

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: HOTEL SCHOOL Hotel Management College

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

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

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The HOTEL SCHOOL Hotel Management College (HS) provides higher education in the study field of Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organisation (study field) within its short-cycle professional higher education programme “Hospitality Services Organization” (study programme). The study programme demonstrates several notable strengths and areas for improvement. Its key strengths include a strong international focus, supported by active participation in international projects like Erasmus and formal agreements with institutions abroad. This global engagement is complemented by the backing of motivated employers eager to deepen collaboration and anticipate meaningful contributions from graduates to the industry. Additionally, the study programme benefits from specialised software and a high level of digitalisation, effectively integrating digital resources and project materials into the curriculum. The institution has developed an effective on-boarding system for international students. It actively involves students in applied research activities, encouraging them to write articles. The involvement of industry professionals as lecturers further enhances the study programme, ensuring students gain real-world insights and expertise from practitioners.

Despite these strengths, some areas require significant attention. One primary challenge is the need for teaching staff to engage more actively in applied research with companies, which would help bridge the gap between academia and industry and enhance the practical relevance of the curriculum. The collaboration between teaching staff and employers needs to be strengthened to ensure that the study programme continues to meet the needs of the hospitality sector. The lack of a comprehensive quality assurance and management system is also a critical issue. The absence of such a system hinders systematic efforts to improve and modernise the study programme, underscoring the urgent need to implement structured quality management practices. Furthermore, the current admission criteria are primarily formal. They should be refined to attract more motivated and capable students, ensuring the study programme is filled with individuals committed to hospitality studies.

The study programme also faces significant challenges in long-term sustainability, as it struggles with declining admissions and a high dropout rate. These issues, though concerning, present opportunities for strategic intervention. By addressing these trends with targeted recruitment and retention strategies, the study programme could improve its sustainability and appeal. The curriculum, seen as outdated, requires a thorough and systematic development process involving regular feedback from both employers and students to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to industry demands. Additionally, while internationalisation is a strength, there is room to expand global partnerships by collaborating with more institutions outside of Latvia, further elevating the study programme's international profile and attractiveness.

In conclusion, the study programme has a solid foundation, particularly in its international engagement, industry partnerships, and student involvement in research. However, challenges remain in areas such as curriculum modernisation, quality assurance, and student retention, all of which need to be addressed to ensure the programme's continued relevance and success in the competitive field of hospitality education.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1.

The study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organization" (study field) is strategically managed with a clear aim. The aim of the study field (SER., p. 4) is to prepare highly qualified specialists who can effectively contribute to the economy, particularly in the hospitality and tourism sectors. The short-cycle professional higher education programme "Hospitality Services Organization" (study programme) is designed to meet the needs of the industry by providing comprehensive education that integrates practical and theoretical knowledge. However, it is worth noting that the courses offered, both mandatory and elective, are quite outdated and would require some changes, or rather an update in the sense of introducing modern courses that keep up with the contemporary changes in this very dynamic industry and sector. The study field is aligned with the strategic goals of the HOTEL SCHOOL Hotel Management College (HS), which include improving management processes, enhancing the competences of academic staff, improving study quality, increasing student enrollment, promoting applied research, and fostering international cooperation (SER, p.12).

The study field development is guided by the broader strategic objectives outlined in the Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029 (DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR 2024-2029_compressed.pdf). These objectives are informed by national and European educational guidelines and aim to ensure the HS competitiveness and relevance in a rapidly changing educational and economic environment. The focus is on creating a flexible and inclusive learning environment that can adapt to the needs of diverse student groups and industry demands, while also fostering innovation and knowledge creation through collaboration with other educational institutions (i.e. To explore the technological innovations and career support at the Swiss Hotel Management School (SHMS), a partnership with the institution was initiated (SER, p.53) and industry partners (i.e. The Chefs' Club, where chefs held master classes for the College's students., (SER, p.52). According to the information obtained in the interviews during the assessment visit, discussions about changes in the study programme are taking place (i.e. introduction of new contemporary topics in hospitality and tourism, Incorporating new international lecturers, reflections on ways to merge similar courses or to avoid this approach etc.). Still, the clear procedures on how and at what intervals this is carried out have not been defined. This solution definitely needs to be addressed, as it is a very effective way to modernize the study programme and gradually introduce changes where and how they are needed. This approach also allows teaching staff to participate in creating a contemporary and attractive study programme.

This aim of the study field is aligned with the mission, vision, strategic priorities and basic directions and tasks listed in the "HOTEL SCHOOL" Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029 (p. 10-11).

The HS mission emphasizes the development of the tourism and hospitality industry at both local and international levels (Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029, p.10). It seeks to achieve this by offering vocational secondary, higher, and continuing education that meets the demands of the global labor market. The study field's focus on teaching specialists who are competitive on an international scale directly supports this mission, ensuring that the HS contributes effectively to the growth and innovation in the hospitality sector.

The vision of the HS—to become a leading institution in Latvia, recognized regionally and globally for its specialization in tourism and hospitality education—further reinforces the importance of this study field (Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029, p. 10). The study field's strategic alignment with this vision is evident in its efforts to attract international students and faculty, foster close cooperation with foreign employers and educational institutions, and promote lifelong learning for professional development as set in the objective number 5 of the Hotel

Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029 (p. 34). The existence of the College Internationalization and Modernization Strategy 2021-2027 supports its intentions to become an internationally recognized and attractive institution.

In addition, the HS development goals, such as improving management processes, enhancing academic staff, integrating applied research, and promoting internationalization (Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029, p.18) are well-reflected in the management of this study field. These priorities ensure that the study programme are interconnected in a logical manner, supporting the overall aim of preparing students for specialist roles in the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, the strategic priorities of the Hotel Management College in hotel and restaurant service, tourism, and recreation organization are consistent with national and European Union educational guidelines (SER, p. 11 - 12). The goals and objectives of the study field are consistent with Latvia's National Development Plan and the European Commission's recommendations, which highlight the importance of preparing a workforce equipped to meet the current and future demands of the tourism and hospitality industry (SER, p.12).

1.1.2.

The HS has recognized its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. (Hotel School Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029, p. 16 and SER, p. 14 – 15).

Based on the aforementioned analysis, the main strengths of the HS are that the HS offers accredited educational programme recognized in Latvia, the EU, and Great Britain. This study programme is well-resourced with laboratories, study literature, and has extensive experience managing EU funds. The academic staff includes many industry practitioners, and the HS maintains strong partnerships with leading industry employers both locally (HWS Management (Avalon Hotel & Conferences), Max Cekot Kitchen, BBH Investments (Baltic Beach Hotel & SPA), Viesnīca LATVIJA (Radisson Blu Hotel Latvia etc.) and internationally (Blue Hotels (Italy), Parklane, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa Limassol (Cyprus), Hotel Alegria Mar Mediter-rania (Spain) etc. Students benefit from internships, resulting in high employment rates among graduates. The HS provides study programme in English, supports the export of educational services, and is located in the historical center of an EU capital, with its own dormitories for students.

The HS also listed its weaknesses, bringing out that the HS offers only one short-cycle professional higher education study programme and has relatively low visibility as a new and small institution. It has a small student population and experiences a high dropout rate, facing challenges in competing with state educational institutions due to its paid education model and lack of state funded places.

The HS also deals with high academic staff turnover, a limited number of foreign guest lecturers, and limited opportunities for students to participate in the Student Parliament's activities. Additionally, the HS lacks applied research commissioned by industry and has limited involvement in policy-making within the tourism, hospitality, and education sectors. It has to be underlined that the HS has long struggled with a low number of students, driven by various factors over time. Before gaining institutional accreditation in 2020, the HS couldn't issue state-recognized diplomas, which hindered student recruitment. In 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic severely impacted the tourism and hospitality industry, leading many current and potential students to shift to other fields due to declining trust in the industry as a viable career path. Even after the pandemic, the low prestige of the sector remains an issue. Given Latvia's declining population, the HS began attracting more foreign students, reaching 61% in 2023. However, Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2022 raised security concerns among potential international students, particularly those attending overseas education fairs, making Latvia seem like a high-risk region (Hotel School Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029, p. 14).

The rapid growth of the hospitality industry presents a stable demand for new professionals both in Latvia and abroad. There is a global trend of young people studying abroad, which creates opportunities to attract foreign students. EU and regional structural fund support for education and training, as well as business competitiveness, offers additional funding possibilities. Recent legislative changes allow colleges to implement professional secondary education programmes, significantly expanding the potential student base. Other opportunities include implementing work-based learning, developing distance learning, creating microcredentials, and offering joint study programmes. The Erasmus+ programme also provides a chance to attract mobile students and learners. Additionally, the absence of specialized higher education institutions in the field of hospitality in the Baltic States reduces regional competition.

The HS faces potential threats from unfavorable changes in external regulatory acts affecting its operations. The long-term decline in Latvia's population presents a challenge, as does the risk of emerging strong competitors. The unstable geopolitical situation in the Baltic region and Europe, particularly due to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, poses a national security risk that could impact the export of educational services and deter foreign students. Furthermore, the threat of a global economic crisis could affect funding and overall stability.

The HS recognized a decline in international student numbers as a weakness. To counter this, it is enhancing international recruitment efforts and increasing foreign faculty through new partnerships and targeted information campaigns. In response to the need for greater research output, the HS is involving staff in relevant projects and studies, boosting its research activities (i.e Business Models Analysis, BMA) developed within the framework of the Nordplus Horizontal project no.NPHZ-2021/10064 "Business Models post Corona in the Hospitality Sector", the project "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Toolkit", CB-VET plus project "Horizontal VET Capacity Building for internationalisation and modernisation including innovation, digitalisation and sustainability by methodology transfer and exchange of good practices" together with partners Italian Hospitality School SRL (Italy), National University of Food Technologies (Ukraine) and Don Bosco Youth Educational Center (Ukraine) etc.) To improve study programme visibility and accessibility, the introduction of English-taught programmes and the reduction of part-time study durations aim to attract a broader student base. The HS is expanding its educational offerings by introducing new study programmes, such as vocational secondary education and microcredentials, broadening its appeal to potential students. By continuing and expanding Erasmus+ mobility programmes and international collaborations, the HS aims to enhance its international presence and attract more students. To respond to demographic and economic challenges, the HS is diversifying its study programme offerings and increasing funding sources, ensuring sustainability in the face of external pressures. Maintaining competitiveness is a priority, with a focus on enhancing study programme quality and visibility to navigate a challenging educational landscape. Through these strategic initiatives, the HS is aligning its responses to SWOT factors, ensuring that it remains proactive in achieving its goals for 2024-2029 (SER, p. 13 - 15).

1.1.3.

The study field is managed by the HS director, who has been in position since 2021 as the HS has one study field and one study programme only. The director is the HS senior official responsible for its administrative management and representation without special authorization. The duties include ensuring compliance with relevant laws, overseeing operations according to the HS strategic plans, preparing and controlling the annual budget, managing resources, staffing, remuneration, and quality assessment, as well as organizing study programme accreditation and supporting student services and self-governance activities (SER, p. 7).

The study programme is managed with shared responsibilities and designed to foster continuous

development. The study programme director plays a crucial role in this process by regularly updating the curriculum to meet educational and occupational standards, as well as adapting to labor market requirements and industry trends but this process is not strictly formalized. Directors responsibilities include managing course descriptions, consulting with teaching staff, and ensuring that the study programme remains relevant and competitive. This approach to curriculum development demonstrates a clear orientation towards enhancing the study field. The study programme director's involvement in updating the study programme and integrating new developments ensures that the education provided is aligned with the latest industry needs, which is essential for the growth and sustainability of the study programme.

The decision-making process appears to be efficient and well-coordinated. The study programme director is empowered to make informed decisions regarding curriculum updates and programme changes, which are then presented to the HS academic staff and HS Council for approval. However, the study programme director meets with the Council only upon request, as there are no defined procedures outlining how to improve the study programme. For instance, a good way to engage teaching staff in the improvement of the study programme is to enable them to submit proposals for changes to individual course syllabi. The study programme director should be responsible for collecting proposed changes and forwarding them to the Council.

The positive feedback from the general student and staff satisfaction surveys (SER, p. 17) indicates that decisions are implemented effectively and that the management structure supports prompt and appropriate responses to emerging challenges. The collaboration between the study programme director and other key staff, such as the Career Consultant and Study Methodologist, supports efficient decision-making by ensuring that all aspects of the programme are considered.

The administrative and technical support provided by the HS staff is comprehensive and well-aligned with the needs of the study programme. The roles of the Career Consultant, Study Methodologist, and Computer System Administrator are clearly defined and directly contribute to the smooth functioning of the programme (SER, p. 16 -17).

The Career Consultant plays a vital role in bridging the gap between education and employment. By managing internships and job placements, the Career Consultant ensures that students are well-prepared for the workforce, which enhances the overall value of the study programme. This support is crucial in maintaining the relevance of the programme to industry needs.

The Study Methodologist's responsibilities include planning and organizing the academic schedule, managing individual study plans, and ensuring that all administrative tasks related to the educational process are handled efficiently. The positive feedback from students and staff highlights the effectiveness of this role in supporting the programme's objectives.

The technical support provided by the Computer System Administrator is critical in maintaining the HS IT infrastructure. By ensuring that computer systems are up-to-date and secure, the Administrator helps facilitate a smooth learning experience, which is particularly important in a digitalized education environment.

The HS practice of conducting annual satisfaction surveys for both students and staff is a strong indicator of a commitment to continuous improvement. The high levels of satisfaction reported in these surveys suggest that the management structure not only meets current needs but also actively seeks to address any potential issues. The positive feedback regarding the study programme director's leadership, particularly in mentoring staff and introducing innovations like digital simulations (SER, p. 17), indicates a strong focus on continuous professional development and innovation within the study programme.

Additionally, the constructive feedback about the Computer System Administrator's work shows that the HS is open to making improvements where necessary, such as refining the e-learning environment.

The admission procedures for the short-cycle professional higher education programme “Hospitality Services Organization” (study programme) are governed by the internal regulation titled “Admission Regulations of ‘HOTEL SCHOOL’ Hotel Management College for Short-Cycle Professional Higher Education Study Programme ‘Hospitality Services Organization’.” (https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Admission-regulations-HSO_2024-2025.pdf) This regulation is updated annually to reflect the latest requirements and are published for each academic year (SER, p. 18). The HS adheres to Latvian laws, including those regulating admissions for various categories of applicants, such as Latvian citizens, EU and EEA nationals, and third-country nationals. Special provisions ensure compliance with educational standards and international agreements. Despite the efforts made, the number of applicants (especially international ones) is decreasing (SER, p. 68). HS needs to improve practice for attracting foreign students and one possibility for that is to join Latvian agreement on good practice in attracting foreign students (<https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/agreement-good-practice-attracting-foreign-students>). The HS conducts an open admission process for the study programme, ensuring equal opportunity for all applicants. Requirements include general secondary or vocational secondary education. Applicants with secondary education prior to 2004 or from abroad, including those with special needs, are assessed based on their academic documents and may be subject to additional entrance tests, such as a video interview for non-EU applicants. For instance, foreign applicants must submit a statement to the Academic Information Centre regarding the equivalence of their foreign education to a Latvian degree, and proof of at least B2 level English proficiency from an international testing institution, unless they have completed secondary education in English or in the EU/EEA/Switzerland with a B2 level assessment. Non-EU/EEA/Swiss applicants must also take an additional video interview to assess their motivation, which is recorded and stored by the College for one year and may be shared with competent authorities upon request (SER, p. 18-19). However, there are issues concerning the language testing and beginning of the semester for foreign students that do not receive all the permits on time. HS accepts Duolingo as English language skills certification, but according to the platform information (<https://englishtest.duolingo.com/applicants>) several testers identification and authentication issues may occur.

The Admissions Committee, consisting of three members appointed by the director of HS manages the admission process. Tasks include preparing regulations, organizing the admissions process, verifying applicant eligibility, and informing candidates of their status. According to the general student satisfaction survey of 2024, 95% of students rate the work of the Admissions Committee positively, indicating effective and satisfactory management of the admissions process (SER, p. 19). During the assessment visit interview with students, they appreciated the provided support in the admission and adjustment stage.

Students can apply to have their previous educational achievements and professional experience recognized. Applications are reviewed by a dedicated committee, which includes faculty members and the director of HS. The Admissions Committee verifies submitted information, requests additional documentation if needed, and may conduct examinations to assess the relevance and quality of prior learning. In 2023, the Admissions Committee held four meetings and processed nine applications, demonstrating the system's effectiveness (SER, p. 20).

The recognition of competences acquired outside formal education, through professional experience, or from previous studies is governed by the HS internal regulation titled “Regulation on Recognition of Competences Acquired Outside Formal Education or Obtained by Professional Experience and Study Results Achieved in Previous Education.” (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Regulations-on-The-Recognition-of-Competences-Acquired-Outside-Formal-Education-or-in-Professional-Experience.pdf>) Although paragraph 4 (p. 4-5) in this document describes the Criteria for the recognition of competencies outside formal education or in professional experience and learning outcomes achieved in prior education, then the HS also need to pay more attention to the content-rich criteria, which should clarify for all the

parties on according to what the recognition decision is made. The confirmed document is more oriented to the formal criteria - minimum amount of credits, subjects which cannot be accepted as recognised through prior education or experience etc. and the principle, that the expected learning outcomes of the subject/course must be covered with the earlier studies or experiences and only then the particular subject/course can be recognised.

The HS ensures transparency in its procedures by informing stakeholders about admission criteria, recognition processes, and assessment methods. This includes publishing regulations and updates on the HS website (<https://hotelschool.lv/en/#>) and through direct communication with students and staff. It is important to note that all the details regarding the application process are published on the HS website and are available to anyone interested. The regular procedure follows, and it is also worth mentioning that the Chair of the Admission Committee (Manager for Foreign Students) contacts each applicant directly via email. In cases where applications are submitted through agencies with which the HS has agreements, Manager for Foreign Students directly contacts the responsible person at the agency (for students from India, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam).

1.1.5.

The study and assessment process at the HS is governed by the internal regulation "Study and Examination Procedure" (No 4-6/68, approved by the "HOTEL SCHOOL" Hotel Management College Council Meeting October 26, 2019 Protocol no. 28 with amendments, which are reinforced "HOTEL SCHOOL" Hotel Management College Council Meeting April 11, 2024, Protocol no. 4-8/2; <https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Study-and-examination-procedure-2024.pdf>) which is developed in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Vocational Education Law, and Cabinet Regulation No. 305 (13 June 2023) "Regulations regarding the state standard for higher vocational education." This document outlines the study course stages, examination procedures, and rights and duties of students and College staff. The regulation ensures that assessment methods are clearly defined, consistent with the aims of the study programme, and transparent to all stakeholders.

