

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Rīga Stradiņš University

Study field: Psychology

Experts:

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# Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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The entire study field has two general pluses both on the national and the international scene. Rīga Stradiņš University (hereafter - RSU) is basically or originally a medical university. In the entire organization this is treated by RSU not as a disadvantage or limitation, but as an asset. This is shown by a clear characterization of the educational programme on all three levels on health psychology and by the use of the background provided by a medical school. This is seen as a plus both on the organization of the biological background materials and the practical clinical experience, but also by the possibility of the students taking classes at the university not directly listed under psychology. These features are seen as very positive by the students as well.

A second positive feature is the compliance with the recommendations of the European Federation of Psychological Associations (EFPA) for the joint European standards for organizing university level studies of psychology. The RSU system follows these recommendations both in the content of the curriculum, and the relationships of BA and MA level diplomas. The general framework is exemplary European.

RSU has developed a system to determine the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the relevant study programmes. There is a system for financing the scientific research activities in place, and this system is efficient.

RSU has identified the infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision required for the implementation of the study field. The students and the teaching staff have full access to the necessary resources. There is a common system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of the material, technical, methodological, and informative provision, etc. in place.

RSU has developed and it implements and complies with the procedures for attracting highly skilled teaching staff. The needs of the teaching staff for professional and didactic improvement are identified in a target-oriented manner. Appropriate improvement measures are undertaken, and the outcome and efficiency of the implemented measures are assessed. The teaching staff members take part both in outgoing and incoming mobility, which brings added value to the implementation of the study process and the study quality.

RSU has identified the support necessary for the students and established a well-functioning support system, based on the needs of the students. The panel notes the efficiency and speed with which the program adapted to Covid-19, in particular the smooth transition to online teaching and the support offered to students during the pandemic.

RSU has contributed to the analysis of the recommendations and their implementation in view of the specific features of the study field and the relevant study programmes.

It should be noted that RSU provides psychological education with a strong medical background. By adding more medical courses all-rounded professionals are provided. The Study field "Psychology" meets the World Health Organisation standards well. Based on information gained from interviews and provided materials it shows that bachelor, master and doctoral level studies are well made for national and international level (theory and research are well combined). However, there should be more attention paid to practical skill training on site for master degree students, and more assessment tools should be provided for graduates to use for psychological evaluation purposes. There are lots of opportunities for students to learn about professional skills and daily duties of

psychologists from lecturers that mostly are practitioners themselves. Lots of role plays and case study analysis are done while learning practical skills. It can be suggested that there should be more opportunity to practice consultation skills with specific client groups (for example - children, psychiatric patients, people with disabilities) on internships/ placements.

At the moment of experts' visit, RSU psychology direction, like others HEI in Latvia, did not have any experience of implementing a bachelor's study programme in psychology in the form of distance learning. This initiative seems quite challenging from professionals' point of view. However, on one hand, such form of study process like distance learning in the academic bachelor's study programme complies with the general RSU strategy for the optimization of the study process for the most of the study programmes where implementation of this form of study is possible, on the other hand RSU psychology direction has enough resources (advanced e-study system, equipment, premises, library, other material resources, well prepared study materials for the most of the courses taught in this programme, academic staff's experience to work on-line with student during COVID-19 pandemic, etc.), that potentially makes possible implementation of such a form of study process.

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

### **Analysis**

The study field "Psychology" at Riga Stradiņš University (hereafter - RSU) is the youngest one among other psychology fields in Latvia presented in other Universities and Academy. According to a self-assessment report (SAR), it has been developed gradually, starting with the Bachelor's study programme in 2007 and ending with the doctoral programme, which was established in 2016. It has been improved in accordance with RSU strategy and goals, focusing on research, practice and cooperation in the context of health care. Originally, the Bachelor's study programme was developed as the basis for the professional Master's study programme "Art Therapy", so originally there were a large number of medical study courses that have been reduced to 6 credit points (hereafter - CP) over time. Gradually, with the advent of health psychology in Latvia, there was a demand from healthcare professionals for a study programme preparing health psychologists. As a result, the professional Master's study programme "Health Psychology" was created. Later, when the first people with a Master's degree appeared, who wanted to work in the university, there was a need to create a doctoral study programme. The bachelor's and master's study programmes are updated in accordance with The Law of Psychologists (2017), which enables the achievement of a psychologist's qualification after having completed a bachelor's and master's study programmes in Psychology, at least one of which should be a professional study programme and totalling 200 credit points. As a result, RSU study field "Psychology" is composed of a successive academic Bachelor's study programme (120 CP), a professional Master's study programme in psychology (60 or 80 CP), and a doctoral study programme (120 CP).

The entire study field has two general pluses both on the national and the international scene. RSU is basically or originally a medical university. In the entire organization this is treated by RSU not as a disadvantage or limitation, but as an asset. This is shown by a clear characterization of the educational programme on all three levels on health psychology and by the use of the background provided by a medical school. This is seen as a plus both on the organization of the biological background materials and the practical clinical experience, but also by the possibility of the students taking classes at the university not directly listed under psychology. These features are seen as very positive by the students as well.

A second positive feature is the compliance with the recommendations of the European Federation of Psychological Associations (EFPA) for the joint European standards for organizing university level studies of psychology (<https://www.europsy.eu/>). The RSU system follows these recommendations both in the content of the curriculum, and the relationships of BA and MA level diplomas. The general framework is exemplary European.

