internet connection, as well as access to internal information systems, where study materials are available, as well as internal normative documents and databases.

The number of books and databases in foreign languages is not sufficient. There are also few databases specializing in the field of law, in particular in foreign languages available in the library (the only databases with subscription is EBSCO & Business Register). During the visit, EKA presented additional information that EKA uses a number of Open Access databases, a list of which is available on EKA website. The number of books in foreign languages does not satisfy the programme's needs either (only 17 acquired during the reporting period).

The institution knows the needs of the students in the programme and has a well-functioning support system. The students get informational, methodological, career, technical, and financial support. The site visit has shown the students' and alumni's overall satisfaction with the services provided by the Institution in the field.

The provision of the programme is supported by e-studies environment with online study materials and online assessments. Technical support is provided if necessary via e-mails and calls; the user

manual is available on the e-learning platform. Since the programme is also offered in distance learning, the resources required for distance learning are sufficient and the provision is good.

Since the Study programme is the sole programme in the study direction, the analysis in part 3 of the Report on resources and provision of the study direction is directly relevant for this section.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

EKA has a suitable infrastructure and the material and technical arrangements necessary for the implementation of the study programme (except for library resources). Additionally, EKA has a plan and is already actively improving the study premises and environment. EKA has a cooperation agreement with Alberta College on the joint use of infrastructure and material and technical equipment. The library and databases are available to students, while at the same time the number of foreign-language books and databases is insufficient. The library has few foreign-language databases and books in the field of law to fully meet the needs of the study programme and, in particular, study direction.

Strengths:

- 1) Infrastructure is constantly developed and meet the needs of the students in the programme
- 2) Study IT systems are good and supportive for students and teachers
- 3) The students' support system is based on the needs of the students and is functioning well

Weaknesses:

- 1) The number of available books in the field of law in the EKA library is not sufficient and availability of databases in the EKA digital environment should be wider.
- 2) The financial provision for the study programme is currently sufficient, however, financial sustainability depends mainly on the number of the students

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the formal requirements for implementing the study programme and the requirements outlined in the regulatory enactments. EKA keeps the proportionate balance between the elected and visiting staff (56,5% of them are permanently employed). Since the study programme is in the field of law, and most of the international scientific publications are in other fields, it is recommended to increase the number of the permanently employed teaching staff members in the latter group.

A number of practicing professionals teach in the study programme bringing the knowledge from the practice.

The inconsistency of data submitted in the CVs and the list of the publications is observed. Based on the CVs only every second member of academic staff of the programme is involved in scientific research (11 out of 23 teaching staff members) and only around 30% of academic staff in the field of law do research (5 out of 16). The list of the publications demonstrate completely different picture - almost all members of teaching staff are in general involved in research. Most of the research in the field of law is published nationally; only some publications are published in English language in international journals. The most productive researchers teaching in the programme are

unfortunately not in the field of law (based on the research outputs submitted for evaluation). The number of publications in Scopus and WoS databases is slowly increasing, however still remains low and usually produced by the same staff members. Considering the limitations to publish internationally in the field of law in the above-mentioned databases, these efforts are highly welcomed and should be further fostered by the financial and administrative support. The research results are used in the study process; however, it is limited to the subjects taught by the researching teaching staff.

The mechanism for a mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members is not clearly described in a self-evaluation report. It may be inferred that the correlation of the modules is the primary responsibility of the Programme director, who cooperates with the academic staff in carrying out the strengths and weaknesses assessment of the study direction, revising content of the study programme. Research teams align scientific priorities within research direction; however, it is not clear what is the interaction of the Study Programme director with the coordinators of the research teams in the field of law.

### **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

1. The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the formal requirements for implementing the study programme and the requirements outlined in the regulatory enactments. EKA keeps the proportionate balance between the elected and visiting staff, however, it is recommended to increase the number of the permanently employed teaching staff members specializing in the field of law.

2. Most of teaching staff members are in general involved in research. Most of the research in the field of law is published nationally; only some publications are published in English language in international journals. The most productive researchers teaching in the programme are unfortunately not in the field of law. The number of publications in Scopus and WoS databases is slowly increasing, however still remains low and usually produced by the same staff members.