Evaluation Components (SER, p. 20 – 21):

1. Course Assignments: Includes regular interim assignments and a final course examination. These assignments can be in various forms such as tests, presentations, or seminars, depending on the course description. Students receive feedback on their performance.
2. Internship Report Presentation: Students present their internship reports, which are evaluated by a committee including academic and administrative staff and possibly industry practitioners. The presentation of an Internship Report follows the College's "Internship Organisation Procedure" (Internship-regulations.zip) and is coordinated by the Study Department of HS. Presentations can be traditional or take the form of an exhibition. The Internship Supervisor discusses the format and timing with the student in advance. Internship Reports are graded on a 10-point scale based on criteria such as content quality, presentation skills, and professional competence demonstrated during the internship. Credit is awarded if the student successfully meets these criteria and performs well during their report presentation.
3. Qualification Paper Presentation: The presentation of a Qualification Paper follows the HS internal "Regulations on Writing and Defending a Qualification Paper" (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Regulations-on-writing-and-defence-of-qualification-paper.pdf>) and is organized by the Study Department. It takes place at an open meeting of the State Examination Committee, which is approved by the director of HS and includes at least five members, with the Chairperson and at least half being experts in the hospitality and tourism sector. The presentation is graded on a 10-point scale based on the paper's quality, the presentation, the student's responses to the State Examination Committee's questions, and feedback from the supervisor and reviewer. The State Examination Committee also evaluates the student's answers to additional questions during the examination.

The annual students survey consistently shows high satisfaction with the evaluation methods. In 2024, 100% of students were satisfied with the evaluation methods and procedures (SER, p. 23). The students shared these positive experiences with the expert panel during the assessment visit interview.

The evaluation methods and procedures described align well with the aims of the study programme and the needs of the students. By incorporating principles of openness, obligation, and diversity, and through systematic procedures for assessing performance and providing feedback, the approach ensures that evaluations are both transparent and comprehensive. The clear definition of criteria and regular review processes support the alignment of assessments with educational objectives and student requirements, promoting effective learning outcomes and continuous improvement.

The evaluation methods and procedures are designed to align with the objectives of the study programmes, ensuring that they effectively measure the attainment of knowledge, skills, and competences required for successful completion of the programme. The diversity in assessment types and continuous feedback mechanisms support both the educational goals and the individual needs of students.

1.1.6.

According to SER (p. 23) the HS has established the principles of academic integrity in the internal regulation "Study and Examination Procedure" (No 4-6/68 and available at: <https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Study-and-examination-procedure-2024.pdf>) These principles define plagiarism as the appropriation of others' work or ideas, including those generated by artificial intelligence, without proper attribution. Plagiarism also includes cases where authorship is unclear or formal permissions are not obtained.

The Hotel Management College uses the "Identific" tool (formerly "Oxsico similarity checker") to detect plagiarism. Reports showing over a 25% match with other sources are reviewed, and necessary actions are taken (SER, p. 24). Academic staff are required to use this tool and report any detected breaches. The reports include possible sanctions such as lowering grades, requesting re-submission, or even exmatriculation. Teachers are aware of the available tools and use them to check students' written assignments during their evaluation.

Depending on the severity, sanctions can range from lowering the assignment grade to exmatriculation. For serious breaches, such as plagiarism in major assignments, students may be required to redo their work or face more severe penalties, including refusal to present their Qualification Paper (SER, p. 24). The Hotel Management College Director makes the final decision on reported violations, which is not subject to appeal. Repeated examinations or re-submissions may incur additional fees as outlined in the Hotel Management College's price list.

The principles of academic integrity are integrated into student and staff training programmes, ensuring everyone is aware of the expectations and the tools available to prevent and address violations. Students are aware of the sanctions and the necessity of upholding academic integrity. There are documents available to students on Moodle and the students are aware of these as confirmed during assessment visit interviews. Information on academic integrity policies and procedures is communicated through various channels including orientations, internal documents, and updates on the HS website (<https://hotelschool.lv/en/#>) .

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

The HS has recognized its strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats from the environment, and has adjusted its strategic plans accordingly, which can be highlighted as quality strategic planning for the institution. The management of the HS is very positive and strongly

committed to the further development of study programmes in foreign languages, as well as their modernization.

The short-cycle professional higher education programme “Hospitality Services Organization” at the HS demonstrates a correct framework that effectively supports student admission, assessment, and academic integrity. The admission procedures are transparent and equitable, ensuring a diverse applicant pool while adhering to legal standards and international agreements.

Regardless, it is necessary to work on adapting the application process according to the needs of international students, ensuring everything is completed on time so that students coming from outside Latvia can begin their studies in accordance with the defined academic calendar. The evaluation methods employed are comprehensive and aligned with the programme's educational objectives, incorporating a variety of assessment types that cater to different learning styles and promote effective learning outcomes.

The HS upholds a strong commitment to academic integrity, with clearly defined principles and effective mechanisms for detecting and addressing violations. This commitment is further reinforced through continuous communication. Overall, these elements create a conducive learning environment that prioritizes educational excellence and integrity, ultimately enhancing the quality of education provided to students in the hospitality sector. However, what is lacking is the modernization of the study programme and the facilitation of changes initiated by the teaching staff.

Strengths:

- 1) A clear commitment by the management of the HS towards the modernization of study programmes and stronger internationalization.
- 2) Clear principles of upholding academic integrity.
- 3) Fair evaluation methods for students.
- 4) The existence of strategic development documents for the future of the HS.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Non-existence of a formalized approach to improving the study programme through the joint contribution of all those involved in delivering the courses within this study programme.
- 2) Admission process of foreign students is not completely transparent and student supportive as well as not paying enough attention to attracting more quality international students.
- 3) There is no competition in admission, HS admitted all the students and the quality of the admitted students is fluctuating.
- 4) Duolingo is not a good language certification platform and alternatives must be considered.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1.

According to the information provided in the SER (Chapter 2.1.3, p. 15), the HS has established a Quality Policy, which was last updated in 2024 and is publicly available on the HS website (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Quality-Policy-2024.pdf>). This policy is reviewed at least once every three years to assess the effectiveness of the quality management system and to incorporate feedback from stakeholders. Additionally, processes, regulations, and other internal documents undergo a review at least once every three years and are accessible on the HS website (<https://hotelschool.lv/en/admission/policies>). The quality policy is binding for all HS staff and partners involved in processes for which the HS is responsible. Once a year, cooperation partners are surveyed about the assessment of cooperation and opportunities to improve it, so that the result

is aimed at achieving the goals.

In the interview during assessment visit with the programme director, the accreditation commission received information that he is available for questions about the quality system also from the side of entrepreneurs. Every representative of the HS, including staff, students, and partners, shares the responsibility for ensuring quality and actively participates in quality assurance, thereby fostering a culture of quality within the HS. The HS director is tasked with introducing, implementing, and monitoring the Quality Policy. However, the HS quality policy lacks clarity regarding the specific actions to be taken and the individuals responsible for each step. While the document states that the HS director is responsible for the overall process, it does not outline a detailed 'Step by Step' approach.

Experts got acquainted with the HS's quality policy. It turned out that the QA system is not coherent or comprehensive but a list of separate and unlinked measures, tools, and activities. Although the HS's strategy highlights the aims/goals and KPIs, the HS carries out different surveys, which are not connected with the ISO model or are not explained in QA.

Whether the study process is critical in any education institution should be at the centre of quality assurance and continuous improvement. According to the Quality Policy (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Quality-Policy-2024.pdf>), there is no transparent and well-defined process description for the study programme development, or even no processes are defined, described or linked with the ISO, Kotter steps, BTEC or other mentioned quality tools.

1.2.2.

The study programme development procedure is very shortly described in the internal document: Development of Study Programmes, Examination and Approval Procedure "Hotel School" in the College of Hotel Business (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Study-procedure-2019.pdf>) with just four claims. The document just mentions who can propose changes (Teaching staff, Programme Director, Director of the HS, students, employers) and in what order the updated programme should be confirmed. During the assessment visit interviews, the students, graduates, and employers couldn't bring out any examples that they have been asked to give feedback for the curriculum or have been in any other way involved in the study programme development process.

According to the information obtained in the interview during the assessment visit with the teaching staff, discussions about changes in the study programme are taking place for example during the academic staff meetings. However, the clear procedures on how and at what intervals this is carried out have not been defined. This solution definitely needs to be addressed, as it is a very effective way to modernize the study programme and gradually introduce changes where and how they are needed. This approach also allows teaching staff to participate in creating a contemporary and attractive programme. The process, how the other stakeholders (employers, students) are involved in the study programme development process must be clearly described and implemented. The study programme development procedure is not representative because the response rate for questionnaires is low and this causes the problem of reliability of the results. It's crucial to have a representative study programme development procedure to ensure that everyone's role in the process is valued and important.

During the assessment visit, the HS informed the experts that the procedure for developing and approving study programmes is in progress. A new regulation will be approved at the next HS Council meeting at the end of October, and this includes rules for joint study programmes according to the HS development strategy. Nevertheless, the experts haven't seen the new regulation, and the recommendations for updating are still valid.

1.2.3.

The Internal Rules and Safety Regulations for Students at "Hotel School" Hotel Management College

(<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Internal-rules-2018.pdf>) states in paragraph 4.10 that students are allowed "to make reasoned proposals for study process improvement to lodge complaints against irregularities in the study process, and to have a response from the officials by HOTEL SCHOOL Procedures." The document regulates the procedure by which the HS accepts and examines application and complaint submissions. Neither of the papers describes the procedure or principles of submitting proposals but are focused on complaints.

Based on the interviews during assessment visit with the students, the procedure for submitting student complaints and suggestions is simplified directly (verbal or emails or anonymous submission) to the teaching staff or study programme director and the aforementioned formal procedure is never used.

The experts agree with the HS management that the institution is small and built upon direct and open communication. Still, they also believe that the procedure and rules should be followed by the organisational culture, traditions, and everyday communication patterns. Therefore, submitting the complaint in a written procedure should be much easier, less formal, and more informative about handling the real and working procedure. The HS should also think about the following improvement areas in updating the documents:

- 1) Anonymous complaints must be allowed as well as whistle-blowing;
- 2) according to the existing document, "The person responsible for reviewing submissions and complaints is a person appointed by the Board of the College, who is responsible for the review process of applications and complaints and who ensures the compliance of verification of the facts indicated in the application or complaint, control of the effectiveness of the review, prevention of potential conflicts of interest and reporting compliance with this Procedure.", but there is no information which (and/or according to which principles) will answer to the complaint content. Especially concerning the ethical cases.
- 3) Reviewers/ ethical committee etc, must be appointed (or regulated how it will be appointed if there is an ethical case), and they have to be independent in their decision-making process.

According to the regulation on writing and defence of qualification paper (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Regulations-on-writing-and-defence-of-qualification-paper.pdf>), a student who disagrees with their final exam or internship grade can appeal by submitting a written request to the HS director within 3 days of the grade's publication. The HS director will review the appeal and, if the evaluation process was not followed correctly, will annul the grade and appoint a different staff member to re-evaluate the student's work. Appeals regarding final state exam grades are handled according to the Regulations on Writing and Defending a Qualification Paper.

1.2.4.

According to the SER and its annexe "Analysis of student, graduate and employer survey" (SER, p. 27-29, annexe 2.2), the HS conducts the following surveys to get feedback from the stakeholders:

- The annual Student Satisfaction Survey is conducted every year in May.
- The Student Survey on the Performance of College Teaching Staff is administered at the end of each academic year for courses taken during that academic year.
- Employers' Survey on Student Performance During Internships is conducted at the end of the internship period.
- The Graduate Employment Survey is conducted once every two years.
- Employee Satisfaction Survey is administered once a year.

Student and employer surveys are conducted once or twice a year to assess the situation and

identify necessary improvements. Unfortunately, respondent participation is low, as noted during an assessment visit meeting with HS representatives. Additionally, the mechanism for reviewing submissions and making decisions is not described. The SER states that in the annual HS student satisfaction survey, students are consistently asked to share their opinions on the quality of evaluating their learning outcomes. Each year, the HS receives positive feedback. For instance, in 2024, 100% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the evaluation methods and procedures. Among these, 80% indicated that teaching staff effectively explain the evaluation criteria, assess students' performance accordingly and that the evaluation process is fair and free from discrimination. However, the number of respondents is not mentioned. The mechanism for obtaining and providing feedback from students, graduates, and employers is practical and focused on improving the study field.

Nevertheless, the school's small size and the statistical data about the main school performance indicators (like number of students, dropout rate, etc.) are not clear (different information from different administrators) nor publicly available. Statistical data concerning the students and their studies are mainly collected through student surveys and should be used as input into the study programme and study organization improvements. At the same time, other data about the students should also be collected (like the number of students, funding, average and weighted grades, number of dropouts, etc), but neither SER nor onsite interviews confirmed that. The interviewees did not mention any use possibilities for statistical data (except results of student surveys), and even the provided data differed according to the people saying those.

During the assessment interviews, the participants confirmed that the HS uses the data to understand the necessary trends and changes. Still, neither the SAR nor its appendices contain any statistically meaningful charts or other visualization of the trends or changes to explain further improvements or enable the measurement of the achievement of set goals or indicators. Proper (statistical) data analysis and the use of its results could give valuable information for the HS in the study programme development (eg. changes in dropout rates and reasons and admission numbers together with the changes in the pricing policy could give valuable feedback about the chosen policy etc.).

1.2.5.

The information published on the HS homepage (<https://hotelschool.lv/>) is well-structured and easy to understand. The website includes links to both external and internal HS documents (<https://hotelschool.lv/en/admission/policies/>). Information is available in three languages: Latvian, English, and Russian. However, there is no information about the lecturers that describes their qualifications and positions. For students it is important to see the Lecturer's academic and professional background. The webpage is also a marketing tool to attract potential students. As a minor issue, the infographics for the students about the student assessment (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/STUDY-COURSE-OUTCOME-EVALUATION-AND-ASSESSMENT-REGISTRATION.pdf>) and about the qualification paper presentation and evaluation (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/QUALIFICATION-PAPER-hereinafter-QP-ELABORATION-AND-PRESENTATION.pdf>) are rather process descriptions than infographics.

Information about the HS given in the VIIS register (<https://www.viis.gov.lv/>) is not updated and provides old information. For example the uploaded admission rules are from 2017, only inactive study programmes are listed and no any information about the running programme, no juridical documents are mentioned (<https://www.viis.gov.lv/registri/iestades>) etc.

The complaints submission policy
(<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/APPLICATION-SUBMISSION-AND-COMPLAINT-HAN>

DLING-POLICY-2023.pdf) says that if the complaint (or application) is not in Latvian, then the submitter needs to pay the translation costs (paragraph 7: "Consideration of applications and complaints is free of charge, except when the submitter requests an answer in a language other than Latvian. In such a case, the answer is provided after the translation in the relevant language has been made and payment for the translation has been received. The HS may not demand payment for the translation if the translation of the answer does not cause additional administrative expenses for the College." Such an act is 1) unethical (that to get an answer to a student's complaint they have to pay), and 2) the college states that English is a study language, so they need to be able to provide all the study and support services also in English.

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

In general HS has established a quality policy (which is publicly available). The HS has developed and maintains a quality assurance system, which contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programme. Nevertheless, the HS's quality management system needs to be more comprehensive, melting together the mentioned quality tools (ISO, BTEC, Kotter, PDCA etc) into one system where also the processes and feedback surveys necessary to achieve quality results are integrated.

Procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programme of the study field and the feedback mechanisms (including feedback to students, employers, and graduates) are established, but not detailed and the sequence of actions is not always clear. The low rate of respondents for the questionnaire are not reflecting the real situation in HS. Information provided in the publicly available channels (eg VIIS, HS webpage) is not fully available or updated.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Small number of students and the variability of their number in the communication.
- 2) Administrative capacity to manage Internal Quality Assurance System is low.
- 3) QMS is not tied into the comprehensive system.
- 4) The proposal and complaints system does not correspond to the open, ethical and accessible principles in all cases and needs.
- 5) Study programme development procedure have to be analysed and clearly described, including the channels, modes etc how the stakeholders should contribute to this process.
- 6) It is unclear how the surveys are conducted (response rate) and the results are used in improvement of internal procedures, documents or process and content.
- 7) Statistical data collection and use for decision making is not effective.
- 8) Information about the HS and its programme in other sources (eg. VIIS) is not updated or is not publicly available.

Assessment of the requirement [1]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

HS Development Strategy for 2024-2029 defines clearly activities for improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field, but there are areas for improvement as more comprehensive QA system, fully implemented study programme development system, decreasing admission and student number with issues in admission system, available information and other inner procedures (complaints, feedback surveys).

- 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

The HS has developed the Quality Policy (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Quality-Policy-2024.pdf>) for the implementation of the quality system

- 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

There are some elements of study programme development, but the process is not comprehensive and does not involve all the necessary stakeholders and is not systematic.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The criteria, conditions and procedures for the evaluation of student results have been developed and published, which make it possible to ensure the achievement of the intended learning results.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The mechanism for the selection and examination of lecturers has been developed and is implemented.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The HS collects data necessary for the decision making, but the data collection is not based on reliable principles (respondents rate, data maintenance and analysis are not transparent and no visualisation, results are not communicated for the stakeholders and updated in systems and among people).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Quality assurance system is not fully adapted and HS needs to develop it further to ensure the continuous improvement of studies.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1.

This HS is a commercial company established by private individuals, so its main source of income is from its business activities. As the SER p. 31 indicates, the HS sources of funding are Tuition fees, Revenue for paid services, Grants of EU and regional funds, State budget funding, Donations and gifts, Bank loans. The main sources of revenue for the implementation of the study programme are tuition fees, which in 2023 amounted to EUR 266 331, and grants from EU funds. The Board of the HS is responsible for the distribution, provision and control of the use of funds necessary for the operation of the HS and the implementation of the study process. Each year, in cooperation with the HS director and the Accountant, the HS budget for the following academic year is drawn up at the beginning of each academic year, in which the available funding is planned and its reallocation is decided both for the needs of the study process and for applied research activities. SER. p. 31 indicates that in 2023 the funding for research and development activities amounted to EUR 61 503, where the HS own funding amounted to EUR 25 301 and the remainder was financed by EU Structural Funds and funding from foreign educational institutions.

During the assessment visit, discussions with the HS management revealed that the minimum number of students required for a study programme to cover its own costs is 50. During the assessment visit, the representatives of the HS indicated that it currently has 46 students. According to the student number dynamics provided by the HS (Additional annexes requested by the experts, file: Table-04102024 (1). docx, received on October 4), it can be observed that in the academic year 2024/2025 the HS has 49 students.