The aims and objectives of the study field are clearly defined and based in reasonable, measurable directions for each activity, therefore also achievable. The aims and objectives also comply heavily with the strategic development directions of the RSU, as well as developmental trends of the society and national economy. For instance, the new RSU professional master's study programme in psychology has been adapted to the new requirements of the Law on Psychologists and provide an opportunity for students to develop practical skills and competences in one of the following professional fields: clinical and health psychology, military psychology or counselling psychology, that corresponds to the actual demands from the society.

The structure of the management of the study field and the relevant study programmes is logical and efficient. Head of the study field manages the work of the RSU study field. Heads of the study programmes manage the study programmes included in the study field. The Study Quality Council (SQC) acts as a support to the development of the study field and study programmes. It works in accordance with the regulations approved by the RSU Senate, and its purpose is to oversee, ensure, and improve the quality of studies. The composition of the SQC is approved at the Faculty Council, involving the Head of the respective study programme, Heads of the respective academic structural units or lecturers delegated by them, as well as employers and students. The composition of the SQC may include representatives of graduates and professional associations. The programme's management in the Liepaja branch follows the same principles as in the main RSU office in Riga.

The support provided by the administrative and technical staff contributes to meeting all needs with regard to the relevant study programmes of the study field. The RSU support departments (Human Resources Department, IT Department, Finance Department, Study Department, Centre for Educational Growth) are closely involved in the implementation and development of the study process, co-operating on a daily basis.

The RSU has established a system and developed procedures for the admission of students, the recognition of the study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education, as well as for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students, and these procedures are logical and efficient. Admission to RSU takes place based on admission requirements of the respective study level approved by the RSU Senate as defined for the particular academic year. The same way, admission takes place and admission requirements are developed in accordance with external laws and regulations. RSU also ensures fair recognition of previous education or professional experience so that the applicant is able to apply for studies in later stages of studies. General courses and foreign languages are most often recognised to students who already have a higher education, but for those who have a medical education - medical courses. If a student comes from a psychology programme of another university, the courses that have already been passed at the previous university and have a similar title and content as those study courses at RSU, are recognised.

RSU has set certain academic integrity principles and mechanisms, and it uses appropriate plagiarism detection tools which are effective and contribute to the development of the internal culture of the university and the stakeholders are aware of such tools and mechanisms. There is an RSU Code of Ethics and established the Ethics Committee that considers violations and cases of

disputes on the basis of applications. RSU has developed and approved the document "Methodological Guidelines for References and Listing of Reference Sources and Literature", which explains to students the principles of using the works of other authors and making correct references. The principles of academic integrity are successfully adhered to in the study process and violations of academic integrity are primarily considered in a decentralised way at the level of faculties, study programmes, and study courses. It is important to note that there have been no cases of plagiarism within the psychology field since the introduction of electronic checking of the papers and regular education on academic integrity.

The information published on the website of RSU regarding the relevant study programmes of the study field complies with the information available in the official registers. It provides important information for the candidates and the students and is published in Latvian and English in which the study programmes are implemented.

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

The entire study field has two general pluses both on the national and the international scene. RSU is basically or originally a medical university. In the entire organization this is treated by RSU not as a disadvantage or limitation, but as an asset. This is shown by a clear characterization of the educational programme on all three levels on health psychology and by the use of the background provided by a medical school. This is seen as a plus both on the organization of the biological background materials and the practical clinical experience, but also by the possibility of the students taking classes at the university not directly listed under psychology. These features are seen as very positive by the students as well.

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Strengths:

1. Good correspondence of the study field to the national and regional social and economic development needs.
2. Effective technical and administrative support in the implementation of the study programmes.
3. The study field offers a wide variety of specialisations, as well as both an academic and a professional introduction to careers in Psychology.
4. Teaching staff have published a lot of literature in the study field in Latvian language that is a great help for students in the learning process.

Weaknesses:

None.

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

### **Analysis**

RSU has developed a robust quality assurance system and a comprehensive quality policy that is publicly accessible. Judging by the statements given in meetings with all of the stakeholders they are involved in the improvement of the study field by giving advice, identifying issues and coming up with solutions, such as improvements of specific courses, course literature, teaching methods

etc. Their participation is well defined in such documents as the Quality handbook, Study Process Quality Guidelines and others. Both staff and students during the on-site visit showed high regard for academic integrity and there are mechanisms in place to ensure that it is not breached which are well developed and used efficiently. This was the case both in the Riga and the Liepāja branch as the different tools (e.g. plagiarism checking system) and methods (e.g. open book exams, use of cameras when in distance learning) are implemented in equal measures. The programme and infrastructure is well adapted for distance learning and part of the study process is already organised in these manners.

Judging by the information given by the teaching staff, administration and students the data RSU collects about their study programmes and their quality is methodically used and the issues that they highlight are resolved rapidly. This data is collected on a regular basis using both formal surveys at the end of study semester as well as after graduation and on a per need basis during the semester. Similarly employers are involved in this process. Judging by the student responses they are able to improve the conditions of the study field even outside the formal process by approaching teaching or administrative staff which should be celebrated.

During the study process a lot of different data is collected, mostly regarding the student performance, drop out rate, academic staff performance, and others. This information is effectively used to determine weaknesses and things to be improved, such as, adjusting teaching methods, updating resources in the moodle system etc. The library collects and analyses the data about the demand on specific books, categories of books and e-resources, databasis. All of this information is used to determine where the demand is for these different resources to make sure that everything necessary is accessible. The teaching staff and employers are involved in these sorts of decisions as well.