Strengths:

- 1) Proportionate balance between elected and visiting teaching staff
- 2) Involvement of professionals in the field bringing the knowledge from the practice

Weaknesses:

- 1) Only some publications are published in English in internationally recognized peer-reviewed journals in the field of law
- 2) The research results are used in the study process, however, they have limited impact on the study process

## **5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Law"**

### **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:** The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the bachelor study program "Law" complies with the procedure laid down by the Cabinet of Ministers 16.04.2013. Regulation No. 202 "Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents".

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:** Agreements have been concluded with Daugavpils University and Turība University for providing students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another higher education institution, in case the implementation of the study program in EKA University is discontinued. However, both of these agreements are concluded for the adoption of students from the professional study program, not from the academic program. Although a review of previous decisions shows that this is the same program that has been changed from a professional to an academic program, the agreements should be amended accordingly.

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:** A document confirming that EKA University guarantees to the students a compensation for losses is attached in Annexes. Confirmation states that EKA will inform students of the possibility to move to another study program or to a partner HEI. If EKA is unable to ensure the continuation of studies in another HEI, EKA repays the student the payment for non-trained credit points. However, such a statement is not included in the study contract, which would be recommended.

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:** Cabinet 7.07.2009 Regulation No. 733 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language". Attached is a statement signed by the Rector of the University that out of 23 lecturers, the state language is the mother tongue, five speak the language at the C1 level, one at the C2 level. Cabinet 7.07.2009 Regulation No. 733 The Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language stipulate that the HEI academic staff must know the official language at least at C1 level. Attached is a statement signed by the Rector of the University that out of 23 lecturers, for 17 state language is mother tongue, five speak the language at the C1 level, one at the C2 level. Consequently, the requirements of the Regulation have been met.

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. 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:**

- 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:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** The Law on Higher Education Institutions stipulates that not less than five professors and associate professors altogether, who are elected to academic positions in the relevant HEI, shall take part in the implementation of the academic study programs. In the annex is a confirmation that two professors and three associate professors, elected in EKA, participate in the implementation of the 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:** The sample of the study agreement complies with the requirements of the Cabinet of Ministers 23.01.2007 Regulations No. 70 "Regulations to be Included in the Study Agreement".

- 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:** The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared on Latvian since program is implemented only on Latvian. The descriptions of the study courses comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 (Study course), and Section 562 (Study modul) of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

- 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:** Not relevant

**Justification:**

- 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:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** The opinion of the Council for Higher Education is attached on the permission to implement a programme with less than 250 students. Considering the fact that the EKA University of Applied Sciences has complied with the requirements of the Law On Institutions of Higher Education as regards the number of students as well as assessing the importance of this programme, the Council of Higher Education, guided by the second paragraph of section 55 of the Law On Institutions of Higher Education has decided to support the EKA University of Applied Sciences in the implementation of the "Law" programme of Bachelor studies for less than 250 full-time students.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** The study programme complies with the national academic standard set by the Cabinet of Ministers on 13.05.2014. regulation no. 240 "Regulations on the State Academic 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:**

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:** Members of the academic staff have publications within the last six years. However, number of publications in Scopus and Web of Science databases remains small; part of the research outputs submitted for evaluation are not in the field of law.

15 P5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** All sections from 1 to 14 (excluding those - not relevant) fully comply with requirements

## 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:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** The number of available books in the field of law in the EKA library is not sufficient and availability of databases in the EKA digital environment should be wider. The financial provision for the study programme is currently sufficient, however, financial sustainability depends only on the number of the students.

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:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the formal requirements for implementing the study programme and the requirements outlined in the regulatory enactments. Almost all members of academic staff in the field of law publishes peer reviewed publications (except for 2). The research results are used in the study process, however, they have limited impact on the study process (see part 4 of the assessment of the study programme).

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:**

## Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

- The title of the study programme, the degree to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are interrelated. The content of the programme is relevant and complementary; it complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the sector and scientific trends. However, the study

programme could be further developed to meet the interests of students better.

- The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centered learning and teaching principles are taken into account.

- Required number of professors and associate professors take part in the implementation of the programme. The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the formal requirements for implementing the study programme and the requirements outlined in the regulatory enactments.