As the management of the HS pointed out during the assessment visit, the HS is profitable and is currently covering the difference in expenditure resulting from fewer students than would be necessary to cover its own costs from the financial provisions of previous years. The HS has carried out a calculation of study programme implementation costs for the short-cycle professional higher education programme "Hospitality Services Organization" (study programme) (Study Programme Other Annexes, "VPO-izmaksu-kalkulacija-2023-eng.odt"). The cost calculation separates the monthly and annual costs of the study programme, resulting in a total of EUR 18 740 per month and EUR 225 077 per year. The largest expenditure items are staff salary costs (EUR 152 957 per year, 67.9% of total expenditure) and material and information costs (real estate costs, purchase and modernisation of facilities and equipment, costs of teaching literature and scientific databases, etc.), which amount to EUR 52 920 per year (23.5% of total annual expenditure). The calculation of the cost of services (e.g. maintenance of IT services) and marketing costs are also included. During the assessment visit, the HS management indicated that tuition fees have been increased from the 2024/2025 academic year in response to inflation and rising costs. Currently, the annual tuition fee for new students in the study programme is €3500 for EU citizens and €5000 for non-EU citizens (<https://hotelschool.lv/en/admission/tuition-fees/>).

In addition to the above, the HS has developed and approved at the meeting of the Council of the College the Procedure for Allocation of Funding for Research Work of Academic Staff at the College (approved on 25.02.2021), which defines the types of activities to be supported, the sources and amount of funding, the methodology for calculating remuneration and the procedure by which funding is allocated. During the assessment visit, the academic staff confirmed that they are aware of the procedure for the allocation of this funding and that they make use of it.

Overall, it can be confirmed that the HS has established a system for determining and redistributing the financial support required for the implementation of the study field and the corresponding study programme. A system for funding scientific and applied research is defined and implemented and it is effective.

1.3.2.

The HS has premises in a historic building in the Old Town of Riga, Smilšu iela 3. The premises are held by the founder under a long-term lease agreement. The lease is valid until 2025 and is to be extended until 2030. During the institutional accreditation in 2020, the experts indicated in their report that the lease agreement is planned to be extended after the HS receives accreditation. As indicated by the director of HS during the assessment visit, the owners of the premises are satisfied with the current cooperation and it is planned to extend the lease in July 2025. In addition, renovation works on the upper floors of the building are actively ongoing and could be concluded in spring 2025, which could provide an opportunity to expand the space used by the HS. Currently, the space used is 480 m², which includes (SER, p. 32, tour of the HS premises during the assessment visit):

- 3 lecture and seminar rooms, each equipped with tables, chairs and multimedia equipment - laptop, projector or large screen TV, sound equipment - and a whiteboard.
- A teaching restaurant with tables, chairs, servers and the professional equipment needed to serve guests, such as a coffee machine, blender, shaker, crockery, glasses, cutlery, textiles, decor, etc. The training restaurant is in good condition overall, but it would be advisable to update the range of crockery, glasses and cutlery available to bring it up to modern restaurant standards. In addition, it would be useful to create a bar area where students could learn bar skills and how to serve drinks. Based on the interviews with the students as well as industry trends it would be beneficial for HS to obtain professional F&B software to ensure study quality.
- A professional kitchen with modern equipment such as convection oven, induction hobs, cooker hood, stainless steel kitchen tables and shelves, cold table, dishwasher, etc.
- A library with a reading room with 20 laptops with internet access for students' independent work, as well as a scanner, printer and copier;
- offices for academic and administrative staff, equipped with office furniture, computers, printers and scanners;
- support facilities - wardrobe, corridors, toilets, storage rooms. It is recommended to improve the wardrobe of students before working in the teaching kitchen, restaurant by installing lockable student lockers, as well as creating changing rooms.

The HS has a lift, which provides access to classrooms for people with reduced mobility. During the assessment visit, students, alumni and academic staff appreciated the accessible infrastructure and confirmed that it is accessible to them.

During the assessment visit, the HS management confirmed that the premises are currently at capacity, but that there is enough space for everything, with adequate space planning. However, it should be noted that with the increase in the number of students and learners in the HS, there is a need to expand the space available for teaching and therefore further work is needed to increase the space available in the HS.

In addition, the HS infrastructure consists of 454 m² of dormitory space. These are apartments for the accommodation of students and other guests of the HS, located in the centre of Riga, within walking distance from the HS (more information: <https://hotelschool.lv/en/admission/student-accommodation/>, SER, p. 32). During the assessment visit, no visits were organised to the dormitory, but students confirmed that they were satisfied with the facilities.

During the assessment visit, the HS management prepared and gave the experts an overview of the investments made in the material and information base of the HS in the period 2018-2023 (the overview includes the major expenditure categories), which were:

- Renovation of College premises;
- Expenditure for the fitting-out of the practical laboratories (teaching kitchen and teaching

restaurant);

- Purchase of furniture for classrooms and offices;
- Purchase of portable computer equipment, multimedia equipment (projectors, televisions, etc.) for classrooms. The College previously had a computer room, but after considering the proposals received from academic staff, it was decided to purchase 20 laptops, which are stored in the College library and are available to academic staff and students. During the assessment visit, positive feedback was received on this innovation, which has increased the availability of equipment and mobility between classrooms.
- Purchase of office equipment for working rooms (computers, printers, copiers, etc.);
- Expenditure on the purchase and subscription of library resources. The most significant investment under this item is the subscription to the digital library Prelego, which has significantly increased the resources available to students and academic staff; positive feedback on this innovation was received during the assessment visit.
- Expenditure on the purchase and subscription of computer simulation licences and specialised computer systems. These include PMS Micros Opera, the business process simulation solution "Knowledge Matters", etc.
- IT infrastructure programming (improvement and development of the college's website, e-learning environment, record-keeping and CRM system).

The total expenditure invested in the last 6 years in the development of the HS material and information base amounts to EUR 154 000, which shows that the HS has established a development-oriented system for the maintenance and improvement of its material and information base.

1.3.3.

The HS has its own library, which is registered in the Ministry of Culture's Library Register and has received library accreditation in 2020. The library's collection includes over 1 000 items of specialised literature and periodicals, most of which are current publications published after 2015, including valuable AHLEI (American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute) publications (SER, p. 33). The library is located in the HS premises and consists of one room with the collection and a reading room. It is open on workdays from 9.30 to 16.00. The library offers book lending, access to subscribed databases, support for access to the Perlego digital library, printing, copying and scanning services, and provides laptops for students and academic staff to work independently.

The HS also subscribes to the Perlego digital library (www.perlego.com), which offers one million books from more than 5000 publishers worldwide, as well as the Emerald Insight research database with access to the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management; International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research; International Journal of Event and Festival Management; International Journal of Tourism Cities; Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology; Tourism Review; Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes. Access to the digital library and scientific database is available to students, learners and academic staff at any time and day, with information on access available on the College's Moodle environment.

The HS calculation of the costs of the study programme (Study Programme Other Annexes, "VPO-izmaksu-kalkulacija-2023-eng.odt") indicates that the annual costs of study literature and scientific databases are EUR 9000, while the HS overview of the investments made in the material and information base of the HS in the period 2018-2023, indicates that expenditure on the purchase and subscription of library resources in the last 6 years has been EUR 23 000, which included stocking, purchase of books, periodicals, subscription to electronic resources. These expenses show that the HS is doing a thorough and thoughtful job of renewing and adding to its library resources. It is also to be welcomed that the College collects and monitors statistical data on the use of digital resources, as indicated on page 34 of the SER.

During the assessment visit, the academic staff confirmed that they are aware of the procedure if

they need to purchase new books or subscriptions to a database in the study courses they teach; they indicated that there is an internal procedure for this where the lecturer can fill in a request form, which is reviewed by the HS management. Similarly, questionnaires are sent to the teaching staff where they can indicate the literature required.

The HS is also active in publishing, with a major project between 2014 and 2017, which resulted in the development and publication of 72 teaching and methodological materials, which are still available both digitally and physically in the HS library. The materials were published in Latvian, English and Russian. In recent years, more active efforts have been made to publish the results of faculty and student research in edited volumes (SAR, p. 34).

Overall, the HS has developed a system for the improvement and purchase of methodological and informative provision. Library resources and databases are available to students and meet the needs of the study field.

1.3.4.

The HS has successfully developed and implemented a range of digital solutions in the organisation of the study process, intensified by the global Covid-19 pandemic and the remote organisation of studies. Currently, the following information and communication technology solutions are used in the study process:

Moodle e-learning environment, available at <https://e-hotelschool.lv/>. During the evaluation visit, the experts were presented with a detailed presentation of the College's e-learning environment. The College was found to be successfully using the features and supported plug-ins of the Moodle platform. The Moodle system is well-organised, easy to understand for students and academic staff, with all study-related information (course materials, course descriptions) and organisational information such as timetables, regulatory documents, regulations, information on internships and Erasmus mobility opportunities. The structure of the Moodle environment is divided into 2 main categories: the Student and the Academic Intranet, where relevant information is thematically included. The College has successfully developed a system for student identification through automated emailing to groups of students, the introduction of an SMS sending function, and integration with Google Calendar to provide easy access to the timetable. Positively, the College has created a separate post of Moodle Administrator to follow and monitor the development and improvement of the e-learning environment. During the meeting with students, a positive evaluation of the functioning of the e-learning environment was obtained, however, it is recommended that all sections of Moodle accessible to students be reviewed to refresh the information, e.g. in the section on available internships, up-to-date contact information for companies.

For the remote learning process, an open source solution BigBlueButton (BBB) is used, which is installed in the e-learning domain of the College, available: <https://bbb.e-hotelschool.lv/b>.

For student record-keeping, grade accumulation and other organisational support needs of the study process, the College has implemented a specially designed and programmed record-keeping and CRM information system (sms.ehotelschool.lv), which is available to administrative staff. With its implementation, many documents of the institution were digitised, including orders, decisions, certificates, etc. of the Admissions Committee and the Study Department (SAR, p. 50).

In addition, Moodle has integrations for access to digital databases such as Emerald Insight and the Perlego digital library. During the visit, the experts were introduced to the functioning of this digital library, which includes a user-friendly interface for both desktop and mobile devices. It allows staff to easily assign students tasks to study specific literature and to monitor students' progress. The Perlego digital library offers a wide range of resources (more than 1 million items), with more than 2300 e-books available in the Hospitality, Travel & Tourism Industry section alone. All students and academic staff have unlimited access to the Perlego library, regardless of location.

Specialised software is also used to support the study process. The College provides students with the opportunity to study and use PMS microOpera, a fully featured hospitality management

software that includes a variety of functions and modules to streamline and better optimize management of property. The College is (according to its representatives) the only higher education institution in Latvia to have acquired this license. In addition, the College has established a partnership with D-EDGE, the European No1 and World No3 hotel distribution technology provider in hospitality (Assessment visit - presentation of Open-source learning platform (Moodle, others); <https://www.d-edge.com/about-us/>). The company provides guest lectures to the College as well as access to demo versions of its IT solutions as part of the study process.

Since 2021, the College has been using Knowledge Matters (<https://www.knowledgematters.com/>), a computer simulation solution produced in the USA, which is used in several courses and allows students to simulate planning and operational scenarios of a hospitality business in a virtual environment with visual layouts and operational reports (SAR, p. 49). This solution is used in the study courses 'Rooms Division Operations Management' and 'Sales Management'. During the assessment visit, the tool received positive feedback from students, graduates and academic staff who appreciate the opportunity to learn in simulated environments using modern, gamified learning methods.

In conclusion, the information and communication technology solutions used by HS ensure the study process is appropriate and effective.

1.3.5.

The HS has developed internal regulations "Regulations on Academic Positions at HOTEL SCHOOL" (approved at the College Council meeting on 19.09.2018, amended on 25.08.2022) which explain the main rights, duties, tasks, organisation of work, including specific tasks for lecturer and assisting professors, and responsibilities for the academic staff, the procedure of election, requirements for candidates, principles for guest teaching staff, procedure of ending work relations and appeal procedure at the HS (HEI other annexes, Regulations on Academic Positions). The Regulations on Academic Position are only available internally and are not published on the HS website.

Vacancies are openly advertised and published on the HS website (<https://hotelschool.lv/category/amatu-konkurss/>), on social media and on the CV.lv vacancies portal (<https://cv.lv/lv/>), where they are available to interested parties. It is recommended that this information should also be published on the Vacancy Portal of the State Employment Agency (<https://cvvp.nva.gov.lv/>). The number of academic staff at the College is determined by the Director according to the need and funding possibilities, as well as to ensure the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The academic staff of the College consists of: assistant professors, lecturers and researchers, as well as visiting assistant professors and guest lecturers. The Regulations regulate the requirements for applicants for each academic staff position.

The Director of the HS shall call for applications for academic posts which are due to expire and for vacant academic posts. Persons wishing to take part in the competition must submit documents to the HS within one month of the public announcement of the competition. The Principal of the HS shall then set up an evaluation committee of three members which, on the basis of the documents submitted by the applicant, shall draw up an evaluation report on each applicant for the post of lecturer, assistant professor or researcher, recommending that the applicant be 'recommended' or 'not recommended' for election to the post. A sample evaluation report with the evaluation criteria is attached as an Annex to the abovementioned Regulations on Academic Positions. The evaluation committee shall decide on the need to organise public lectures or seminars, workshops, laboratory work or other demonstrations of pedagogical activities by applicants for the posts of Assistant Professor and Lecturer. This shall be organised by the Director of the HS. Before organising the performance of the said task, the Director of the HS shall approve the type (form) and evaluation criteria of the task, as well as the experts to evaluate the quality of the task. The evaluation committee's opinion on the candidates recommended for election shall be forwarded by the Director

of the HS together with the documents submitted by the candidates to the Secretary of the HS Council not later than one week before the HS Council meeting. A meeting of the HS Council shall be entitled to consider the question of elections to academic posts if at least 6 members of the Council are present. The candidate for the post in question shall also be invited to attend the Council meeting. After examining the documents submitted, the findings of the evaluation committee and after interviewing all the candidates for the post in question, the Council shall decide by secret ballot whether or not to elect the candidate to the academic post. In the event of a vacancy or temporary vacancy of an academic post at the HS, the Director of the HS may decide not to open a competition, but to recruit a Visiting Assistant Professor or Visiting Lecturer for a period of up to 2 (two) years. Visiting lecturers and guest lecturers shall have the same rights, duties and remuneration as other lecturers and guest lecturers of the HS, but may not participate in the work of the elected governing bodies of the HS.

Thus, it is evident that the Director of the HS plays a central and important role in the selection and election process: deciding whether a vacancy will be announced, appointing the evaluation committee, approving the type (form) of the assignment and the evaluation criteria, as well as the experts to assess the quality of the assignment, in addition to being a member of the HS Council, who also votes on the election at the end of the process. The direct influence of one person at so many important stages of the recruitment process can influence the conduct of an open and fair competition. It should be noted that the academic staff members met during the evaluation visit did not mention any negative aspects of their selection to work for the HS, and the HS (SER, p. 36) indicates that it has not yet received any complaints from applicants or other stakeholders about irregularities in the election of academic staff.

In the News section of the College's website, selecting the category "Job vacancies" (available only in Latvian), there are several entries for previously announced job vacancies for lecturers, assistant professors and guest lecturers. These competitions were all for part-time posts, providing specific courses of study for which the applicant can apply to teach, but with the limitation that only up to 3 study courses can be applied for.

This limitation is explained by the HS Ordinance No 3-3c/13 of 12.07.2021 "On the election of academic staff" (HEI other annexes, file: P3-1-Koledzas-rekomendaciju-izpilde-en.docx), which responds to the expert recommendation from the 2020 institutional accreditation: "The number of courses given by the same teacher, should be smaller - eg. not higher than three different courses per same teacher" stipulated that "teaching staff who are elected to an academic position in the HOTEL SCHOOL until 2020 may be elected to a maximum of 4 courses within the same degree programme, while teaching staff standing for election from 2021 may be elected to a maximum of 3 courses within the same degree programme." This approach to the implementation and interpretation of the recommendation is confusing, as its primary aim was to balance the workload of academic staff. Such a mechanical approach, without a more thorough analysis of the study course credit points and contact hours, the total workload, does not really solve the problem, as situations may arise where one lecturer teaches 3 study courses, each of 3CP (total 9CP) and another lecturer teaches 3 study courses of 4CP, 8CP and 12CP (total 24CP). As can be seen, this issue should be addressed in a more complex and substantive way, rather than by imposing technical constraints.

The texts of the advertisements are rather general, without more details on the objectives of the study courses, the expected amount of credit points. Nor is there any reference to the above mentioned Regulations on Academic Positions and its Annex No 1 Table "Assessment of the applicant's scientific and teaching qualifications, organisational competence and professional experience" which contain several evaluation criteria (research qualification, pedagogical qualification, organisational competence, professional experience and other formal criteria) for recommending an applicant for further competition. This information should be published in the descriptions of the competitions in order to promote a clear, transparent and open process for all

interested parties. In addition, job advertisements should include the HS registration number, per Article 32(3)(1) of the Labour Law.

The HS would be advised that in the future, when considering the election of persons to academic positions and when advertising such competitions, the advertisements should include information on the scientific discipline group, branch and sub-field of the academic position, which would also make it easier for the College to enter data in the Academic Staff Register of the National Education Information System in the future.

The HS has established, implemented and followed procedures (for the field of study and relevant study programme) for attracting qualified staff, which are open and communicated to relevant stakeholders. However, improvements can be made in staff selection matters by improving the descriptions of the competitions, including/publishing on the HS website information on the HS procedures for the election to academic posts and carefully considering the influence of those involved in the selection process in order to ensure an open competition.

1.3.6.

The HS has a system for the professional and didactic development of academic staff and regular measures for the evaluation of academic staff. The quality of academic staff is evaluated at the end of each academic year by the Administrative Commission, which analyzes and assesses performance in study work, research, professional development, methodological and administrative work, and takes into account the evaluation of students (SER, p. 37). The evaluation of academic staff consists of four evaluation stages: self-assessment by academic staff, assessment by students, assessment by the administrative committee and a final assessment which determines the salary coefficient to be applied to the academic staff member (the maximum coefficient is 1.2 or 20%). During the assessment visit, it was confirmed from the academic staff that such evaluations take place and that they are useful to improve their performance. Based on the results of the annual evaluation, the Director of the HS plans and submits to the HS Council for approval the Staff Professional Development Plan for the following year, for which financial resources are allocated from the HS budget. The HS has established and approved a procedure for the allocation of funding for professional development activities of the HS staff (Additional annexes requested after the visit, file: finansejums-pilnveidei-2018.docx (Only in Latvian)).

The HS has a dual approach to the professional development of academic staff, both by designating specific members of academic staff who, according to the results of the evaluation, need additional professional development, and by organising a competition for support, open to all members of the HS staff, with special conditions for who has priority (e.g. applicants elected to an academic post, applicants who have participated less in professional development activities than others, etc.). The HS notes that in 2023, 8 members of academic staff participated in 12 professional development activities at a total cost to the College budget of EUR 12 824 (SAR, p. 39).