RSU has identified the standards set forth in Part 1 of the ESG, which require special attention which is reflected in their study field analysis and general strategy. Judging by the administrative and academic staff, student and employer answers this is taken into consideration when developing the study field, such as involving both internal and external stakeholders in creating the quality assurance policy. RSU has high internal standards for designing and creating new study programmes such as set goals to be reached during the process, clear points when different stakeholders should be involved in the process as well as an internal feedback loop between the administrative and academic staff. The study programme is implemented with student centered learning in mind by ensuring that student diversity is respected and there are different paths that students can take to achieve their study, professional and individual goals. Both academic and administrative staff showed understanding of the student "life cycle" which is well defined and understood. The collection of data is also used to follow RSU students during this cycle. All of the relevant documentation is available publicly and anyone can familiarize themselves with them.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The higher education institution has established a quality policy. The system is well defined, efficient and open to all stakeholders. ESG is taken into consideration when developing the study field. The main task now is maintaining the existing system and implementing the newest developments in higher education management and quality.

Strengths:

1. The quality assurance system is well defined and used efficiently.
2. Feedback from all stakeholders is taken into consideration when improving the study field.

3. Students have many ways to impact the quality of their studies even outside of the formal process.
4. Feedback by the stakeholders is taken into consideration rapidly and issues resolved in a short amount of time.
5. Academic integrity is ensured efficiently and is thought about when implementing different teaching solutions.
6. ESG is used to improve the study quality.

Weaknesses:

None.

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

#### **Analysis**

RSU has developed a system to determine the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the relevant study programmes. All study programmes in the Psychology study field are privately funded. Currently there are only two state-funded budget places financed by the Ministry of Health in the “Health Psychology” programme (Master’s studies), and as it was confirmed by the study programme directors, it makes these programmes less competitive.

The academic Bachelor’s study programme “Psychology” is implemented full-time (3 years), and in the future, the programme is also intended to be offered in part-time and distance learning. The professional Master’s study programme “Health Psychology” is implemented in full-time studies during 1.5-2 years. The doctoral study programme “Psychology” is implemented over a period of 3 years. Part of the programmes are implemented not only in Riga, but also in the Liepāja branch.

There is a system for financing the scientific research activities in place, and this system is efficient. According to SAR and discussion with RSU administration, the sources of RSU research funding are basic funding, research projects (national budgetary financing, EU Structural Fund funding, EU Framework Programme funding etc.), infrastructure and institution development projects, as well as private funding. RSU has established various incentive schemes and practices to promote research and help researchers at the initial stage of their careers, e.g., RSU internal grant system, joint RSU and Riga Technical University (RTU) grant programme for multidisciplinary research, grants for post-doctoral students and researchers at the initial stage of their careers, grants for doctoral students, co-financing for international cooperation networks and mobility (Erasmus +).

RSU has identified the infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision required for the implementation of the study field, and they are equally available for all RSU study programmes, both for the teaching staff and students. All RSU buildings (including Liepaja branch) are provided with a safe wireless network Eduroam Wi-Fi. RSU students may also use open access computers with provided access to the student systems and internet resources. Multimedia projectors are available in 193 lecture rooms for use of audio-visual materials for studies; most of these are high-resolution interactive projectors that are connected to a sound system.

The Panopto video recording system is used for the preparation of audio-visual training materials, whereas a video conferencing system is used to provide online lectures, and during the meeting students confirmed their satisfaction with the quality of video lectures.

Ten computer rooms with more than 200 workstations that are used both for the implementation of certain study courses, as well as for provision of electronic examinations and other types of

knowledge testing are available. RSU uses the Respondus Monitor platform to provide remote “closed-book” written examinations and Zoom for remote oral examinations.

As stated in SAR, more than 30 % of the IT annual budget is dedicated to the development, i.e., for long-term investments in network and server infrastructure, equipment, and software. RSU offers its students and academic staff to use Office365 (full Microsoft Office software), OneDrive file storage without additional fee. Additionally, employees can use the e-mail system Exchange for a calendar and contact management, as well as Skype for business. RSU also provides students and academic staff with remote access to specialised software, including SPSS.

During discussions with academic staff and administration, they confirmed that RSU IT department is efficient in providing technical resources for remote learning: a) all study courses and students assessments are provided in an e-learning environment; b) the virtual communication environment, Zoom and MS Teams are used for communication between the teaching staff and students; c) the Turnitin system for submission of homework in the e-environment of the study course facilitates the collection of work and automatically checks the originality of the work; d) the Student portal MyRSU is linked to the E-study (Moodle) platform, contains the necessary study information and e-services; e) the Academic portal containing information on academic staff, academic structural units, register of study courses and study programmes, survey system, and feedback.

The teaching staff have the necessary equipment for the remote learning process - a computer, camera, headphones, microphone, and other necessary equipment, as well as a video recording studio, separate rooms with stationary video recording equipment and document cameras, as well as mobile equipment is available to carry out specific learning scenarios. The members of the teaching staff confirmed that the IT department provides an opportunity to apply for online individual consultations with an expert in improving digital skills of lecturers.

The RSU library is located in the main RSU building, it also has three branches: two in Riga and one in Liepāja. The RSU library has been accredited several times as a library of national significance. The Library Open Access Loan is available in 24/7 mode to RSU students and staff. During COVID-19, Calendly tool was introduced, providing the possibility to register for a visit to the library remotely and receive the necessary editions, complying with the national epidemiological and health safety requirements.

As stated in SAR, the library’s resources and services are rated as good and meet the demand of students and teaching staff to ensure successful completion of the respective study course. Overall library collection consists of around 572 900 physical units, including approximately 261 900 books (as on 1 January 2020). The library stock is regularly supplemented via purchases, as well as donations corresponding to the profile.

Each year the library subscribes to PsycARTICLES database, multidisciplinary resources, which also include the psychology sector, and books and e-books for psychology programmes are purchased. Resources corresponding to the field of psychology are available in both Latvian and English. Accordingly, all electronic resources for the support of the Psychology field (e-books / e-journals) are available in English.