- Most of teaching staff members are in general involved in research. Most of the research in the field of law is published nationally; only some publications are published in English in international journals. The most productive researchers teaching in the programme are, unfortunately, not in the field of law. The number of publications are usually produced by the same staff members. EKA keeps the proportionate balance between the elected and visiting staff. However, more teaching staff members specializing in the field of law employed permanently could ensure better research results.

- EKA has a suitable infrastructure and the material and technical arrangements necessary for the implementation of the study programme (except for library resources).

Strengths:

1) The study programme complies with the majority of formal requirements

2) The content of the programme is relevant and complementary, and it complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the sector and scientific trends.

Weaknesses:

1) Library resources are not sufficient, the financial sustainability is temporary

2) Only some publications are published in English in internationally recognized peer-reviewed journals in the field of law

3) The research results of the teaching staff are generally used in the study process, however, they have limited impact on the process

4) There no incentives for the students to gain international experience during mobility studies abroad

The experts observe, that since EKA provides an academic degree in law for their graduate students, it should be assessed according to the criteria valid for every high education institution, which provides a similar academic degree. The same level of student qualification should result from programs that are generally of the same quality and are assessed against similar requirements, even though formally institutions providing such programs are different in nature and status (public/private, big/small, applied sciences/research universities, etc.). Students who formally acquire the same academic degrees enter the domestic and international labor markets, competing for quite similar job positions. Therefore they should have diplomas that require the same, as much as possible harmonized, effort to get them.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Law"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

## **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Law"**

### **Short-term recommendations**

- |  |
|--|
| 1. All students' efforts should be evaluated therefore the course "Introduction to Studies" which forms part of the curriculum should be allocated with credit point               |
| 2. It is recommended to discuss the option to offer more electives for the choice to tailor individual needs of the students   |
| 3. To build a designated mobility window to encourage the students to benefit from the international experience during the mobility for studies                                    |
| 4. To encourage the use of international research outputs in the study process, in particular in students' research, and make sure that the resources are available in the library |

### **Long-term recommendations**

- |  |
|--|
| 1. To review the structure of the support for legal research by ensuring transparency and clarity so that more teaching staff members may benefit from the incentives for publications of the research results abroad                            |
| 2. To increase the number of the permanently employed teaching staff members in the field of law   |
| 3. To enhance the development of students' international competences it is recommended to offer subjects in English as elective as part of formal curriculum   |
| 4. To ensure the study's financial sustainability of the programme and international experience of the teaching staff by encouraging teaching staff to develop research and study projects with academic and non-academic international partners |
| 5. To increase the availability of books and databases in the library in the field of law.   |

## **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>		Partially compliant	<p>Bases on the shortcomings indicated below (see 1.2; 1.4; 1.6, R.2-R.4)  No permanent forum dealing with the overall quality assurance system at the programme/study direction level; employers' involvement in the development of the study direction and programme is not sufficiently clear; numerous issues in the programme are solved by one person – a programme director; the workload of the teaching staff lacks transparency and risks to be unbalanced; support for legal research is not well-tailored and targeted; the procedure, the criteria for getting the support and its extent lacks transparency and clarity; the qualification assurance system is reactive rather than proactive; wide scope of the operational functions allocated to the head/director, puts the success of the development of the study direction at risk; low students' participation in the quality assurance surveys; lack of library resources; risk to financial sustainability of the programme due to absence of the diversity in budget resources; no credit mobility; unclear strategy for improving possibilities of internationalisation for the students and professors; lack of a clear vision for internationalisation of studies' curriculum; the implementation of the recommendations is described formally, very few examples are given.</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>		Partially compliant	<p>No credit mobility; unclear strategy for improving possibilities of internationalization for the students and professors; lack of a clear vision for internationalization of studies' curriculum (see part 5 of the Report</p>

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).		Partially compliant	Lack of international scientific projects; small part of research outputs submitted for evaluation are in the field of law (see part 4 of the Report)
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.	Fully compliant		The implementation of the recommendations has been carried out. However, it should be noted that the implementation of the recommendations is described formally (see part 6 of the Report).

#### 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	Law	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Partially compliant		Average

#### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

None