Based on the interviews during the assessment visit with teaching staff, the experts learned that several courses of training for teaching staff have been organized, but teaching staff who attended the accreditation meeting did not participate in any of those training due to individual reasons. Sustainability in tourism was mentioned as one direction in Hotel School Development strategy (page 12, available: <https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/HOTEL-SCHOOL-ATTISTIBAS-STRATEGIJA-2024.-2029.-GADAM.pdf>) to be implemented in study programme, but the commission did not get the evidence of implementation of sustainability questions in professional study programme. Further assignment of resources for teaching staff education on sustainability questions would be recommended in the future. During the assessment visit interviews with employers, they confirmed that sustainability is an extremely important, huge trend and should be strongly implemented in the study programme and professional subjects. Also during assessment visit interviews with students, study programme should benefit from covering the newest industry trends, including sustainability

in the hospitality industry.

In the annex on the implementation of the recommendations received during the 2020 institutional accreditation (HEI other annexes, file: P3-1-Koledzas-rekomendaciju-izpilde.docx), it can be found that in the period 2020-2023, 4 current members of the academic staff have participated in the 160-hour course "Higher Education Didactics" provided by the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology of the University of Latvia and co-financed by the HS. This is a positive practice and should be supported in the future. In addition, it is recommended to advertise more widely the opportunities for professional development of academic staff and to adapt the events organised by the HS so that the majority of staff could participate in them, as well as to publish information about them in the HS information channels, thus informing both students and the public about the achievements of academic staff and professional qualification and skills development.

1.3.7.

According to the information provided in the SER, p. 39, the workload of the HS academic staff is 100 hours per month (1000 hours per year), corresponding to one monthly salary rate. The HS has the right to assign academic staff part-time, which in practice happens quite often, as the number of students at the HS is currently small. Currently there are 15 academic staff members involved in the implementation of the study field (Basic information on the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field, file: Iesaistitie_macibspeki_ENG.xlsx), of which 11 are elected academic staff and 4 are non-elected (guest lecturers). Of the elected academic staff, 6 are lecturers, 4 assistant professors and 1 lead researcher. The information given in this annex differs slightly from that available in the SER, p. 39, where it is indicated that the programme has 3 guest lecturers, 1 visiting assistant professor and 1 researcher, which is probably inaccurate information in the SER.

Based on the information provided in the SER, two academics work more than full-time (1.3), 5 academics work more than half-time (0.5-0.75) and the rest work quarter-time (up to 0.25). The most full-time teaching staff carry out not only study and methodological work, but also research and organisational work in varying proportions. According to the internal regulations "Regulations on Academic Positions at HOTEL SCHOOL", the working time of academic staff consists of study work, research work, methodological work and organisational work. The SER, pp. 38-39, provides a more detailed explanation of the duties covered by each of these components.

During the assessment visit, no negative feedback was received from academic staff and students regarding the workload and availability of academic staff, thus, taking all of the above into account, it can be considered that the workload of academic staff involved in the implementation of the study field is currently balanced. However, the HS should carefully monitor situations when the workload of the staff exceeds the full-time load so that it does not negatively affect the organisation of the study process, and in the future, if the number of students in the study programme and in the HS increases, the possibility of providing full-time work to the elected academic staff should be assessed.

1.3.8.

The HS provides various support mechanisms for students (SER, p. 40):

- Information support during the admission process, provided by the Admissions Committee staff, who inform students about study and student loan options, and everyday life issues. During the assessment visit, it was reported that the quality of this support has now improved significantly compared to the experience of graduates helped by the integration courses for international students. However, this process still requires continuous work and improvement to ensure that applicants are informed about their choice of studies, the education to be received, living conditions

in Latvia, conditions for residence permits, etc.

- Guardian services for students who are foreign minors;
- Accommodation services provided by the College's affiliated company "HS apartments" Ltd.
- Integration courses for foreign students, which is a very positive initiative and should be continued in the future. These integration courses are currently provided thanks to an EU co-funded project. During the assessment visit, the feedback from the students was positive, but the HS needs to look into the possibility of continuing these courses in the future when the project comes to an end. The College should motivate foreign students to participate in them, as this way they get to know better the living conditions and culture in Latvia, find out the information they need, e.g. where to get medical help, find job opportunities, etc.
- Methodological support during studies is provided by the Methodologist of the Study Department, who advises students on the possibilities of settling academic debts, prepares certificates upon request, purchases insurance for students during their internship and advises them on its conduct.
- Career support provided by the College's Career Counsellor. It is important to note in this type of support that students are provided with up-to-date information on internship opportunities and that the available information and contact details of companies are regularly updated in the e-learning environment.

In addition, it should be noted that the HS has also established a tuition fee discount policy, which is regulated by the Discount Application Procedures at HOTEL SCHOOL "Hotel Management College, which are published on the College's website in English and Latvian. Students can apply for a tuition fee discount through a competitive application process regulated by the above-mentioned rules (available at: <https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Discount-Regulations-June2019.pdf>).

In the future, given the HS aim to continue to attract international students, it is advisable to establish (and inform students about) partnerships with medical institutions that are able to provide medical support in English, and to suggest work opportunities that students can combine with their studies. Explore the possibility of scholarships or tuition fee reductions for promising and talented students, in cooperation with industry partners and companies. The HS may also consider providing students with access to psychological support. The Student Council should also be involved in the development of the student support system, as it can help the HS to better identify students' needs and expectations. Such complex support mechanisms will enhance the well-being of students and reduce the risks of student drop-out.

Overall, the HS has a well-developed basic student support system, but there is still potential for improvement.

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

The HS has established a comprehensive financial system for redistributing resources to support both its study programme and research activities. Its primary income comes from tuition fees and grants, particularly from EU funds, with smaller contributions from donations and other services. While student enrolment has been slightly below the self-sustainability threshold, the HS remains profitable due to efficient cost management and increased tuition fees.

The institution is well-resourced with adequate infrastructure, including well-maintained lecture rooms, a professional kitchen, and a teaching restaurant. However, there is a need for space expansion and equipment upgrades. Additionally, the HS library and digital resources, including access to specialised databases and a wide array of e-books, meet the academic needs of both

students and staff. The HS also employs modern ICT solutions, such as the Moodle e-learning platform and hospitality management software, to enhance the study process.

The HS has established a solid framework for attracting and supporting qualified academic staff and students. It has developed procedures for hiring academic staff through open competitions, albeit with room for improved transparency and fairness. The professional and didactic development of staff is supported through structured measures, though there are some limitations in participation. Additionally, the workload of academic staff appears balanced, but monitoring is recommended. Lastly, the HS offers a comprehensive support system for students, which effectively addresses their diverse needs, but further enhancements could benefit the institution, especially as it continues to attract international students.

Strengths:

- 1) The HS has a well-structured system for financial planning, with an annual budget review and distribution to support study and research activities.
- 2) Adequate classroom and laboratory facilities, with continued investment in improvements and equipment.
- 3) Effective use of technology through Moodle, BigBlueButton, and specialised hospitality software to support both in-person and remote learning.
- 4) Access to a vast range of digital resources, including a substantial e-library and specialised academic databases.
- 5) A clear procedure for allocating funds for academic staff research, which is effectively utilised.
- 6) Regular evaluations and opportunities for professional development are available to the academic staff, supported by budget allocations.
- 7) A variety of support services are offered, including career counseling, integration courses for international students, and methodological support.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The HS is currently operating below the student threshold required for the study programme to be self-sustaining.
- 2) The current premises are at full capacity, and future student intake may outgrow the available space.
- 3) The kitchen and restaurant equipment need updating to align with modern industry standards.
- 4) There is no dedicated area in the teaching restaurant for students to learn bar skills.
- 5) The wardrobe area lacks secure, lockable lockers and changing rooms for students working in the practical environments.
- 6) The HS recruitment regulations are not published on the website, limiting transparency.
- 7) The HS Director holds significant influence over key stages of staff recruitment, potentially affecting the fairness of the process.
- 8) Limiting the number of courses per lecturer does not fully consider workload disparities.
- 9) Some staff members have not engaged in professional development opportunities.
- 10) While support for international students is improving, further development is needed in areas such as healthcare partnerships and psychological support.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1.

The HS clearly identifies specific research fields related to "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism,

and Recreation Organization." These fields precisely include sustainable business, quality and financial management, human resource development, modern gastronomy, technological progress, marketing and competitiveness, and didactics in professional education. The HS selection of these research areas appears to be well thought out and aligned with its focus on hospitality and tourism, which is consistent with the study field in question. The fact that these areas were first defined in a formal Research Strategy and continue to be relevant in the new HS Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029 suggests a sustained and strategic approach to research.

Compliance with the aims of the HS and Study Field: The research fields identified by the HS are consistent with its aims (main tasks and areas of the Hotel Management Colleges' activities are also listed in the SER Hotel School Hotel Management College, p. 4), as highlighted by its inclusion in both past and current development strategies. The strategic focus on integrating applied research into the study process (6th Hotel Management College's developmental goal listed in the new Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029), promoting science-based studies, and contributing to the creation of knowledge in tourism and hospitality underlines the alignment with the HS 's educational objectives. However, it is emphasized that currently HS is not conducting any applied research projects together with companies/employers.

The SER HS, (p. 41 – 42) notes specific achievements, such as the number of applied research projects, seminars, conferences, publications, and student involvement in research. These indicators suggest a robust and developing research environment. The HS intention to continue improving these indicators aligns with a proactive approach to research development. The ongoing focus on the same research directions in the new HS Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029 combined with concrete tasks aimed at promoting and disseminating research, indicates a commitment to further development in these areas. A summary of the HS activities aimed at promoting applied research and its integration into the study process listed under objective number 6 - "to promote applied research and its integration in the study process for the implementation of science-based studies in the Hotel Management College, as well as to contribute to the creation of knowledge about tourism and hospitality") (Hotel Management College Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029, p. 38 – 39):

Applied Research Implementation: The HS aims to conduct applied research relevant to the tourism and hospitality industry, both locally and internationally. The target is to conduct at least 2-4 studies annually, with an increasing number of industry-commissioned research projects over the years.

Dissemination of Research: The HS plans to organize multiple seminars and conferences each year, alongside publishing research digests and books to share findings with the academic community, the hospitality industry, and the general public.

Integration of Research in Study Programmes: The HS is progressively increasing the integration of the latest research into its study programs, aiming for a higher percentage of course descriptions to include references to current research and requiring students to use this data in their studies.

Academic Staff Engagement: Efforts are being made to motivate academic staff to focus on priority research areas such as sustainable business, modern gastronomy, and technological innovation in hospitality. The goal is to ensure a significant portion of research aligns with these priorities, with targets for publication in indexed journals and participation in scientific conferences.

Student Involvement in Research: The HS is actively involving students in research activities which was confirmed during interviews with students, particularly within its priority areas. There are goals for increasing the percentage of students engaged in research, the number of student-led research projects and publications, and the proportion of students presenting at conferences.

These activities aim to strengthen the HS research capacity and enhance the integration of research into its educational programmes, contributing to a science-based approach to learning in tourism and hospitality.

In the context of the criteria, this research aligns well with the HS strategic goals, enriching the study field through interdisciplinary research and contributing to the development of a knowledge-based, competitive hospitality industry. The integration of these research fields into the study programme, as well as the promotion of applied research relevant to the industry, directly supports the objectives of the study field. The involvement of students and motivation of academic staff to engage in these research areas further ties the research activities to the educational mission of the HS.

1.4.2.

The HS actively incorporates research outcomes into its study content and methods. For instance, the Business Models Analysis (BMA) matrix developed under the Nordplus Horizontal project is now used in subjects like "Leadership and Management" and "Macroeconomics." This matrix allows students to engage in practical, data-driven comparisons of hospitality business models, directly linking research to their learning experience (SER, p.42).

Similarly, the digital tools developed through the Erasmus+ "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Toolkit" project have been partially embedded into the curriculum (SER, p.42). This includes a comprehensive course supported by digital platforms and resources, focusing on sustainable digitization practices in hospitality. The course is designed to accommodate different learner styles and integrates a customer experience management system, ensuring students gain hands-on experience with cutting-edge digital solutions in the industry.

The research outcomes are not just included as theoretical content but are also used as practical tools and case studies within relevant courses. For example, the "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Toolkit" is expected to be extensively used in courses like "Customer Experience Management" and "Procurement and Sustainable Resource Management" (SER, p. 42). This ensures that students are learning directly from current, research-based practices. The College also encourages students to apply these research findings in their qualification papers, exemplified by a student's work on using guest experience software in a real-world hotel context, drawing directly from the research project's outputs.

The HS fosters a research culture by involving both academic staff and students in research projects. Notably, in the "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Toolkit" project, a broad range of faculty and students participated in workshops and conferences, contributing actively to the research and its dissemination (SER, p.42). This involvement not only enhances the learning experience but also ensures that research findings are well-integrated into the educational process.

The "A World of Cuisine" project further demonstrates this integration, where students created innovative recipes based on their research and experiences in national culinary traditions. These innovations are now part of the "Contemporary Gastronomy" free-choice course, showcasing the direct application of research in enhancing course content (SER, p.42).

The HS past involvement in the "X-Culture" international project with the University of North Carolina Greensboro illustrates the long-standing tradition of integrating international research collaborations into the study process. HS students participated in global virtual teams, developing business plans for international corporations, which directly contributed to achieving learning outcomes in "Entrepreneurship" and "Record-keeping and Finance" (SER, p. 42 – 43).

1.4.3.

The HS extensive involvement in international projects is well-explained in SER (p. 43 – 44). It includes participation in Erasmus+, Nordplus, and other EU-funded initiatives. Projects such as

"Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship," "A World of Cuisine," and "Business Models Post Corona in the Hospitality Sector" demonstrate active collaboration with institutions across Europe and beyond. This shows a strong engagement in international research and artistic creation, aligning well with the criteria.

The SER (p. 43 – 44) specifies several joint projects, including those with institutions from the UK, Netherlands, Turkey, Romania, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Italy, and Ukraine. These collaborations are diverse, covering areas such as sustainable development, culinary arts, hospitality digitization, and waste-free culinary practices. The detailed descriptions of these projects illustrate the HS active role in international research and artistic initiatives, meeting the requirement to specify joint projects and research.

The SER (p. 43 – 44) highlights how the study programme benefits from these international collaborations. For example, the Erasmus+ and Nordplus projects contribute to course content and research methodologies used in subjects related to hospitality, culinary arts, and sustainability. From 2017 to 2019, the Hotel Management College led the Erasmus+ project "Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship." This project developed a methodology for integrating the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 into educational curricula and included training workshops for educators and learners. The College collaborated with European institutions such as Global Learning & Skills Partnership (UK) and Stichting voor Educatie-, Cultuur- en Migratie (Netherlands). From 2022 to 2024, the College led the Erasmus+ project "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Toolkit," focusing on sustainable digitalization in hospitality. In collaboration with partners from Cyprus, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, and Italy, the project produced a "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Handbook" (233 pages), a "Pedagogy of Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation" guide (283 pages), and a digital course integrated into the HS Moodle platform. From 2022 to 2023, the Hotel Management College took part in the "A World of Cuisine" project with partners from Turkey and Romania. Students collaborated to research and share national culinary traditions, resulting in new fusion recipes and advancements in modern cuisine. Since 2022, the College has led the Nordplus project "NO LEFTOVER Nordic/Baltic Culinary Arts," set to conclude in summer 2024. Collaborating with partners from Iceland, Denmark, Estonia, and Lithuania, the project focuses on researching and compiling waste-free culinary practices in the Nordic and Baltic regions. The results will be showcased at the VII International Conference on "NO LEFTOVER Nordic/Baltic Culinary Arts" in spring 2024. During the assessment visit interviews with teaching staff, they confirmed that they integrate the new outcomes of the project in their courses in different ways: informing students about the new material available, engaging them to explore the material whilst writing final thesis or some seminars etc.

Future plans for international cooperation are clearly outlined, including the upcoming CB-VET plus project aimed at capacity building in Ukraine. This project, along with the continuation of current international collaborations, indicates a forward-looking approach to expanding global research and artistic partnerships, fulfilling the criterion of specifying future plans for international cooperation (SER, p. 44).

1.4.4.

The HS has developed effective mechanisms to engage teaching staff in scientific and applied research, as well as artistic creation. It provides financial support for various research activities including publications, conference participation, and the preparation of teaching materials, governed by internal rules (Procedure for granting funding for the scientific and applied research work of academic staff) that outline the types of activities funded, the sources and amounts of funding, and the payment procedures.

Additionally, the HS offers informational and organizational support by notifying academic staff about research opportunities and conferences, and providing advisory support to new staff from experienced colleagues.

According to the list of publications from the HS academic staff (10 staff), a total of 60 articles have been published from 2013, with 34, or 57%, directly related to tourism and hospitality. Over the past six years, college lecturers (5 lecturers) have contributed some publications to international scientific databases, some of which have been indexed in prominent platforms like Web of Science. Several academic staff members are involved in editing the College's annual research collection, "Hospitality Industry: Opportunities, Challenges, and Perspectives."

During the interview, teaching staff mentioned they are not obligated to participate in scientific research projects by any means (for instance, no regulation that defines that each teacher needs to be engaged in one scientific project for a certain number of years). The absence of formal requirements for faculty to engage in research projects may lead to uneven participation, with some staff less involved in scholarly activities than others. It would be beneficial to formalize the participation of academic staff in scientific research projects per a certain period of time.

Notable research projects include those focusing on post-COVID recovery strategies in the hospitality industry, with results published and presented at various conferences (SER, p. 46).

The HS also organizes conferences and seminars, contributes to international research collections, and maintains a dedicated research publication series. College academic staff actively organize conferences and seminars, both within international cooperation projects and independently, focusing on current issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. A comprehensive list of these events, including programmes and materials could be found in <https://hotelschool.lv/en/seminars-and-conferences/>. Academic staff are financially awarded for organizing such events and they are satisfied with the amount of money they get paid for this as per the interview done with the academic staff. These efforts illustrate the college's commitment to fostering active involvement in research and ensuring that teaching staff are well-supported in their scholarly endeavors.

In general, based on the interview, the academic staff is well acquainted with the procedure for granting funding for the scientific and applied research work and are satisfied with it.

1.4.5.

The HS has established comprehensive and effective mechanisms to foster student involvement in applied research, scientific research, and artistic creation, aligning well with the criterion (SER, P. 46 - 47).