RSU has developed and it implements and complies with the procedures for attracting highly skilled teaching staff. The academic staff application and selection procedure at RSU is regulated by internal regulations: a) RSU Regulations on Academic Positions; b) RSU Process “Academic Staff Elections”; c) Regulations on the Procedure of Inviting Visiting Lecturers to Rīga Stradiņš University.

According to SAR, during the process of staff selection, competences, professional skills, and self-motivation level of the potential employees are evaluated. Applicants to RSU academic positions are set higher research, educational qualification requirements, organisational and professional competences than specified by the requirements of external laws and regulations; thus, the best possible professionals are recruited for the work.

For the teaching staff involved in the study field and programme implementation, the teaching load is planned according to the study plan of each academic year and study semester. Study courses can be organised in modules and the workload is reviewed according to necessity and regulations. SAR states that RSU promotes a balanced workload for lecturers and promotes a healthy lifestyle to reduce and eliminate the risk of burnout for teaching staff, however this fact was not confirmed by the members of the teaching staff – on the contrary, they mentioned heavy workload, e.g., teaching 10-11 subjects, and that fact could be also seen analysing the curriculum.

Full-time university lecturers are required to participate in research activities that are regulated by staff job descriptions. Depending on the type of academic position, the following proportion of duties and responsibilities of the employee in scientific and research activities has been determined: a) assistants carry out scientific and research work 30% of the working time; b) lecturers carry out scientific and research work 15% of the working time; c) assistant professors, associate professors, professors carry out scientific and research work 20% of the working time.

The needs of the teaching staff for professional and didactic improvement are identified in a target-oriented manner. The Centre for Educational Growth provides support in the improvement of the quality of studies by analysing the study process and organising pedagogical growth of academic staff in continuing education activities, updated each semester. According to SAR, in the spring semester of 2019/2020 and in the autumn semester of 2020/2021, the continuing training activities organised by the Centre for Educational Growth and the Information Technology Department were attended by 45 lecturers who teach the study courses in the study field Psychology. They participated in the activities such as Creating Engaging and Interactive Online Course Design and Delivery, advice to lecturers on how to organise active learning in online activities, providing a remote learning process using the e-learning environment: Panopto and Zoom, building interactive content in the e-learning environments (H5P) and others.

Outgoing mobility of the teaching staff of RSU is implemented within the framework of Erasmus+ programme, bilateral cooperation and a number of EU-funded projects. In the period from 2016 within the framework of mobility projects (Erasmus + etc.), outgoing mobilities of 9 lecturers have taken place. During the last six years, the Department of Health Psychology and Pedagogy has hosted 33 visiting lecturers, and in 2020, all the planned lectures and seminars with visiting lecturers took place online on the Zoom platform. It could be concluded that RSU offers various projects within which mobility can be implemented and that brings added value to the implementation of the study process and the study quality. However, as it was stated during the discussion with the teaching staff, obstacles to the wider possibilities of mobility are personal workload, family issues and no interest to participate in one of the mobility projects.

There is no possibility for psychology students at RSU to get financial support from the State. Almost all psychology students study at their expense. Only a few funded places are provided by the faculty. This fact indirectly indicates that psychology direction is not a priority for RSU.

RSU has identified the support necessary for the students and established a well-functioning support system, based on the needs of the students. RSU supports students with special needs in various

stages related to studies – selecting a suitable study programme, when enrolling with the higher education institution, and in the study process (study materials, taking examinations, etc.) and creating an appropriate social and physical environment. The aim of the support measure is to promote the independence and inclusion in the study process of the students with special needs. There have been developed guidelines and support policies regarding support to students with special needs.

Since 2012, all RSU students have access to psycho-emotional support service. The service was introduced with the aim of helping students to overcome adaptation problems when starting their studies, reducing the emotional manifestations of stress, stress-related health disorders, psychosomatic disorders or illnesses, overcoming relationship-building difficulties and crisis situations. The need for the service has been appreciated by both local and international students. The introduction of the service has helped to reduce the number of students who have dropped out of the study process, and has helped to increase the efficiency of study work by reducing students' stress and adaptive disorders.

RSU has a Career Centre, which offers group and individual career consultations, organises events on current issues in the labour market, as well as other career and self-development related topics. The Career Centre is an active member of the Latvian Career Development Support Association. The services of the Career Centre are available to all RSU students, prospective students, as well as employees. Students can post their CVs and get information about job vacancies on the RSU website. RSU Career Centre provides literature and information materials on career topics that students can read on the spot or take home for reading.

The International Department (ID) provides informational support to the international students. Mentor programme is maintained with the aim of helping the new international students to adapt to the higher education institution. Even before the new students arrive in Latvia, they may contact previously trained mentors, senior local and international RSU students. Before the beginning of each semester, the ID organises the informative exhibition, providing the opportunity for the new international students to obtain information about various RSU student organisations, amateur groups, sports club, health centre and clinic of psychosomatic medicine, etc.

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

RSU has developed a system to determine the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the relevant study programmes. There is a system for financing the scientific research in place, and this system is efficient.

RSU has identified the infrastructure resources and the material and technical provision required for the implementation of the study field. The students and the teaching staff both in Riga and Liepaja have full access to the necessary resources. There is a common system and procedures for the improvement and purchase of the material, technical, methodological, and informative provision, etc. in place.

RSU has developed and it implements and complies with the procedures for attracting highly skilled teaching staff. The needs of the teaching staff for professional and didactic improvement are identified in a target-oriented manner. Appropriate improvement measures are undertaken, and the outcome and efficiency of the implemented measures are assessed. The teaching staff members take part both in outgoing and incoming mobility, which brings added value to the implementation of the study process and the study quality.