In the HS Development Strategy for 2024 – 2029, under the objective number 6 (p. 40), it is clearly mentioned that the HS is actively involving students in research activities, particularly within its priority areas. There are goals for increasing the percentage of students engaged in research, the number of student-led research projects and publications, and the proportion of students presenting at conferences. Students are engaged in research through several key avenues. They conduct applied research as part of their qualification papers, which are presented at both internal and external conferences. All the students confirmed during the interviews that, as part of their final theses, they have to conduct some form of applied research, and they like this approach. For instance, students recently showcased their work at the HS international applied research conference and at a student scientific conference organized by the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. This not only provides them with valuable presentation experience but also allows them to receive feedback from a wider academic audience. Director of HS and Chair of the Board, during assessment visit interview began by highlighting their significant investment in promoting research among the student body. Director of HS emphasized that they are actively working to strengthen this area and are making strong efforts to engage students as much as possible.

In addition to presenting their research, students have the opportunity to publish their findings in the HS annual collection of research articles, "Hospitality Industry: Opportunities, Challenges and Perspectives." This collection, along with other scientific journals, offers a platform for students to

contribute to the academic discourse in their field. The editorial board supports students in preparing their articles, which helps enhance their research skills and overall academic performance.

The HS also encourages students to collaborate with academic supervisors on longer publications and rewards exceptional research efforts with tuition fee discounts. This incentivizes students to engage more deeply in research activities and strive for high-quality outputs.

Looking ahead, the HS Development Strategy for 2024-2029 includes ambitious goals to further integrate applied research into the study process and significantly increase student involvement in research. This strategic focus highlights the HS commitment to expanding research opportunities for students and enhancing their contributions to the field.

1.4.6.

The HS has made substantial strides in integrating innovative solutions into its study processes, demonstrating a significant positive impact on its educational framework (SER, p. 48 – 50).

- Product Innovations: The HS has developed several advanced educational tools through international projects. For example, the Erasmus+ strategic partnership project "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Toolkit" produced a digital course, two audio brochures, and a digital application to enhance learning in hospitality. Additionally, the College collaborated on the "Business Models post Corona in the Hospitality" project, which produced a matrix for analyzing innovative business models. Another example is the Erasmus+ project "A World of Cuisine," where students created innovative recipes and participated in an international cooking competition in Romania, showcasing their culinary research.

- Process Innovations: Process innovations include the implementation of a digital exam protocol system and self-enrollment software for courses like "Introductory Course about Life in Latvia for Foreigners," developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture of Latvia and the Society Integration Fund. These advancements streamline administrative tasks and enhance the learning experience.

- Marketing Innovations: The HS creates dynamic marketing materials, including social media and print advertising. This has improved its ability to reach and engage with prospective students and other stakeholders effectively.

These innovations reflect the HS commitment to continuously improving its educational offerings and operational processes, aligning with both national and international standards for higher education.

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

The HS has demonstrated a good commitment to integrating scientific and applied research into its educational framework. By developing effective mechanisms for involving both teaching staff and students in research activities, the HS has fostered a dynamic environment that promotes scholarly engagement and innovation. Financial support, informational resources, and collaborative opportunities are key components of the HS approach, enabling faculty and students to contribute meaningfully to the fields of hospitality and tourism. Furthermore, the incorporation of innovative solutions and a focus on continuous improvement ensures that the HS remains aligned with national and international standards of higher education. Overall, the HS commitment to applied research not only enhances the educational experience for students but also supports the advancement of knowledge in the hospitality industry.

Strengths:

- 1) Comprehensive Support Mechanisms: The HS provides substantial financial, informational, and organizational support for applied research activities, ensuring that both faculty and students have the resources they need to engage in scholarly work.
- 2) Active Student Involvement: Students are effectively integrated into applied research activities, with opportunities to present their findings, publish work, and receive guidance from experienced faculty, fostering their academic development.
- 3) Engagement with the Global Community: Participation in international conferences and collaboration with global research networks enhance the College's visibility and reputation in the academic community.
- 4) Scientific research and / or applied research and/or artistic creation and the outcomes thereof are well integrated in the study process.
- 5) The increase in the number of international projects. The HS integrates findings from these international projects into its study programmes, as demonstrated by the incorporation of research outputs like the "Sustainable Hospitality Digitalisation Handbook" into their courses.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Variability in Research Output//There is no regulation about participation of academic staff in applied and scientific projects. Fluctuations in the number of publications and conference presentations indicate potential inconsistencies in research engagement among faculty, suggesting the need for a more structured approach to encourage regular participation.
- 2) Although the HS has some projects whose results are practical and linked with the industry needs, there is no applied research planned and implemented together with the industry companies.

Assessment of the requirement [2]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

HS has well-functioning mechanisms for engaging both staff and students in research, decent international cooperation, and a commitment to integrating innovative solutions into the study process. Some minor improvements need to be taken care (initiation of the projects and applied research with the companies) should be done.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1.

The HS collaborates with Latvian educational institutions, employers, employer organizations, state bodies, and non-governmental organizations to meet its operational objectives. The HS focuses on cooperation with other institutions that implement tourism and hospitality programmes (i.e. Turība University, Baltic International Academy, ISMA, Vidzeme University, Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies), which directly supports its academic goals (SER, p. 50-51). The Hotel Management College collaborates with high-level industry employers, such as 4*-5* hotels and internationally recognized restaurants (i.e. RADISSON BLU, WELLTON and SEMMARA brand hotels in Riga, hotels "Neiburgs", "Pullman Riga Old Town", "Grand Hotel Kempinski Riga", "AC Hotel Riga by Marriott", "Avalon Hotel & Conferences", "Baltic Beach Hotel", restaurant "Max Cekot Kitchen") which provides students with exposure to high standards and industry best practices (SER, p. 51). This cooperation is crucial for ensuring that the students' learning outcomes are aligned with the

expectations of top-tier employers in the hospitality sector.

The complete List of cooperation agreements - "HOTEL SCHOOL" Hotel Management College list of cooperation agreements* (hereafter: List) is provided. According to the List the agreements have been signed with 4 higher education institutions in Latvia, 9 with employers from Latvia, 4 with ICT companies from Latvia and abroad and 3 with state institutions from Latvia. Students have access to the list on Moodle.

The HS applies detailed and strategic criteria for selecting its cooperation partners, as outlined in its internal strategic document - Modernization and Internationalization Strategy for 2021-2027 (p. 30 - 38). These criteria focus on ensuring quality measures and aligning partnerships with the College's core tasks and development objectives. This selection process helps maintain the HS quality and reputation.

Strategic relevance, shared goals, and values, as well as professional experience and reputation, are key criteria for the HS. This approach ensures that cooperation partners are not only credible but also contribute meaningfully to the educational outcomes.

The HS has structured mechanisms for organizing cooperation; they use a mentioned strategic document (Modernization and Internationalization Strategy for 2021-2027, p. 30 - 38) to guide its selection and engagement with partners.

According to SER (p. 52) cooperation is typically formalized through written agreements, though some arrangements remain oral, depending on the cooperation type and regulatory requirements. This was also further explained by the HS Director during the assessment visit interview. For example, student internships require a tripartite agreement while employer participation in State examination committees necessitates a written contract as per labor laws. In contrast, field trips and participation in conferences often proceed based on verbal agreements or completed registration forms.

The HS cooperation with other Latvian higher education institutions and industry employers contributes significantly to the achievement of its learning outcomes. The exchange of students and lecturers, joint activities in studies and research, and the sharing of resources like libraries and laboratories enhance the educational experience and ensure that students receive comprehensive training. The companies mentioned above offer internships to HS students and also provide job opportunities for both students and graduates (SER, p. 51).

According to SER (p. 51) employers contribute to the study field by providing internships and job opportunities for students and graduates. They also invite students to excursions, lectures, seminars, and practical training sessions at their premises. The active involvement of employers in guest lectures, master classes, field trips, and the development and evaluation of qualification papers ensures that the curriculum is relevant and grounded in current industry practices. This real-world engagement is essential for preparing students to meet the demands of the hospitality and tourism industries.

The HS actively engages in various forms of cooperation, including the organization of conferences, seminars, and international project dissemination activities (SER, p. 51).

In line with the information shared during assessment visit interviews by staff involved in the study programme, as well as students, it would be beneficial to expand the pool of partners for collaboration, particularly those operating in the tourism and hospitality sector.

1.5.2.

The HS cooperation with international institutions significantly contributes to achieving the aims and learning outcomes of its study programme. The college forms strategic partnerships with renowned institutions like the Swiss Hotel Management School and the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute, offering students internships, access to career support services, and globally recognized certifications such as Guest Service Gold®. Additionally, these partnerships facilitate the acquisition of specialized teaching materials and resources, further enriching the college's educational

programmes by aligning them with international standards and practices (SER, p. 53 - 54).

This exposure to international best practices and innovations enriches the curriculum and provides students with a broader perspective on the hospitality and tourism industries. However, the number of partners with whom the HS collaborates at the international level is insufficient, which is a significant observation made by the students who participated in the interview. For instance, as listed in the “HOTEL SCHOOL” Hotel Management College list of cooperation agreements (Annex 2) 5 cooperation agreements were signed with higher education institutions from abroad out of which only 3 provide the possibility for students of continuing studies in the bachelor's level professional higher education study programme.

The HS uses criteria similar to those for domestic partnerships when selecting international partners (Modernization and Internationalization Strategy for 2021-2027 (p. 30 - 38).). However, the clear criteria for the selection of cooperation partners for modernization and internationalization are all listed in their Modernisation and Internationalisation Strategy 2021-2027. According to the mentioned source, the HS selects international partners based on their relevance to the hospitality industry, accreditation, service structures, and additional criteria such as sustainability and digitalisation. In 2016, College management began cooperation with Atlantica Hotels & Resorts in Greece by visiting the hotels to assess internship conditions, meet supervisors, and verify accommodations for students. Similar visits occurred in 2017 and 2018 to Alegria Hotels in Spain, in 2019 to Allegroitalia in Italy, and in 2020 to Blu Hotels in Italy. In 2022, the programme director visited Danaide Resort in Italy, while another lecturer visited Parklane Resort & SPA in Cyprus in 2023. These visits helped ensure quality and safety for student internships (SER, p. 53). These hospitality service providers meet the HS's established criteria for selecting international partners. The international higher education institutions HS cooperates with also meet the established criteria for selecting international partners. They have accredited hospitality management programmes, provide qualitative services at the same level as the College, and are from Erasmus+ partner countries. The same applies to institutions where the academic staff can participate in mobility programmes.

Additionally, the HS conducts preparatory visits and online meetings to evaluate potential partners, ensuring that their facilities and practices meet the HS standards for quality and safety in internships and other collaborative activities (SER, p. 53). It is expected that teaching staff provide some feedback based on their visits to foreign institutions; however, there is no formal procedure outlining how this should be done. Therefore, the suggestion is to establish such a procedure.

According to SER (p. 53) cooperation with international employers is managed through various measures, such as mobility trips to observe internship conditions, verify accommodation, and discuss practical tasks. For example, visits to hotel chains like ATLANTICA HOTELS in Greece and ALEGRIA HOTELS in Spain have ensured that internship conditions meet the College's quality standards. Similar visits to universities have led to agreements on study continuation opportunities for graduates (3 agreements with .City Unity College Nicosia (Cyprus), Business & Hotel Management School (Switzerland) and Swiss Hotel Management School (Switzerland)) (“HOTEL SCHOOL” Hotel Management College list of cooperation agreements, Annex 2).

The HS attracts international partners through a combination of strategic visits, participation in global educational and industry events, and collaboration on international projects. For instance, the College's engagement with institutions like Dania Academy for the Erasmus-EDU-2025-PEX-COVE project illustrates its proactive approach to forging high-value partnerships. This strategic approach not only enhances HS cross-border network but also aligns with its modernization and internationalization goals.

1.5.3.

Mechanisms for Attracting International Students and Staff (SER, p. 54):

- Education Fairs and Business Trips: HS representatives attend international education fairs and organize business trips to showcase the HS's programmes.
- Online Advertising: Advertisements on the internet and social networks, including LinkedIn, are used to attract foreign students and educators.
- Partnership Programmes: Recruitment of foreign educators through Erasmus+ and other cooperation agreements.

Regarding student incoming mobility under the Erasmus+ programme, the HS is in the process of initiating this programme (SER, p. 54 – 55). The Head of HS clearly pointed out in the initial interview that they had worked extensively on the process of registering the institution with the Erasmus community, and that the process was very demanding, both in terms of time and intellectual effort. According to the Statistical Data on the Outgoing and Incoming Mobility of Students (Indicating Study Programmes) number 2-5-3-2 no incoming mobilities of students were realized. The number of foreign academics visiting the HS increased from 1 in 2018 to 13 in 2022 and 2023, with contributions from various countries including Ukraine, Germany, and Cyprus (SER, p. 55).

The HS has organized long-term vocational traineeships from Ukraine and short-term learning mobility for adults from Italy (SER, p. 54).

The HS received the Erasmus+ Charter (ECHE) in 2021 and applied for mobility in 2022. In summer 2022, it signed a grant agreement, allowing it to organize co-financed mobility placements for students and staff. Following the European Commission's switch to the Beneficiary Module for Erasmus+ project management, the HS fully activated the technical module in spring 2024. Consequently, it signed inter institutional agreements with institutions in Cyprus, Denmark, and Portugal and plans to finalize an agreement with Lithuania in June 2024. These agreements will enable the College to initiate student incoming mobilities.

Student outgoing mobility fluctuated between 7 to 20 from 2018 to 2023, with a significant drop during the COVID-19 pandemic. 8 students in 2022 and 9 students in 2023 benefited from Erasmus Erasmus+ ECHE KA1 mobilities (Statistical Data on the Outgoing and Incoming Mobility of Students (Indicating Study Programs) number 2-5-3-2). Post-pandemic, mobility numbers have increased, reaching 20 in 2023 (SER, p. 54). Students are regularly informed about the Erasmus + possibilities. Academic staff mobility rose from 8 in 2018 to 16 in 2023 (file:///C:/Users/Korisnik/Downloads/2-5-3-3%20Statistical%20data%20on%20academic%20staff%20incoming%20and%20outcoming%20mobilities.pdf)

It would be beneficial to seek feedback from students and teaching staff about their experiences while abroad, specifically aiming to gather suggestions for improving practices or expanding collaborations based on their experiences.

During the assessment visit interview, the staff emphasized the very large workload that arises with Erasmus+ mobility. As the network of partners continues to expand, opening up new opportunities for both faculty and students, an even greater workload is expected. Therefore, it is necessary to consider whether an additional role related to Erasmus can be assigned to one of the employees, allowing someone on the staff (either full-time employees or external) to take on the role of a sort of Erasmus coordinator. Ensuring smooth integration for incoming staff and students and dealing with cultural adjustments continues to be a challenge as pointed out during the initial interview during assessment visit with the management.

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

The HS demonstrates a comprehensive approach to fostering collaboration with both domestic and international institutions, aligning these partnerships with its strategic goals. Through active cooperation with Latvian and foreign higher education institutions, employers, and industry leaders,

the HS supports its study programme to be relevant, practical, and up-to-date with industry standards. By leveraging these partnerships, the College provides students with valuable hands-on experiences, international exposure, and access to high-quality resources.

As the employers stated during the assessment visit, they would like to involve students more directly in researching the practical everyday activities of their organisation. Furthermore, its proactive efforts to attract international students and staff, supported by the Erasmus+ programme, enhance the quality of education and promote global engagement within the hospitality and tourism sectors. The HS systematic approach to collaboration contributes significantly to the achievement of its educational objectives and the professional success of its students.

Strengths:

- 1) The start of the Erasmus+ programme for the exchange of teaching staff and students and strong engagement of employees in that direction.
- 2) The existence of clear criteria for selecting partners with whom the HS wishes to collaborate.
- 3) Quality dissemination of information about the partners with whom the HS collaborates, as recognized by students and faculty.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Still too few institutions outside the country with which the HS collaborates and where students can study for a semester or a year (exchange of students).
- 2) Formally, there is no individual designated as the Erasmus coordinator.
- 3) No feedback mechanism established.

Assessment of the requirement [3]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

HS has established a collaboration network and although there are still few international institutional partners, the scope of cooperation is at a good level for such a small school.

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

Analysis

1.6.1.

Since the last accreditation in 2020, there have been significant improvements in the organisation of the learning process and the order of HS documents. The HS has corrected the information on the public webpage and clarified the potentially misleading information concerning the study programme level and given diploma.

The HS has taken into account several recommendations from experts. In the time period from 2020 to 2023, the HS continued to improve its performance in several criteria and also expects to do so in the next planning stage, which is reflected in the College Development strategy for 2024-2029. The expert recommendations received within the procedure touched on issues of the institution's strategic development and quality management, internationalisation goals (for example, obtaining the Erasmus Charter), and strengthening the capacity of academic staff and students' self-governance. The situation is much better concerning the academic staff competencies and its

development support, key academic staff workload, which seems to be more reasonable, processes and responsibilities are more evident, and staff is informed about the procedures in the college and participates in those processes. Based on the presented syllabi, the academic staff has gained more knowledge in learning outcome-based approaches and didactics, reflected in the better quality of syllabi. The implementation of the recommendations facilitated the professional development of the HS staff in the field of study methodology and research, thereby improving the quality of study and research processes in the HS.

Also, improvements proposed by experts have been made in the study courses, introducing a greater emphasis on learning various digital applications and correcting the lists of mandatory literature. The results of research projects implemented in cooperation with industry companies are used in the study content. The Modernization and Internationalization Strategy of the College for 2021-2027 has been developed, and the College's Development Strategy for 2024-2029, Erasmus Charter 2021-2027, has been obtained, allowing to ensure the regularity of the mobility of students and teaching staff.

The HS established a tradition of organising an annual international applied research conference and publishing its proceedings, strongly emphasising student involvement in research. In addition, the HS improved the information provision of its study programme, especially in digital resources, by purchasing digital simulation licenses "Knowledge Matters" and subscribing to the digital library "Perlego". Also, the HS continued to add to its library collections, placing the main emphasis on foreign language learning resources, for example, learning Latvian in the "Latvian language for foreigners" study course, as well as on the acquisition of the latest methodological literature for teaching staff and HS management, for example, on the quality management aspects of higher education institutions.

At the same time, some recommendations from the previous assessment still have not been fully implemented or solved. Probably because of the institution's smallness, some lecturers still teach more than three courses for the study group. The strengthening of the academic staff capacity in practice has not been successful because of the decreasing number of students (fewer resources and the need to hire more varied staff). Although there are clear improvements in involving the industry partners in the HS activities, the possibility to involve them in the market analysis and strategy writing/developing process from the beginning to get more appropriate bases for the strategic goals is not fully used as well as obtaining real orders from business to conduct applied research.

There is no convincing proof that student self-governance takes a more active stance and develops a strategic viewpoint regarding College quality assessment, including possible participation in quality assessment procedures and communication and collaboration with other student self-governance institutions or the national student union to improve its understanding of student academic and social affairs.