RSU has identified the support necessary for the students and established a well-functioning support system, based on the needs of the students.

Strengths:

1. Excellent IT infrastructure and technical resources for remote learning (Moodle, Panopto, Zoom, MS Teams, Office365 etc).
2. Good facilities (library, rooms etc), used in the teaching process, both in Riga and Liepaja.
3. The members of the teaching staff actively participate in the activities organised by the Centre for Educational Growth.
4. Great access to psycho-emotional support service, used by both local and international students.

Weaknesses:

1. There are no state-funded study places in RSU for psychology students at all levels. Faculty provides a very limited number of funded places, that reduce a possibility and motivation for potential students to apply for psychology programmes.
2. There is a lack of paying placement mentors. The RSU has to develop a strategy, which helps to motivate mentors to work with students.

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

##### **Analysis**

The role of scientific research is clear at all three levels, on BA, MA and PhD levels. There is sufficient emphasis on independent research work. This is shown by the self analysis and also by the feedback from students, including talk with actual students.

There is an increasing participation in international comparative studies. These studies are in line with the increasing European awareness. This is especially important regarding the new health challenges in Europe. Here, RSU participants bring in an important Latvian ingredient of the comparisons. At the same time, efforts could be made to position RSU as the principal or leading participant in these multi party projects.

The involvement of teaching faculty in scientific research is increasing and becoming more and more efficient. This is shown both by the number of peer reviewed publications, and by the listing of projects where RSU participates. At the same time, more RSU participants should be first and last authors of international papers. This is a key factor in health science assessments.

RSU specifically involves students into large projects. There is a clear mentoring relation between faculty and students. For instance, in July-December 2020 a group of psychology master's and PhD students have participated in the study supported by the National research program aimed to study the effects of COVID-19 (project Nr. VPP-COVID-2020/1-0011, project leader Anda Ķīvīte-Urtāne, RSU).

There is an increasing proportion of faculty having a scientific qualification (PhD) conducting research and publishing.

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

The directions of scientific research in the study field of psychology at RSU complies with the health related developmental aims of RSU. They are related to the issue of health maintenance and health management goals. That is specifically true for the doctoral programme as well.

There is a good concentration on scientific work. The research work integrates efforts of the faculty and that of students rather well. Participation in large national and international projects is increasing.

Strengths:

1. There is an increasing participation in international comparative studies. Here, RSU participants bring in an important Latvian ingredient of the comparisons.
2. The engagement of students, especially M.A and PhD level, is increasing in these projects. Ethical considerations both of the subject and of student participation are clearly following international guidelines. This is especially important since there is an increasing international awareness of sensitive ethical issues of psychological science at large.

Weaknesses:

1. There should still be more internationally visible publications where RSU participants are in 1st, 2nd and last author positions. This may sound formal, but in international assessment this is taken as essential.
2. There should also be more project based publications. RSU psychology may wish to develop some specific long-term and long-range health psychology projects.

## **5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

Local cooperation is well developed and fulfils its main goals of giving education that represents the newest developments both in science and the practical application of knowledge, to promote teaching and research in health psychology, but there still is room for improvement when it comes to cooperation with other Latvian higher education institutions. Students in Riga have a lot of choices when it comes to placement options, internships and different mobility options. When it comes to the Liepāja branch there are also different options with local institutions such as the local municipality and others. The cooperation partners are selected with a clear view of promoting health psychology in the wider domain of health sciences, the specific strength of RSU.

One negative tendency is a lack of international mobility of students. Partly it may be clarified by the circumstances related with COVID-19 global pandemic for the past two years prior to the expert's visit, but during the meetings with students it was determined that most of them are not motivated enough in order to participate in such activity.

When it comes to cooperation with other higher education institutions in Latvia there is a lot of room for improvement. Students should be encouraged to use the opportunity to attend some study courses in other higher education institutions as there were no examples shown of this happening. RSU should also explore the opportunity to encourage student cooperation with students from other higher education institutions both in the study process and scientific research.

However, when it comes to international cooperation there are issues that should be resolved, mainly that teaching staff's international mobility could be improved, by increasing the amount of staff using this option. As per the information provided in "Statistics on incoming and outgoing mobility of teaching staff (reporting period 2013/2014 ac. y. — 2019/2020 ac. y.)" there have been only 25 cases of outgoing and 3 cases of incoming teaching staff. Student mobility both incoming and outgoing, as seen from the data provided by RSU, is very lacking. From the information provided within the same period as with teaching staff only there have been only 6 cases of outgoing student

mobility and 2 incoming mobility cases in the Liepāja branch. When discussing this issue with students one of the main issues that came up was the fact that mobility takes a lot of time away from work and other commitments, however RSU still should find ways to relieve these difficulties, for example by providing more short term mobility options. In the discussion with different groups during the onsite visit another issue that came up is information available about such options. While the students are informed about the option at the start of their studies the information decreases as they continue their studies. This especially is the case in the Liepājas branch. In addition most Erasmus+ cooperation contracts expire at the end of 2021, which is a risk if these will not be renewed. While a system for the attraction of the teaching staff and students from abroad within the study field is there and is used it doesn't seem to have a lot of results and should be revisited. Use of international study and research materials however is widespread and encouraged.

A common system for the provision of traineeships and the organisation thereof is well developed and defined. This was shown both throughout the discussions with students and academic staff. Students are assisted every step of the way. Equal traineeship possibilities are provided to both in Riga and Liepaja branch. All relevant documents and assistance tools are accessible to students and are well defined.