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

HS has taken the previous assessment experts' recommendations seriously and has made several improvements, especially in the areas of establishing international connections and admission, together with several improvements in leading the study field to the higher education level. In general, progress is being observed, and all deficiencies received in previous evaluation procedures

have been eliminated, or work is underway to eliminate them.

Strengths:

- 1) Academic staff has gained competencies in the learning outcomes based study approach and didactics, which reflects in the improved quality of syllabi.
- 2) Academic staff is aware of and involved in the HS internal processes.
- 3) Research activity and student engagement to the research have been improved a lot since the previous assessment.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Insufficient involvement of entrepreneurs in the preparation of curriculum, strategy planning process and research work.
- 2) Some lecturers give too many different lectures per one group and more different lecturers could be involved to the studies from industry.
- 3) Students self governance do not take enough strong leading role.
- 4) The student admission and number are still decreasing.

Assessment of the requirement [4]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Despite the work done, continue the recommended process by paying more attention to the involvement of entrepreneurs, the availability and transparency of documents, and provide feedback from the involved participants, ensuring the anonymity of the submitter.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

Refurbish the crockery, glassware, and cutlery in the training restaurant to meet modern hospitality standards.

Publish the academic staff recruitment regulations on the HS website to improve transparency.

Reduce the involvement of the HS Director in multiple recruitment stages to diversify decision-making authority.

Evaluate the restrictions on the number of courses allocated to teaching staff taking into account credits and contact hours as well as the total workload, not just the number of courses, to ensure a fairer distribution of the workload.

Increase access to professional development opportunities for both academic and administrative staff.

Provide more detailed job advertisements with clear course objectives, credit points, and evaluation criteria.

Conduct research to identify reputable international institutions for academic partnerships. Focus on universities with strong hospitality programmes, especially those with established exchange programmes; Erasmus+ Participation: Fully leverage the Erasmus+ programme by building relationships with other institutions that have already participated in the programme.

Strengthen Erasmus+ participation by building relationships with institutions experienced in the programme.

Appoint a dedicated person to manage the Erasmus programme to improve international collaboration.

Establish a formal procedure for students and staff to suggest international collaborations and partnerships.

Establish partnerships with companies to plan and execute applied research projects, ensuring collaboration between the academic and business sectors to enhance practical relevance in studies.

Develop strategic initiatives to attract a larger and more consistent number of students, focusing on both recruitment and retention to ensure stable student numbers.

Improve administrative capacity to effectively manage the Internal Quality Assurance System.

Develop a comprehensive Quality Management System that aligns with institutional goals and ensures integration across processes.

Review and improve the current proposals and complaints submission and proceeding system to make it more usable, useful and transparent and responsive to feedback from stakeholders.

Analyse and clearly define the study programme development procedure, including channels and methods for stakeholder involvement, ensuring a structured and inclusive approach to curriculum updates.

Clarify how surveys are conducted, ensure higher response rates, and systematically use the results to inform and improve internal processes, procedures, and the study programme content.

Create a formalized process for teaching staff to propose course and programme changes annually, aligning changes with learning outcomes.

Improve the process for attracting and supporting international students, ensuring visa and status issues are resolved before the academic year starts. Joining the initiation (<https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/agreement-good-practice-attracting-foreign-students>) could be valuable.

Replace Duolingo as a language certification platform by adopting more recognized alternatives for accurate language assessment.

Enhance the collection and use of statistical data to improve decision-making processes.

Regularly update public information about HS and its programme to ensure accuracy and availability.

Increase the involvement of industry professionals in curriculum development, strategy planning, and research collaboration.

Strengthen the leadership role of the Student Council to increase their influence in decision-making processes.

Long-term recommendations

Focus on long-term international recruitment strategies to enhance programme visibility and attract a diverse student body.

Secure an extension of the lease beyond 2025 and explore opportunities to expand the HS space during renovations.

Invest in creating a fully equipped bar area in the training restaurant to offer comprehensive hospitality training.

Plan for dedicated changing rooms and secure lockers for students as part of the long-term renovation.

Continuously monitor staff workload to ensure fair distribution as student numbers increase.

Expand professional development on sustainability and ensure these topics are integrated into the curriculum.

Establish partnerships with healthcare and psychological support services to assist international students.

Improve student support systems by incorporating feedback from the Student Council and enhancing communication about available resources.

Require all academic staff to participate in applied or scientific research projects with the industry to increase research output and engagement.

Develop strategies to enhance competitiveness in student admissions and attract high-quality applicants.

II - "Hospitality Services Organization" ASSESSMENT

II - "Hospitality Services Organization" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1.

Short-cycle professional higher education programme "Hospitality Services Organization" 41811 (study programme) aligns with the Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organisation study field in terms of its curriculum, awarded qualification, and overall goals.

This study programme is appropriately categorized within the broader study field, as it covers the essential components of hotel services that are crucial to this business field in general. Its focus on the organisation of hotel services directly reflects the core elements of the field.

In summary, the study programme fits well within the Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organisation field due to its comprehensive approach to hotel services. By addressing key objectives, the programme equips students for various career opportunities in the diverse and evolving hotel industry.

2.1.2.

The study programme code - 41811, is established in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 322 of 13 June 2017 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524>). The digits "41" stand for - short cycle professional higher education

(fifth level professional qualification), formerly first level professional higher education. To be implemented after general or vocational secondary education. Duration of full-time studies: two to three years, in this case 2 years and 3 months. The third, fourth and fifth digits of the code '811' indicate the affiliation of '8' to the thematic group 'Services', '811' to the educational programme group 'Hotel and restaurant services'. This code is relevant to the study programme.

After completing the programme, a professional qualification is awarded: Hotel Services Organizer. The Professional standard of the Hotel Services Organizer corresponds to level 5 professional qualification (P7_atbilstiba_prof_standartam_ENG.docx).

There is a smaller mismatch between the study programme title (hospitality), the title of the professional standard (hotel) and the content of the study programme (focus on the hotel services). The study programme title "Hospitality Services Organization" shows the focus on the whole hospitality sector (The hospitality industry is a broad category of fields within the service industry that includes lodging, food and beverage services, event planning, theme parks, travel agency, tourism, hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, and bars). Still, the study programme is focused on the more narrow hotel services.

The duration of the study programme is full-time, two years and three months (135 ECTS). Studies are held only in English and Latvian; although the HS gets some applications to study in Latvian every year, there are not many of them to open Latvian study groups.

The study programme has a defined aim (SER, page 61): "to provide education in accordance with international standards and to prepare competitive hotel services organisers for the labour market - specialists who are able to participate in the management of hospitality companies, plan and coordinate the operation of services, manage personnel, promote the sale of products and services and budget execution control - according to the professional standard and short-cycle professional higher education requirements." Except for the previously mentioned minor mismatch between the programme title and content, the aim correlates with the study field and title and gives input for the learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the aim should focus on the hotel services (because the professional standard is also focused on hotel services) and hospitality as a much wider concept should be taught only to understand the hotel context.

The objectives/tasks of the study programme (SER, p 62) are well-worded and focus on providing opportunities for the students to gain specific skills and knowledge to work in the hospitality industry in different job positions starting from the performance of the simplest functions to the performance of the duties of the leading staff, getting to know the specifics, standards and requirements of the work of service managers. The objectives also describe what kind of generic competencies are developed during the studies - self-management, research skills, digital literacy, creativity etc.

The learning outcomes of the study programme are much more detailed than the tasks, and the specific skills connected to hotel services are prioritised. The learning outcomes also refer to generic competencies but not the same ones that were mentioned in the tasks. Collaboration skills and ethicality are highlighted. Integrating the specific and generic skills and abilities into the learning outcomes is definitely a positive approach, but the competencies focused on study tasks, aim, and learning outcomes should be the same.

The characteristics of the Hospitality services organiser study programme (title, code, professional qualification to be obtained) are in line with the programme's aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements. All the characteristics are well described to introduce the programme's content and show its focus on developing new specialists in the field of Tourism and hospitality.

2.1.3.

The study programme has retained its name, code, professional qualification to be awarded, duration and form of studies, as well as structure and objectives—there have been no significant changes since the previous assessment.

The main change in study management is connected to the changes in legislation, whether Latvia

adopted the European Credit Transfer System and whether all the higher education institutions need to transfer from the national credit system (CP) to the European system (ECTS) by the end of 2024. Based on the documents (study regulation, study programme and syllabi), the ECTS is adapted correctly - full (whole number) credit points, 60 per study year, 25 student work hours per credit point. Still the HS have incorrectly indicated the type of study programme (SER and e-platforma) as first level professional higher education study programme. After the change in legislation it should be a short-cycle professional higher education study programme.

In 2022, the new professional standard came into force (P7_atbilstiba_prof_standartam_ENG.docx, 2022), which also initiated some minor changes in the study programme to align with the requirements. Therefore, the marketing course was specified and focused on Hospitality Industry Management; a new specific topic was introduced as a separate course - Reservations and Revenue Management in the study programme. As previously freely elective courses, Part B courses were modified to be limited elective courses. According to the interview with college management, the study programme director made the recommendations for the necessary changes and discussed them with the director of the College. Agreed changes were presented to the Council and confirmed. The first intake to the updated study programme was in autumn 2023.

Following the amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the HS was required to discontinue offering studies in Russian. The final cohort for the Russian-language programme, with a phased transition to English, was admitted in 2019. The discontinuation of the Russian language stream negatively affected student enrollment at the HS, as many prospective applicants were either unable or reluctant to pursue studies in a language other than Russian.

2.1.4.

Due to the predicted increase in the hospitality sector in Latvia and abroad, the HS has chosen the potential study field and study programme to teach and develop. The HS has provided several justifications in SER (p. 66-67) to confirm the future labour market needs for hotel services organisers. Accordingly, employers enhanced the continuous need for educated labour in the hotel field.

The number of graduates working in the hospitality or hospitality-related industry supports the HS aim of providing quality specialists for the hospitality sector. According to the HS Graduate Employment Survey conducted in 2023, all graduates are employed and work in the hospitality or hospitality-related industry (SER, p. 67). If the number of graduates is minimal and the survey response rate is unavailable (despite the questions asked during the interview), then the trustworthiness of the survey results might be low.

Despite the positive expected trends in the sector, the HS student statistics show several problems (The data from document HS was sent to experts on October 4, 2024, titled "Table-04102024 (2)", also see chart on doc: HS_student_statistics).

The data on the "Hospitality Services Organisation" study programme reveals several trends that highlight important areas of concern. Over the past few years, the number of applications for the programme has shown noticeable variation. In 2021/2022, the programme reached a peak with 110 applications, but this number has since declined, ranging between 70 and 91 in subsequent years. Despite this relatively strong initial interest, the number of students admitted to the programme has not followed the same upward trend. The highest number of admitted students was in 2021/2022, with 45, but this figure has steadily dropped, reaching only 17 students in 2024/2025. This decline in admissions suggests challenges in converting applicants into enrolled students, which could be a signal of increasing competition, shifting student preferences, or potential issues within the admission process itself.

The student body before graduation has also exhibited fluctuations, with a high of 60 students in 2023/2024. However, this number has slightly decreased over time, indicating potential difficulties in student retention. A key concern lies in the dropout rates, which have remained consistently high,

with 18 to 30 students leaving the programme each year. The peak dropout rate occurred in 2021/2022 when 30 students left, which represents a significant challenge for the programme's sustainability and success. High dropout rates can be indicative of various underlying issues, including academic pressures, disengagement, or insufficient student support systems.

The number of graduates from the programme, while fluctuating, has remained relatively low, with between 2 and 8 students completing the programme each year. The highest number of graduates was recorded in 2022/2023 and 2023/2024, but the overall output of graduates is still modest. This suggests that the programme faces difficulties in guiding students through to completion, possibly linked to the high dropout rates and other retention challenges.

In conclusion, the programme faces several pressing issues, including declining admissions, high dropout rates, and a relatively low number of graduates. These trends suggest the need for strategic interventions aimed at improving student retention, enhancing the admission process, and providing stronger support systems to ensure that more students complete the programme successfully. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for the future sustainability and growth of the programme. The HS must take immediate and decisive action to address this issue by increasing student admissions and reducing drop-out rates.

2.1.5.

N/A

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

The study programme aligns well with the broader field of Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organisation in terms of its curriculum, qualification to be obtained, and goals. It offers a structured approach focused on hotel services, providing students with the skills and knowledge to pursue careers in the hospitality sector. Despite this, there is a mismatch between the programme's title, which suggests a broader focus on hospitality, and its content, which is primarily centered on hotel services. The programme has recently undergone changes to adapt to updated professional standard and new legislative requirements in adopting the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

One significant challenge is the programme's high drop-out rate, which threatens its sustainability. Additionally, the programme experienced a decline in enrollment following the discontinuation of Russian-language studies due to changes in national law. Although the programme has strong ties to the labour market, with all graduates reportedly working in hospitality-related fields, there are concerns about the increasing drop-out and low number of graduates.

Strengths:

- 1) Well chosen and increasing sector to work with and where the graduates of the HS are expected.
- 2) The general characteristics of the study programme are coherent with each other and give for the student or potential student the good overview of the studies and study programme.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Mismatch between title, professional standard and content of the study programme.
- 2) Decreasing admission and student numbers.
- 3) High drop-out of the students.
- 4) The generic skills reflected in tasks/objectives and study programme learning outcomes are not

fully aligned.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1.

The study programme is divided into three parts: general educational study courses, industry-specific courses and electives, internships and qualification work. The last changes in the study programme were made because the new professional standard came into force in 2022 (P7_atbilstiba_prof_standartam_ENG.docx). The analysis of the study programme revealed the following potential misunderstandings and conflicts with higher education principles:

1. limited electives - the idea of electives is to enable students to find some courses according to their deeper interests and to allow a mobility window (students can transfer different courses achieved abroad to the electives). Having "limited" electives is not the same concept anymore.
2. Internship titles - there are two internships in the study programme. The length and implementation semester are really different, as are the aims and learning outcomes. Therefore, the titles of the internships could better reflect the real content of the internships and direct the expectations and tasks for the particular internship.
3. Two courses in the study programme seem to support the students' writing and presentation skills: Formatting and Presentation of Study Papers (1st semester) and Research Methodology (3rd semester). Some of the LOs and topics of the subjects overlap, and teaching "formatting" skills raises the question of whether it is a higher education level skill and must be part of the HE programme. Some of the topics of those subjects reflect academic writing skills (e.g. academic integrity, databases search, etc.), and academic writing could be a more appropriate set of skills for higher education students.
4. Latvian for foreigners is an elective course. Still, it should be taught to all international students. It cannot be chosen according to the student's preferences or will. To better support foreigners' integration into the Latvian culture and labour market, the study subjects teaching Latvian tourism products and the most important events of Latvian history and culture could be added to the studies.

The professional standard also strictly requires that one of the skills of the qualification holders is the ability to use the state language, observing the norms of literary language and using professional terminology for the performance of work duties, being able to discuss fluently and constructively in Latvian, produce well-structured, detailed texts, use professional vocabulary of the field/sector in Latvian, etc. Currently, the study programme is conducted only in English, with a high proportion of foreign students who have no prior knowledge of Latvian. The study programme plan includes only one 4 CP course "Latvian for Foreigners" and the course description confirms that after completing the course the student will be able to use the Latvian language in oral and written communication at A1/A2 level on simple and general topics. It is recommended that the College adopt an approach to Latvian language learning similar to English, German, Spanish or Italian, where the curriculum provides for two separate study courses, the first covering the basics of the language and the second more in-depth professional vocabulary and language use to ensure compliance with the requirements of the professional standard.

5. Some subject descriptions make you wonder how current the studies are. For example, the Hospitality Industry Marketing subject mandatory literature is from the years 2013, 2005, 2011 and 2010, and additional literature is even older. No recent and emerging trends in marketing (e.g. social media, reels, etc.) are included in the subjects. According to the title, sustainability is taught in the course Supply Chain and Sustainable Resource Management, but as an integral trend in the

hospitality sector and hotel industry, it should be taught in the other specialization subjects as well. Course materials review (especially concerning the industry study courses) shows that not many lecturers are familiar with the possibilities of Perlego or other database opportunities or do not use those.

During the assessment visit interview with the employers, they said that the graduates would need better knowledge and skills to work with Opera PMS. Knowledge and understanding of cooperation between different hotel services would be useful, as well as the various hotel types. At the same time, the basics of reservation systems are necessary if the graduate will work in a guest house or a small hotel. Therefore, this could be included in the study programme as well. Based on the study programme (SER, appendix 10: P10_kursu apraksti_ENG.docx), the skills for working with Opera PMS are already included in the study programme (Hotel Management Software), but the partner employers didn't know anything about it. Employers should be better involved with the study programme development to align expectations for internships and future job placements.

According to the graduates' feedback in the interview, they miss the skills needed to cope with real communication situations in the hotel, self-management skills, including time and stress management, and multicultural skills. The graduates also expressed that they had never asked before about their feedback for the study programme.

Based on Appendix 7 (SER, Compliance of the study programme "Hospitality Services Organization" with the professional standard: P7_atbilstiba_prof_standartam_ENG.docx), the necessary topics and competencies are covered in the study programme. The analysis revealed two issues: 1) some subjects seem overloaded and supposed to support far too many different skills and attitudes and/or professional knowledge given in the standard. Eg. Hospitality Industry Marketing, 5 ECTS, is mentioned as a supportive subject 37 times (and not all the linked skills/knowledge/attitudes are reflected in the syllabi), Rooms Division Operations Management, 5 ECTS, is mentioned 34 times, Quality Management in Hospitality, 3 ECTS, is mentioned 32 times and so on; 2) Several specialization subjects do not correlate with the professional standard. Eg. The contemporary Hospitality Industry, Managing Food and Beverage Operations, International Gastronomy.

2.2.2.

N/A

2.2.3.

The study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. The academic staff of the study programme "Organization of Hospitality Services" uses various teaching methods provided by appropriately qualified academic persons. The main implementation methods are (SER 3.2.3):

- 1) Lectures and seminars (eg. interactive lectures, discussions, group works), to provide a theoretical knowledge base and promote critical thinking. Students acquired knowledge and skills to analyze and discuss various issues of the hospitality industry.
- 2) Practical lessons and laboratory work (eg. internships in hotels and restaurants, business simulations, practical lessons in laboratories), to develop practical skills and the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real situations. Students gain the practical skills and experience needed to work in the hospitality industry.
- 3) Project work and research (individual and group projects, research, presentations) to promote creativity, problem-solving skills and scientific research. Students develop the ability to independently conduct research, analyze data and present their findings.