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

Local cooperation is well developed and already is taking place in practice. Only thing remaining is increasing cooperation with other Higher education institutions in Latvia.

A system to attract international attention for the attraction of the teaching staff and students from abroad within the study field, though there are not a lot of results.

The system for developing strong international bonds and opportunities is already there. Currently the only lacking thing is using this system to ensure high mobility of students and academic staff.

Strengths:

1. The infrastructure to ensure the mobility of staff and students is implemented well.
2. A common system for the provision of traineeships and the organisation is well developed.

Weaknesses:

1. It is recommended to develop closer cooperation with other Latvian HEI.
2. Academic staff's international mobility should be increased even further.
3. Student international mobility, both outgoing and incoming, is very insufficient.

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

### **Analysis**

As it was mentioned in Chapter 1, the programme has been developed gradually, starting with the Bachelor's study programme in 2007 and ending with the doctoral programme, which was established in 2016. The Bachelor's and Master's study programmes were updated in accordance with The Law of Psychologists (2017). The professional Bachelor's programme was transformed into an academic Bachelor's programme. Changes were made on the duration of implementation on the Master's programme - from 3 to 2 and from 2 to 1,5 years. Both Bachelor's and Master's programmes are also implemented in Liepaja's branch. As a result, RSU study field "Psychology" is composed of a successive academic Bachelor's study programme (120 CP), a professional Master's

study programme in psychology (60 or 80 CP), and a doctoral study programme (120 CP).

The recommendations provided during the previous accreditation of the study field have been fully implemented. It could be concluded that the implementation of the recommendations provided by the experts during the previous accreditation has promoted the development and improvement in all programmes: learning outcomes were coordinated between the study programmes, mapping of study courses was done, new courses have been created (e.g. "Individual Counselling"), new members of academic staff joined RSU (more professional psychologists as full-time lecturers and visiting lecturers, the new doctoral students and graduates), international and local cooperation has been promoted, as well as students more actively involved in research projects (e.g., there was a student research interest group established and a psychology laboratory set up for conducting research in neuropsychology). The Psychology Laboratory has been improved, a special simulation room for practices has been created. A student-centred approach to the implementation of the study programmes within the field has been developed and strengthened by educating the teaching staff and using students' recommendations for the improvement of the study process.

Recommendations received during the doctoral programme "Psychology" licensing procedure have been largely implemented, but some have not been implemented. E.g., one of the recommendations received was to reduce the fragmentation of study courses. All study courses were additionally evaluated in depth and the possibility to combine courses and increase the obtained credit points was considered. However it was later decided to redistribute courses again so that the content of the programme is transparent and corresponds to the standard of the profession. In experts' team opinion, the fragmentation of the courses makes it easier for RSU to attract higher-level specialists to teach the specified courses in the specified field.

Another recommendation received during the licensing procedure that has not been implemented yet (as stated in SAR) - due to the reorganisation of the Faculty of Communication, the number of staff lecturers - psychologists has not increased sufficiently. In experts' team opinion, the implementation of this recommendation should be continued in the future.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The recommendations provided during the previous accreditation of the study field have been fully implemented.

RSU has contributed to the analysis of the recommendations and their implementation in view of the specific features of the study field and the relevant study programmes.

Recommendations received during the licensing procedure have been partly implemented.

Strengths:

1. The impact of the implemented recommendations on the quality of studies is large and positive.
2. Coordination of learning outcomes between the study programmes and mapping of study courses helps to ensure that the graduates have all the necessary competences corresponding to the qualifications of the psychologist.
3. A student-centred approach to the implementation of the study programmes within the field has been developed.

Weaknesses:

1. The number of staff lecturers - psychologists should be further increased.

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

- 1 R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RSU fully complies with relevant regulations and the internal quality assurance system is used well and efficiently (see Chapter 2).

- 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

RSU has a well developed policy and procedure for ensuring the quality of higher education (see Chapter 2).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Based on the self-assessment report, meetings with stakeholders and provided annexes (such as Management structure of the higher education institution) the mechanism is well developed.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Based on discussion with both teaching staff, students and provided self-assessment report the criteria, conditions, and procedures for the evaluation of students' results are well defined, clear and public.

- 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

Teaching staff qualification and work quality is assessed on a regular basis both by administration and students.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The higher education institution collects the necessary data on a regular basis through many different ways (see Chapter 2, Summary of the statistical data on the incoming and outgoing mobility of the teaching staff over the reporting period and other similar annexes).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study field is already continuously developed and improved while implementing their quality assurance system (see Chapter 2).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Cooperation with local higher education institutions can still be improved. Where there currently is cooperation, it ensures the achievement of the study field (see Chapter 5).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The research output is good in all levels and considerable from a health science perspective.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

One recommendation received during the licensing procedure that has not been implemented yet - due to the reorganisation of the Faculty of Communication, the number of staff lecturers - psychologists has not increased yet (see Chapter 6).

## 8. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

The RSU "psychology school" should campaign for more state support. There should be state supported students at all levels.

Language skill requirements for the study programme should be more highlighted for new applicants.

It is recommended to develop closer cooperation with other Latvian HEI.

The number of staff lecturers - psychologists should be further increased.

### Long-term recommendations

Student international mobility should be increased by at least 100%, by ensuring logistics and other types of support, for example by providing options for shorter term mobility.

To keep developing psychological evaluation tools that provide graduates with needed materials to work with.

The HEI management team should discuss with the teaching staff about more specified work hours on research.

There should be more 1st and last author papers from RSU.