Thanks to the close cooperation with the industry, HS provides study tours, during which students get to know the specifics of the industry and improve their knowledge of the diversity of the industry. Student-centered learning and teaching principles are considered. Only the English language is used in the teaching process of this period. The study process in HS is organized according to the Regulation "The procedure for organizing and implementing remote learning". (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/329849-attalinato-macibu-organizšanas-un-istenosanas-kartiba>) and this document states that the remote learning in full-time and part-time studies at the higher education level can be implemented up to 50 percent of the number of contact hours determined for the implementation of the relevant study programme, which is specified in the study plan of the relevant study programme approved by the educational institution. As it was mentioned during the interviews with the academic staff and management, there are just some courses which are fully online (eg. Marketing) and some lectures given by the foreign lecturers and majority of the studies are taking place in auditories.

2.2.4.

The organization of internship in HS takes place according to the "Procedure for Organising the Practices" (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Internship-procedure-2022-ENG.pdf>) Students are offered internship opportunities in hospitality companies in Latvia and abroad. HS partners for internships are companies of the industry, including international hotel chains. Practice tasks are related to the learning outcomes to be achieved. The practice meets the requirements of regulatory acts. Internships are provided in foreign languages. Internship opportunities in foreign institutions are provided in a small number. According to the interview with the employers, Latvian hospitality industry companies would be interested in a larger number of interns and for a longer period of time.

2.2.5.

N/A

2.2.6.

The topics of students' qualification papers are selected and coordinated with the supervisor, and also reviewed and approved at the meeting of the HS Council. The topics are practical and are developed in close cooperation with industry companies. The "Regulations on Writing and Defence of Qualification Paper at "Hotel School" Hotel Management College" (<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Regulations-on-writing-and-defence-of-qualification-paper.pdf>) rules stipulate that the topic of the qualification work must correspond to the study programme and the main research priorities given in the Scientific Research Strategy of the HS:

- sustainable business in hospitality;
- quality and financial management in hospitality;
- human resource development in hospitality;
- modern gastronomy;
- technological progress and innovation in hospitality;
- marketing and competitiveness of hospitality companies.

Also, the rules stipulate that the topic of the qualification work must correspond to the nature of the applied research. In recent years, an intensive research direction of HS is the observance of sustainable development and principles in the hospitality sector.

The analysis of the real qualification papers topics revealed that the chosen topics are in coherence with the study field and study programme as well with the research priorities given in the

Regulations on Writing and Defence of Qualification Paper. All the papers are about the hospitality field and open the themes which are important for the industry companies (eg. papers about the different companies (eg. Radisson Blu Latvija Hotel, Neiburgs Hotel, Georgian Cuisine Restaurants in Riga, Aberton Hotel Klaipeda etc) like recovery from Covid19 and personnel management issues (eg. hiring and retainment, training, staff shortage etc). The most popular topics seem to be connected with the sustainability of the hospitality sector companies or the impact of Covid19 to the sector companies. More variety in the topics could be more interesting for the students and supervisors and attractive for the employing companies.

As the employers stated during the assessment interview, they could propose a qualification thesis topic and participate in the selection of topics, but they do not know how to do this.

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

Topics for qualification papers are selected according to the study field and relevant study programme. They are often developed in partner companies. The topics of qualification papers are clarified and improved in cooperation with the supervisor. It follows from the interview with businessmen that their involvement in research topics of the industry, including qualification works, is insufficient. A higher added value would be involving entrepreneurs in the selection and discussion of qualification paper topics.

Strengths:

1) Mandatory competencies listed in the professional standard are matched with the study programme subject.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The involvement of industry representatives in the selection of topics and support from entrepreneurs could be closer.
- 2) There is a lack of mechanisms for three-party cooperation in the development of qualification works.
- 3) Latvian language and culture is not paid enough attention in the study programme.
- 4) Some of the subjects are overloaded and some of the specialty subjects are not connected with the required competencies in the professional standard.
- 5) Study programme does not reflect the latest trends in the hotel industry.

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

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1.

Based on SER (pages 77-78) the following resources are in place for study purposes:

- auditoriums for lectures and seminars, each of them equipped with multimedia equipment

(computer, projector, sound equipment or wide-screen TV) and whiteboard

laptop computers for each student

- property management software "Micros Opera", as well as access to the "D-EDGE" reservation module and the digital marketing platform "Media Genius"

"Knowledge Matters" virtual reality computer simulations of different hotel department operations – Front Office, F&B, Marketing & Sales etc.

- a library with a room for reading and individual computers with connection to Internet (over 1,000 items of specialized literature and periodicals are registered in the collection, most of them are current editions published after 2015, including valuable AHLEI of the American Hotel and Lodging Association's Education Institute publications)

- subscription to a digital library "Perlego"

- subscription to a scientific database "Emerald Insight" with access to the field specific journals

- subscription to a plagiarism checking computer software "Identific" (formerly – "OXSCO Similarity Checker")

- printers, scanners and copying machines for study and research work of students and academic staff members

- restaurant and bar professional equipment in practical training lab, e.g., coffee machine, blenders, shakers, dishes, glasses, cutlery, textiles, decorations, etc. c. equipment

- a professionally equipped kitchen lab that fully meets the tasks of implementing the programme.

- The e-study platform www.e-hotelschool.lv (built on the basis of "Moodle" software), where the HS's academic staff publishes teaching materials, as well as assignment briefs.

Teaching and methodological resources created by the academic staff of the college (in total over 70 unique editions with different editions), as well as collections of student research articles (in total 6 unique collections) in print and digital versions.

Based on interviews with the head of college and management team, since the last accreditation significant investment in software and hardware has been made following the recommendations of the last accreditation commission. Digital library has been subscribed recently as there is students' demand for digital library, agreement with BHRS is in place, ensuring leading hotel software Micros Opera has been used in the study process, as well as simulation tool for imaginary hotel/ restaurant. HS library is in process of digitalisation which will allow students to choose printed versions of the books online and reserve them. In experts opinion the resources for studies, scientific research are sufficient.

During the assessment visit with employers, experts received very positive feedback about the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of students and graduates of HS which confirms that resources of the study programme should be evaluated as good to ensure the learning outcomes and knowledge of students and graduates meeting the industry demand.

Besides serious investment in software and digitalisation, the commission noticed a bit out of date equipment at the study restaurant during the site visit. For example glasses, coffee/ tea cups, and plates. Students overall knowledge would benefit from being able to practice modern cooking technologies, following the latest industry trends, besides the traditional dishes have been cooked in the study kitchen. Despite the changes in the professional standard that minimize practical knowledge in F&B, the HS could consider offering additional practical training—bar and sommelier courses—as an advantage.

For further investments and development it would be recommended to consider training in specialized F&B software, for example R Keeper or others. In case investment is not possible right now, it would be recommended to organize more study tours to hotels and restaurants in Latvia, it was also mentioned during the interviews with students and employers.

2.3.2.

N/A

2.3.3.

Based on SER (p. 31) the HS carries out financial activities and provides paid services in accordance with the goals and tasks set out in College Regulations. College Funding Sources are tuition fee, revenue for paid services, grants of EU and regional funds, state budget funding, donations and gifts and bank loans.

During the interview with the Head of the college, the commission learned that the main income of the college is tuition fees of its students. Recently a business decision has been made and tuition fees were increased. Head of the college mentioned that 50 students in this programme would ensure financial stability and reach the break even point, nevertheless 46 students (according to the interview with the HS management) are studying currently and the financial gap will be covered by the savings from the previous years.

Based on the interviews during the assessment visit with the management team, the main income to finance the study programme is tuition fees, correlation of tuition fee and number of students is important for financial sustainability of HS. From this year tuition fee is increased and 46 students are studying, as the head of HS mentioned during the interview the optimal number of students still would be 50 students. Experts were convinced that the mentioned number of students - 50 - would ensure financial stability and sustainability of the study programme. The missing funds to ensure financial stability of the study programme for this year will be provided from the profit of previous years. The HS management team plans to get to break even point in the summer. In experts opinion this is very important and would ensure the financial stability of the programme.

Based on SER (p. 32), the amount of funding raised and allocated by the College for research activities has increased several times in recent years. Thus, in 2023, the research budget increased in comparison to 2022 for 164% and in 2022, the research budget increased in comparison to 2021 for 204%. This became possible thanks to an increase in the volume of grants of EU and regional funds within the framework of international cooperation projects implemented by HS.

Based on the interviews with HS management, willingness of further development of the programme and investment in resources is planned. From experts' point of view it would be advisable to work on further marketing activities to attract more students and to ensure the minimum number of students for the programme's financial stability.

As this programme is one of several programmes offered by HS it is a bit difficult to evaluate its financial stability as funds are assigned with proximity. In the cost calculation (Annex to the SER VPO-izmaksu-kalkulacija-2023) some funds assigned to realization of the programme are questionable, for example food self cost 100 EUR/month seems a bit low taking into account recent inflation on the prices of products.

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

The "Hospitality Services Organisation" study programme demonstrates notable strengths, particularly in its commitment to digitalisation and professional resources. Previous and ongoing investments in professional software and a digital library ensure that students and graduates acquire industry-relevant knowledge and skills. Additionally, the programme has effectively leveraged external funding, such as EU projects, to compensate for financial shortfalls caused by declining student fees. However, some weaknesses need to be addressed. There is a need for further investment in specific equipment, such as dishes, glasses, and cutlery, to enhance the teaching of food and beverage subjects. Additionally, the programme currently lacks sufficient student numbers to fully cover its operational costs. With 46 students enrolled, at least four more students are required to ensure its financial sustainability.

Strengths:

- 1) Previous investments in professional softwares.
- 2) Continuous investment in digitalisation, digital library.
resources of the study programme are good and ensure the learning outcomes and knowledge of students and graduates meeting the industry demand.
- 3) HS has been successful in finding additional sources (e.g. EU projects) to cover financial decreases in students' fees.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Further investment in modern dishes, glasses and cutlery needed for teaching of F&B subjects needed.
- 2) Missing number of students to cover the costs of running the programme. At the moment 46 students are studying in this programme. At least 4 more students should be attracted to ensure the financial stability of the programme.

Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Overall, the study, science, information, material and technical, and financial provision follow the conditions for implementing the study programme and ensuring learning outcomes. However, the HS should pay close attention to investing in modern dishes, glasses, and cutlery needed for teaching F&B subjects. Additionally, attention should be given to student recruitment to ensure financial stability within the programme. As described in the study field section of this expert report, there are specific issues related to the study programme, such as the wardrobe area lacks secure, lockable lockers and changing rooms for students working in practical environments; the HS is currently operating below the student threshold required for the study programme to be self-sustaining.

Even though the experts point out many areas that need improvement, they do not believe that this should affect the overall evaluation. Instead, they encourage the HS to make changes according to their recommendations to ensure better conditions and a learning environment for the students.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1.

Based on SER (p. 79) in 2023/2024 there have been 15 academic staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme "Hospitality Services Organization". They are highly qualified and meet all the requirements of regulatory acts. The academic staff of the College includes experienced docents (4), lecturers (6), lead researcher (1), as well as guest lecturers (3)

and guest docents (1) with significant experience in the hospitality industry (a total of 60% of the academic staff in the 2023/2024 academic year).

According to the SER (p. 79) all academic staff members of the College are fluent in English (at the B2-C2 level), which ensures the course delivery in English. 87% of the academic staff have at least a master's (or doctorate) degree and 13% of the academic staff have a professional bachelor's degree. Nevertheless, the experts analysis of the biographies of the teaching staff (CV) submitted and the language proficiency levels indicated therein showed that the English language proficiency level of the teacher of the courses International Gastronomy (4 ECTS) and Supply Chain and Sustainable Resource Management (4 ECTS) was not at B2 level. According to the CV, the lecturer's level of English varies between A2 (listening, writing) and B1 (reading and dialogue). The College should assess the lecturer's language proficiency and decide on measures to improve her language proficiency in order to continue teaching the courses in English.

Based on SER (p. 80) the transferring the experience of industry practitioners: Docents and lecturers who are active industry professionals provide students with current and practical knowledge. Their experience in day-to-day work in the hospitality industry ensures that the study programme meets real-life requirements, which are very important in preparing students for work after graduation.

Based on interviews with teaching staff and employers, experts were assured that close connection with the industry has been maintained, several on site visits to leading hospitality enterprises have been organized, and graduates are employed by the best hotels and restaurants of Latvia. Employers have acknowledged good theoretical knowledge and practical skills of students and graduates of HS. Above mentioned confirms that the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses have been achieved. As the weakness for this criterion should be mentioned lack of international guest lecturers. The aims and learning outcomes of this programme would benefit from more internationalization in the future as well as more involvement of industry professionals as teaching staff.

2.4.2.

Based on SER (page 80) the study programme director was replaced recently. Mg. oec. Dzintars Priedītis replaced MIB Oļegs Ņikadimovs as the director of the study programme. Mg. oec. Dzintars Priedītis, is an experienced professional with more than 23 years of experience in the hospitality industry, including hotel management positions. His experience and academic knowledge are a significant contribution to the development of the study programme. Despite the change of the director of the study programme, the composition of the elected academic staff has generally remained unchanged since 2020 when the College's institutional accreditation was carried out.

Based on interviews with teaching staff, programme director and site inspection at the amenities of HS, experts were assured that permanent teaching staff is competent both academically and professionally. Based on interviews with students and graduates, recommendations for future improvement of the content of F&B related subjects should be carried out in terms of investment in the resources as well as lectures and practical assignments related to the bar and restaurant topics.

2.4.3.

N/A

2.4.4.

Based on the annexe "Iesaistitie_macibspeki_ENG.xlsx", there are currently 15 teaching staff members directly involved in the teaching in the Hotel Management Organisation study programme. 7 (annexe: Macibspeku-publikaciju-saraksts-eng.docx) has been actively publishing articles from 2018 - 2024 (the last six years). According to the list of publications from the HS academic staff (10 people), 60 articles have been published since 2013, with 34, or 57%, directly related to tourism and hospitality. Over the past six years, college lecturers (5 lecturers) have contributed some

publications to international scientific databases, some of which have been indexed in prominent platforms like Web of Science.

HS publishes one collection of scientific and applied research articles a year. The teachers' and students' involvement and contribution are important and valued (annexe: Petniecibas-aktivitasu-statistika-2018-2023-eng.docx).

In comparing the information given in the annexe "Iesaistitie_macibspeki_ENG.xlsx" (which courses the teacher gives) and annexe: Macibspeku-publikaciju-saraksts-eng.docx (topics of the articles), there are some mismatches. One of the aims of research in higher education is to support the study and teaching activities of particular teachers and enrich students' study experience with the research results and the latest knowledge of the field. This raises the question of how, for example, research in the area of urban community supports marketing courses or how the macroeconomic level analysis of the tourism sector helps to teach the course Conference and Banquette Management.

It's important to note that some of the academic staff members engage in valuable collaborations with scientists from abroad or other Latvian higher education institutions (e.g., Vidzeme College) in writing and publishing articles. These collaborations benefit the individual researchers and contribute to the broader academic community.

2.4.5.

Based on SER (p. 81) there are several mechanisms for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff:

- Regular meetings and working groups (Regular meetings are held in which all the academic staff of the programme participate. During these meetings, issues of study programme development, student feedback, and improvement plans are developed.)
- Digital collaboration tools (Using the e-learning environment (Moodle), academic staff share materials, ideas about teaching methods and digital aids.) Harmonization of assessment criteria and methodologies (All College lecturers agree on common assessment criteria and methodologies that ensure consistency and fairness in student assessment and help students understand the expected requirements.)

There are 15 academic staff members and 46 students in the study programme "Hospitality Services Organization" in the academic year 2024/2025. Therefore, the ratio of the number of academic staff and students is 1 academic staff for 3 students. This ratio provides a more individualized approach to students, allowing lecturers to better understand each student's needs and provide personalized support.

Based on interviews with management team experts noticed some inconsistencies in the number of students mentioned in different materials of the accreditation. For example in SER the number of students mentioned is 60, but the management team mentioned that there are 46 students studying, a table of students statistics sent for the experts by the HS Director after the assessment visit mentioned 49 students.

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

Teaching staff complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. HS purposefully takes measures so that changes in the composition of the teaching staff do not negatively affect the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements specified in regulatory enactments. A mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the

study programme has been established, it ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and the interconnection of study courses within the study programme. Nevertheless some minor improvements should be made in the future, for example attracting teaching staff from the industry and international guest lecturers.

Strengths:

- 1) Good management, small and effective teaching staff team, effectively communicating for the implementation of the study programme.
- 2) Teaching staff ensure reaching the aims and the learning outcomes of the study programme. Employers are satisfied with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of the graduates.
- 3) Research work of the academic staff in reasonable and collaboration with the scientists outside the HS is valuable

Weaknesses:

- 1) The lack of engagement of teaching staff- practitioners from international environments.
- 2) The English language skills of some lecturers are not proven.

Assessment of the requirement [7]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The teaching staff of the study programme complies with the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments, although there are some minor issues (eg. language skills of some lecturers)

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Annex (see annex: P6_atbilstiba_izgl_standartam_LV.docx) confirms that the Short-cycle SP "Hospitality Services Organization" fully complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 305 "Regulations on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education".

The study programme includes a module of study courses for the acquisition of professional competence in entrepreneurship with a total of 15 CP (ECTS), including the following study courses: 'Entrepreneurship' (4 ECTS); 'Record Keeping and Finance' (5 ECTS); 'Leadership and Management' (3 ECTS); 'Human Resource Management' (3 ECTS).

The mandatory content of the study programme includes the study course "Labour Safety, Civil Defence and Environment Protection" (3 ECTS), in accordance with the study course content requirements set out in the Law on Environmental Protection and the Law on Civil Protection and

Disaster Management.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The HS has provided a comparison with the Hotel Service Organiser Professional Standard (available only in Latvian:

<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-217.pdf>), detailing how the knowledge and competences set out in the Standard are incorporated into the curriculum (Annex: P7_atbilstiba_prof_standartam_ENG.docx).

However, inconsistencies have been identified:

1) The professional standard strictly requires that one of the skills of the qualification holders is the ability to use the state language, observing the norms of literary language and using professional terminology for the performance of work duties, being able to discuss fluently and constructively in Latvian, produce well-structured, detailed texts, use professional vocabulary of the field/sector in Latvian, etc. Currently, the study programme is conducted only in English, with a high proportion of foreign students who have no prior knowledge of Latvian. The study programme plan includes only one 4CP course "Latvian for Foreigners" and the course description confirms that after completing the course the student will be able to use the Latvian language in oral and written communication at A1/A2 level on simple and general topics. It is recommended that the College adopt an approach to Latvian language learning similar to English, German, Spanish or Italian, where the curriculum provides for two separate study courses, the first covering the basics of the language and the second more in-depth professional vocabulary and language use to ensure compliance with the requirements of the professional standard.

2) Another clear discrepancy was found with the professional knowledge on data security, computer security programmes, data protection, information and communication technology security, as required by the standard. The College states that this is covered in the course "Labour Safety, Civil Defence and Environment Protection", but the course description does not cover these topics and is mainly devoted to environmental, civil protection issues. These topics are already partially covered in a number of other courses, e.g. Professional Communication, Laws in the Hospitality Industry. IT security, data security should also be included in other courses directly related to the use of technology.

Consequently, the study courses and their course descriptions in the Annex to the conformity assessment submitted by the College often do not contain the information required by the standard. However, in most cases, similar or relevant information is provided in the course descriptions of completely different courses, so that the College's assessment of compliance is inaccurate, but in practice it can be assumed that students are acquiring most of the knowledge and skills required by the professional standard. However, in order to ensure full compliance with the professional standard, the College needs to reassess and align the curriculum content and course descriptions with the relevant requirements of the professional standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Descriptions of almost all study courses in Latvian and English are available in the SER Annex

"Study Course Descriptions". However, it would also be advisable to create separate course descriptions for " Internship 1", " Internship 2" and " Development and Defence of Qualification Paper" according to the course description template and to include them in the overall course description compilation. The assessment of the compliance of the course descriptions with the requirements laid down in Article 56`1, paragraph 2 and Article 56`2, paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions concludes that all submitted course descriptions meet the formal requirements.

However, the HS can improve the course descriptions by defining the course learning outcomes more clearly, ensuring that they are meaningfully linked to the course content and students' independent work tasks, assessing whether these tasks and teaching methods contribute to the achievement of specific learning outcomes, and linking the course learning outcomes more clearly to the learning outcomes of the study programme (Annex "Mapping of study courses/modules to the learning outcomes of the study programme"). Course descriptions define the learning outcomes of courses but do not clearly define which learning outcomes contribute to which learning outcomes of the study programme. A more detailed approach and mapping would also make it easier to ensure that the requirements of the professional standard are indeed linked to the content of the study programme.

In addition, course literature lists should be reviewed to assess their relevance to the latest literature and sources in the field, with a number of course descriptions having literature more than 10 years old. Given that the HS has access to the Perlego digital library, currently only 2 course descriptions include the literature available there.

Additional care should be taken to ensure that the descriptions of the organisation of students' independent work and assignments in the course descriptions actually reflect the content of the course and are not merely formal descriptions. Currently, several course descriptions contain the same formal descriptions of students' independent work tasks.

In addition, the course descriptions are confusing in terms of the criteria for assessing students' performance. All course descriptions include a reference that they are assessed on a scale of 10 point according to the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia of 13 June 2023 No 305 "Regulations on the State Standard for Professional Higher Education" and the "Study and Examination Procedure" of HOTEL SCHOOL Hotel Business College of 27 August 2019 No 4-6/68. However, for a number of courses the final examination is indicated as "Test", which according to the same College procedure provides for a mark of Pass/Fail. The study programme plan indicates that the form of examination for the courses " Internship I " and " Internship II " is the Test, however, in accordance with the College's procedure and regulations on the organisation of internships and the internship programme, this course provides for the defence of the internship. The HS must specify in all documents a common and precise form of the final examination. The same applies to the course 'Development and defence of a qualification work', the study plan specifies the form of the examination as "Exam", whereas the HS 'Study and examination procedure' stipulates that the examination in this course is the defence of a qualification work in the framework of the national final examination.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The additional samples of the Diploma Supplement submitted to HS still contain inaccuracies and are partially compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation No 202 of 16 April 2013 'Procedure for issuing state-recognised higher education diplomas'. The Latvian and English

versions of the Diploma Supplement need to clarify these points:

2.5. the implementation language of the study programme - Latvian or English - must be indicated correctly and must be the same in both versions of the diploma supplement.

3.2. the amount of credits according to Latvian credits and ECTS should be indicated in point 3.2. to be in line with Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation No 202 of 16 April 2013 'Procedure for issuing state-recognised higher education diplomas' clause 41.2.

3.3. the admission requirements must specify secondary education, according to the admission criteria provided to AIKA, and not general secondary education (in Latvian version).

4.2. the aim of the study programme (according to the information provided to AIKA) must be added and distinguished from the intended learning outcomes of the study programme.

4.3. must indicate the amount of credits according to Latvian credits and ECTS to comply with Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation No 202 of 16 April 2013 'Procedure for issuing state-recognised higher education diplomas' clause 41.2.

In Section 5, point 5.2 may be supplemented by the following professional status: entitlement to work in the hotel service organiser profession.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Basic information on the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field (see annex: "Iesaistitie_macibspeki_ENG.xlsx") and College director's signed confirmation (annex: 4-3n-1-Par-macibspeku-valsts-valodas-prasmi-ENG.edocx) confirms that all elected teaching staff members fully complies with Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 157 "Regulations on the Scope of Knowledge of the State Language, the Procedure for Testing State Language Proficiency, and the State Fee for State Language Proficiency Testing." The exception are two foreign guest lecturers, who conduct their courses only in English, their Latvian language proficiency is assessed at A1 level.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Basic information on the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field (see annex: "Iesaistitie_macibspeki_ENG.xlsx") and College director's signed confirmation (annex: 4-3n-2-Par-macibspeku-anglu-valodas-prasmi-ENG.edocx) confirms that all teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme at least at B2 level according to the European Language Proficiency Assessment levels.

However, a check of the Biographies of the teaching staff (CV) submitted and the language proficiency levels indicated therein showed that the English language proficiency level of the teacher of the courses International Gastronomy (4 ECTS) and Supply Chain and Sustainable Resource Management (4 ECTS) was not at B2 level. According to the CV, the lecturer's level of English varies between A2 (listening, writing) and B1 (reading and dialogue). The College should assess the lecturer's language proficiency and decide on measures to improve her language proficiency in order to continue teaching the courses.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The sample study agreement additionally added by HS after on-site visit (22.11.2024 dok: Studiju-ligums-VPO-2024-labots (1)) (complies with the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation No 70 of 23 January 2007 on "Provisions to be included in the study agreement" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/152072>).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

HS has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another higher education institution if the implementation of the study programme is terminated. The agreements are specified in the annex 2024-ViA-HotelSchool-parakstits.edoc. However, it should be noted that the attached cooperation agreement provides that the students will be able to continue their studies in the bachelor level professional higher education study programme "Tourism Experience Design and Entrepreneurship" (42812) of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (240 credit points (ECTS), study duration 4 years (8 semesters) for full-time studies or 5 years (10 semesters) for part-time studies, study language - Latvian/English, professional qualification and degree: Manager of Tourism Services, 6th level professional qualification, degree to be obtained Professional Bachelor degree in Tourism Management.

This study programme is at a different level of education (bachelor), confers a different type of professional qualification than HS - "Manager of Tourism Services", and corresponds to a different thematic group of educational programmes - Tourism and Leisure Organisation, but it is part of the same study field.

The College should consider further cooperation agreements with other higher education institutions for the transfer of students on more comparable study programmes.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

HS has attached a statement in Annex 1-7-6-Par-zaudejumu-kompensaciju-studejosajiem-04062024.edoc that HS guarantees to compensate students of the short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Hospitality Services Organization", hereinafter - the Programme, in case the Programme is not accredited or the Programme licence is revoked due to the College's action (act or omission) and the student does not wish to continue his/her studies in another study programme. The relevant regulation is enshrined in Paragraph 8 of the Internal Regulations of the College "Tuition Fee Refund Procedure", hereinafter - the Regulations. The current version of the Regulations is published on the College's website [www.hotelschool.lv](https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/1-3-1-Macibu-maksas-atmaksas-kartiba-05012024.pdf) in the section "Rules and Procedures":
<https://hotelschool.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/1-3-1-Macibu-maksas-atmaksas-kartiba-05012024.pdf>

However, it should be noted that the Rules referred to in this statement and point 8 thereof provide that HOTEL SCHOOL shall refund tuition fees if it temporarily suspends or completely terminates an educational programme without offering learners the opportunity to continue their education in another HOTEL SCHOOL programme or in another accredited educational institution with which HOTEL SCHOOL has an agreement. In such case HOTEL SCHOOL shall refund the tuition fees paid by the learners in advance for the classes that did not take place. The calculation of the amount to be refunded shall be carried out by HOTEL SCHOOL. It is necessary to regulate more clearly the student's right to compensation in cases where the student does not wish to continue his/her studies in another study programme.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The study programme as a whole meets most of the requirements set out in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments. However, a number of partial compliances and shortcomings were identified. The programme is conducted primarily in English, with only a basic Latvian language course offered. This does not fully meet the professional standard's requirement for graduates to be proficient in the Latvian language, particularly in professional contexts. Although the College offers a Latvian language course, its current level does not adequately prepare students to use the language at the required standard. Introducing a more comprehensive Latvian language programme, as suggested, could address this issue.

In addition, the assessment of compliance with the professional standard needs to be improved, as currently a number of the knowledge and skills included in the standard are only superficially

covered in the course content. The course descriptions need to be improved, with a more thorough approach to the definition of learning outcomes, the organisation of students' independent work and the linking of everything to the learning outcomes of the study programme, and the compulsory literature needs to be updated. A number of shortcomings were identified in the submitted samples of diplomas, diploma supplements. The HS needs to complete the list of cooperation agreements on the transfer of students in case of closure of the programme with more similar study programmes in Latvia or abroad. The HS needs to carefully assess the language skills of all teaching staff in order to ensure a quality study process.

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

The study programme aligns well with the broader Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organisation field regarding its curriculum, qualifications, and goals. It offers a structured approach focused on hotel services, providing students with the skills and knowledge to pursue careers in the hospitality sector. Despite this, there is a minor mismatch between the programme's title, which suggests a broader focus on hospitality and its content, primarily on hotel services. The programme has recently adapted to updated professional standards and new legislative requirements in adopting the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

One significant challenge is the programme's high dropout rate, which threatens sustainability. Additionally, the programme experienced a decline in enrollment following the discontinuation of Russian-language studies due to changes in national law. Although the programme has strong ties to the labour market, with all graduates reportedly working in hospitality-related fields, there are concerns about the increasing dropout and low number of graduates.

Topics for qualification papers are selected according to the study field and relevant study programme. They are often developed in partner companies. The topics of qualification papers are clarified and improved in cooperation with the supervisor. It follows from the interview with businessmen that their involvement in research topics of the industry, including qualification works, is insufficient. A higher added value would be involving entrepreneurs in the selection and discussion of qualification paper topics.

HS's reputation among employers is good. Graduates successfully employed in many leading companies in the hotel industry. The HS management team is very motivated and driven for further development.

Teaching staff complies with the requirements for implementing the study programme, enabling the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. HS purposefully takes measures so that changes in the composition of the teaching staff do not negatively affect the quality of the study programme's implementation and the study programme's compliance with the requirements specified in regulatory enactments. A mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme has been established; it ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and the interconnection of study courses within the study programme. Nevertheless, minor improvements should be made, such as attracting industry teaching staff and international guest lecturers.

The analysis confirms that the short-cycle study programme (SP) "Hospitality Services Organisation" complies with the State Standard of Professional Higher Education as per Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 305. The curriculum includes mandatory courses such as entrepreneurship, finance, human resource management, and specific content related to labour safety and environmental protection. However, some discrepancies with the professional standard were identified, including inadequate Latvian language training and insufficient coverage of IT security and data protection topics. Additionally, inconsistencies in course descriptions and assessment criteria were noted, and issues with lecturer language proficiency must be resolved. Several shortcomings were identified in

the submitted samples of diplomas, diploma supplements.

Although the analysis of the study programme identified some more minor issues, the experts find that, in general, the level of the development and overall coping of the institution is good - HS acts in specific and rising study field, infrastructure supports the studies and teaching staff is motivated, skilled and competent for this study programme. There is positive feedback from HS partners. Employers are happy and eager to contribute. Some students work at the top companies in the industry, and the overall impression of the quality of knowledge of students is good.

Some of the issues identified in the analysis are critical and must be addressed by the HS as a matter of urgency. These include decreasing admissions and a high dropout rate, which if not resolved, could jeopardize the programme's financial and academic viability. Additionally, the programme's adaptation to modern trends and field-specific requirements, such as the professional standard, requires immediate attention, as does the quality-oriented process of study programme development.

The other weaknesses and detailed recommendations in this report are mainly intended to support the institution in offering quality studies, further development, and enabling it to get higher value from evaluation.

Strengths:

- 1) Well chosen and increasing sector to work with and where the graduates of the HS are expected.
- 2) The general characteristics of the study programme are coherent with each other and give for the student or potential student the good overview of the studies and study programme.
- 3) Mandatory competencies listed in the professional standard are matched with the study programme subject.
- 4) Previous investments in professional softwares and continuous investment in digitalisation, digital library.
- 5) Good management, small and effective teaching staff team, effectively communicating for the organisation of the studies.
- 6) Teaching staff ensure reaching the aims and the learning outcomes of the study programme. Employers are satisfied with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of the graduates.
- 7) A clear stance, willingness, and commitment from the management regarding the further development of study programmes and internationalization.
- 8) The engagement of expert teaching staff in the field of study.
- 9) Good cooperation with numerous domestic partners and their willingness to deepen collaboration.
- 10) Commitment to further utilizing opportunities and potential through the Erasmus+ project.
- 11) Integration of the project results into the study programme.
- 12) Cooperation agreements signed by the college provide the opportunity for students to study at other universities outside of Latvia.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Mismatch between title, professional standard and content of the study programme.
- 2) Decreasing admission and student numbers.
- 3) High drop-out of the students.
- 4) The generic skills reflected in tasks/objectives and study programme learning outcomes are not fully aligned.
- 5) The involvement of industry representatives in the selection of topics and support from entrepreneurs could be closer.
- 6) There is a lack of mechanisms for three-party cooperation in the development of qualification

works.

7) Latvian language and culture is not paid attention in the study programme.

8) Some of the subjects are overloaded and some of the speciality subjects are not connected with the required competencies in the professional standard.

9) Study programme does not reflect the latest trends in the hotel industry.

10) Further investment in modern dishes, glasses and cutlery needed for teaching of F&B subjects needed.

11) Missing number of students to cover the costs of running the programme. As mentioned previously 50 students, at the moment 46 students studying in this programme. At least 4 more students should be attracted to ensure the financial stability of the programme.

12) The lack of engagement of teaching staff- practitioners from international environments.

13) The insufficiently effective procedure for enrolling international students and ensuring their stay in Latvia.

14) The study programme is insufficiently adapted to contemporary trends in tourism, gastronomy, and hospitality.

15) The insufficient number of foreign lecturers (online or in-situ) who, with their diverse experiences and approaches, could greatly contribute to the quality of the study programme.

16) The study programme does not adequately prepare students to meet the professional standard for Latvian language proficiency.

17) Inconsistent study course descriptions and study plan: Study course descriptions lack clarity in defining learning outcomes and alignment with the study programme learning outcomes. Inconsistencies in the final examination format and unclear assessment methods across study courses.

Evaluation of the study programme "Hospitality Services Organization"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Hospitality Services Organization"

Short-term recommendations

Do a benchmark of similar programmes at comparable institutions to identify the shortcomings of the existing programme and find opportunities for integrating contemporary courses into this study programme

Develop a procedure for the annual improvement of the study programme, which will be based on proposed changes to individual course syllabi, with changes being adopted each year before the start of the new academic year

Create a Plan/Procedure for the Inclusion of Teachers and Industry Experts in the Hotel Management College Studies. Also involve international guest lecturers.

Develop a practical mechanism for selecting and conducting qualification works and research topics involving entrepreneurs. They are ready to participate in the material as well, even if they inform the responsible person of the company that it is in internship cases.

In order to promote student understanding of the tourism and hospitality industry, to promote the recognition of Latvia as a tourist destination and knowledge of tourist attractions, and in accordance with the professional standard to include the topic of Latvia and its tourism resources in one of the subjects.

Continue with investments in digitalisation, for example investing in specific restaurant software, in resources, buying modern restaurant equipment: dishes, glasses, cutlery.
Planning additional HS sales and marketing activities to attract more students for this programme and ensure the financial stability of it.
Increase the depth of the existing "Latvian for Foreigners" study course to cover more professional language use. Introduce an advanced Latvian language course focused on professional terminology to ensure compliance with the professional standard.
Provide language training to the lecturer whose English proficiency is below B2 level.
Improve the assessment of relevance to the professional standard by checking it carefully against the content of the study programme and study courses.
The course descriptions need to be improved, with a more thorough approach to the definition of learning outcomes, the organisation of students' independent work and the linking of everything to the learning outcomes of the study programme, and the compulsory literature needs to be updated.
Address gaps in the diplomas and diploma supplements to be issued, so that they fully comply with the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation No 202 of 16 April 2013 on the Procedure for the Issuance of State-recognised Documents of Higher Education.
Align the study programme title, professional standard, and content to ensure consistency and accurately reflect the focus on the hotel sector.
Develop strategies to increase student admissions and maintain stable enrolment numbers through targeted recruitment efforts and improved visibility.
Implement measures to reduce the high drop-out rate by addressing key factors such as student support, engagement, and curriculum relevance.

Long-term recommendations

After the intensive English language course, when entering college, those who need it are provided with additional English language training opportunities
Regularly review and update study course descriptions, ensuring they reflect accurate, up-to-date content, literature and independent work tasks.
Establish cooperation agreements with other higher education institutions in Latvia or abroad that offer study programmes more closely related to the "Hospitality Services Organisation". Expand collaboration with multiple universities to provide broader transfer options for students in case of study programme termination.
For the college to provide the lead weight of the intensity of lectures in a certain period of time to ensure a balanced learning process.
In order to avoid the overlapping of topics, the teaching forces should coordinate the topics of the subjects and their level of detail.
More actively involve alumni in promoting the college and the hospitality industry.

Standardise the final examination formats across all study course descriptions and study programme study plan to eliminate inconsistencies.

Ensure full alignment between the generic skills outlined in tasks/objectives and those reflected in the study programme learning outcomes for consistency.

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

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

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:		Partially compliant	HS Development Strategy for 2024-2029 defines clearly activities for improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field, but there are areas for improvement as more comprehensive QA system, fully implemented study programme development system, decreasing admission and student number with issues in admission system, available information and other inner procedures (complaints, feedback surveys).
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Fully compliant		HS has well-functioning mechanisms for engaging both staff and students in research, decent international cooperation, and a commitment to integrating innovative solutions into the study process. Some minor improvements need to be taken care (initiation of the projects and applied research with the companies) should be done.
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Fully compliant		HS has established a collaboration network and although there are still few international institutional partners, the scope of cooperation is at a good level for such a small school.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.		Partially compliant	Despite the work done, continue the recommended process by paying more attention to the involvement of entrepreneurs, the availability and transparency of documents, and provide feedback from the involved participants, ensuring the anonymity of the submitter.

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	Hospitality Services Organization (41811)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

No dissenting opinions.