## II. "Psychology" ASSESSMENT

## II. "Psychology" ASSESSMENT

### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

#### Analysis

The name of the RSU academic bachelor study programme "Psychology", the degree (Bachelor of Social Sciences in Psychology), the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements of the study programme are logically interrelated and consistent. This study programme is implemented two languages (Latvian and English) in Rīga Stradiņš University in Riga and Liepāja branch of Rīga Stradiņš University. The forms of implementation of this study programme are as follows: full time, part time and part time extramural studies distance education. The full time and part time forms of implementation of the academic bachelor's study programme of psychology are traditional for the most of Latvian Higher Educational Institutions offering psychology education. The possibility of part time extramural studies distance education in psychology is rather new for Latvian psychology and may arouse discussions among professionals. This form of education demands high standards in relation to the quality of the e-environment, library and materials prepared for students i.e. video lectures, presentations, individual tasks and group activities, etc. RSU psychology direction might be relatively well prepared for this challenging option. However, the outcomes of extramural studies of distance education will be evident only after the real implementation of this form of studies.

The admission of students takes place in accordance with the Admission Regulations approved by the RSU Senate for the academic year concerned and the external laws and regulations. The aim, objectives, and structure of the programme comply with the relevant normative regulations. The knowledge, skills and competence gained in the course of study, fully comply with LQF/EQF level 6 (Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 322 "Regulations on Classifications of Education in Latvia"), which is the level of Bachelor's study. The bachelor's study programme "Psychology" provides an opportunity for students to gain a basic academic education in psychology, practical and theoretical knowledge in relation to various branches of psychology as well as necessary research, critical and analytical thinking and social skills to continue further education at a higher level. This study programme provides a solid basis for further studies, opening to its graduates opportunities for further professional education in Master's study programme and proceeds with a further research career in psychological science.

#### Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The study programme is comparable to other psychology Bachelor's programmes in the country in terms of structure, learning aims, objectives and outcomes.

The Bachelor's study programme "Psychology" is well-rounded, suited for giving students an all-around basic skill set for professional and academic future in virtually any field.

##### Strengths:

1. The programme is logically integrated in the study field, providing a first stage in the professional education of psychologists at RSU and has good prospects for sustainability.
2. The programme complies with its applicable LQF/EQF level (6).

##### Weaknesses:

1. Unpredictable outcomes of extramural studies distance education until this form of studies is really implemented and it is possible to compare its results with the other forms of the studies.

## 2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

The content of the bachelor's study programme is fully relevant to psychology and interdisciplinary social science. It complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the requirements of the industry and the scientific trends present in modern psychology. The programme contains courses that provide a possibility of acquiring knowledge about the basic principles, structure and methodology of psychology, the history of the development of psychology and current problems within the confines of the main subfields of psychology. A part of the courses supports the students' understanding of the interdisciplinary aspect of psychological science.

The content of the study programme enables students to master basic settings, principles, structure and methodology of psychology of 26 CP. Students learn mandatory study courses: the history of development and current issues of the psychology science and its subfields of 22 CP, characteristics of the field of science or subfield of science and the problems in a cross-sectoral context of 16 CP, general courses of a Bachelor's study programme of 14 CP and professional activity courses of 16 CP, as well as 20 CP of restricted elective courses and 4 CP of free elective courses. During the entire programme there are two placements of 6 CP, during which students get some idea about the psychologist's work in psychological assessment and research, which help them to make a decision to continue studies in the professional psychology programme and to become psychologists or not to continue on this path and specialise in other area in Master studies. The introduction of placements in the content of academic study programmes in Psychology is unusual practice in Latvia, but this could be quite effective in promoting development of further professional identity of the students. The descriptions of the study courses, the traineeship, and the final thesis are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments and in general are applicable to all forms of implementation of studies. However some aspects should be emphasized in the case of distance learning. The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods and self-assessment procedures should be reconsidered and applied for all study courses, especially practically oriented ones.

At all levels, general psychology should concentrate on teaching experimental psychology. By hiring experimentalists, students would be taught laboratory methods. But they could also be taught new distance based experimental methods that use computational resources on the subject end. In this way teaching psychology would use the pandemic constraints towards methodical innovations that are promising for the applied fields as well.

The methods of teaching and fostering successful learning in this programme are of a wide variety, ranging from interactive lectures, practical interactive classes to independent essays, analysis of research papers and data and presentations. With the development of part-time studies and distance learning, it is expected that there will be fewer contact hours than for full-time studies. The proportion of independent work will increase accordingly. And more emphasis will be placed on information in the e-learning environment. Students' independent works will be focused more on the independent acquisition of the subject. In turn, in distance learning, students will acquire the programme independently, getting acquainted with videos of the lectures and study materials put in the e-studies themselves.

All the advanced technologies available at RSU are used during lectures and classes. This option except the (laboratory and library) is available in both programme's implementation places in Riga and Liepaja. Each study course has mapped out the best methods for achieving their individual

aims, putting emphasis on active learning and student critical skill development through learning. As such, the programme takes great consideration of student-centred learning principles.

The system of evaluation applied in the bachelor's study programme in psychology complies with RSU regulations for organizing examinations for study courses. In order to evaluate the level of knowledge, examinations are administered, and independent work is assessed over the course of the semester. The current evaluation system is that of a 10-point system and the individual evaluation criteria are noted in each study course description. It is admirable that the study results are measured mostly based on the entire study period instead of focusing on final examinations, as this helps gather a clearer perception of the achieved study results.

The outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students, employers, and graduates are effectively used to improve the quality of studies. Recommendations of students are evaluated on a regular basis and special attention in the improvement of the quality of the study process is devoted to ensuring feedback. Employers are actively involved in the consulting on the study process of the programme, including planning, implementation and evaluation (Study Quality Council, the State Qualification Examination, lectures/classes). The employers' survey on the relevance of knowledge, competences and skills of the results of the study programme to the needs of the labour market is carried out annually using special questionnaires when students have placement. The graduates express their satisfaction with the choice of the study programme and the higher education institution, the study process, the evaluation of obtained knowledge, skills and competences.

In recent years, students of the Bachelor programme have chosen not to use Erasmus+ exchange programme opportunity, because of the different reasons. Often because most of them are working and did not want to stop their job. Since studies in the study programme are mainly in Latvian, foreign students do not use Erasmus+ opportunities to study one semester in this programme. However, there is currently an offer of courses to propose to Erasmus + students in English, that may improve the situation with incoming mobility in the future. Recognition of study courses takes place through careful and individual evaluation and in accordance with the procedure adopted by RSU. That is, since the courses learned in foreign universities differ in content and size in most cases from those of the RSU academic Bachelor's degree programme "Psychology" in the relevant semester, the management of the programme has carefully assessed the content and extent of each foreign university course and taking into account the interests and needs of the student (mostly selected in the context of the course or Bachelor's thesis topic), creates a list of courses to be learned in the context of mobility so that the learning outcomes of the course were comparable to the learning outcomes of the courses in the RSU programme.

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

The bachelor's study programme in psychology of RSU has been created in accordance with the basic educational principles of psychology, which are in great measure applied to the bachelor's level programme in Latvia and the EU. The bachelor's study programme in psychology complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the State Academic Education Standard.

Strengths:

1. There is a logical progression of study courses that builds on previous knowledge, starting from basic skills and progressing to more in-depth knowledge.
2. The courses offered comply with the industry, current needs of the labour market and scientific trends.
3. The content of the study programme has a good balance of scientifically oriented and practically

oriented courses.

Weaknesses:

1. The teaching of general psychology should always be taught by colleagues who have continuous involvement in experimental psychology and are members of RSU staff.
2. Because of the different reasons there are limited possibilities for incoming and ongoing mobility for students.

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

#### **Analysis**

The study provisions scientific support, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision fully comply with the implementation of the programme, in the sense that it is possible to achieve the learning outcomes with the tools at hand. This means that there is good access to supervision, e-resources as well as a physical place to study. Students and academic staff have access to comfortable and well-equipped study environment in the entire university, namely, during breaks or at any other time students can do everything necessary for the study process not only in the library (there is free internet, study desks and chairs, power connection, and so on in university halls). In order to provide a convenient approach for students to study materials, they are placed in the environment, which is available through the student portal and MyRSU mobile app. All RSU resources (library resources, IT availability, etc.) are equally available to all RSU students, regardless of whether they study in Riga or Liepāja. As many courses for Liepāja students take place on a teleconference by one lecturer together with students in Rīga – study materials placed in the e-environment are also similar. Moreover, currently, there is enough staff to teach and supervise the programme. The library has all necessary resources (books, journals, access to databases, etc.).

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

The resources and provision of the study programme are at a high standard. University provides a very comfortable and modern study environment for students and academic staff, which fully complies with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and creates all the prerequisites for the successful achievement of the learning outcomes.

Strengths:

1. All students are well informed and trained how to search for and find necessary information in databases of scientific articles.
2. All RSU resources (library resources, IT availability, etc.) are equally available to all RSU students, regardless of whether they study in Riga or Liepāja.
3. Students of the Liepāja branch have access to all the resources of the Psychology Laboratory, except for the EEG equipment, as there is only 1 device and it is located in Riga.

Weaknesses:

1. There are no state funded places in the programme. The only one budget place is financed from RSU and the Faculty of Communication.
2. Almost all students have to work in order to be able to pay for their studies. As a result, many students experience problems combining their studies and working duties.
3. There is a huge drop-out of students because of the different reasons. RSU should develop a strategy in order to help students complete their studies.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme fully complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme. Academic staff consists of 8 Dr.psych., (including 5 Latvian Council of Science (LCS) experts in psychology with experience in research projects) and is involved in the implementation of the study programme. Most of the academic staff involved in the programme are certified psychologists and supervisors in different areas of activity (e.g. clinical and health psychology, school and educational psychology, counselling psychology, organisational psychology, military psychology, etc.). They also are actively involved in scientific research (in the fields related to the content of the study programme) and are recognized quite well both at national and international level. It is important to note that most of the academic staff of the study programme also work in the respective sector as practitioners allowing the content of the programme and study courses to be consistent with the real work situation. There is a mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members in place, which contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation. The mutual cooperation of the academic staff is usually discussed at the extended meetings of the Psychology Quality Council at the end of the semester, when not only the members of the Psychology Quality Council but also all the lecturers of the semester participate. If some shortcomings are stated, they are initially resolved at the level of heads and lecturers of the programme.

RSU is discussing how to open up new possibilities to study psychology by distance learning. As directors of the study field explained, the new programme would provide the possibility for students to learn courses with provided materials and video lectures, studies mostly are planned as self-study. Practical skill learning may be partially provided on site with lecturers. As a new programme is provided - the question about teaching staff availability for students arises. As well - if all lectures are provided as pre-recorded content how would it influence the employment of teaching staff? Secondly there should be more information on how professional skill training and internships will be provided if a student chooses distance learning possibility.

It was stated from students and graduates that when learning new theories and practical skills lecturers' presence is needed to explain specifics or demonstrate the skill. Main gain of the study process from students and graduate point of view are possibilities to receive supervision and feedback from teaching staff. They mention that on site visits and internship possibilities have been crucial parts of learning the professional skills.

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

The qualification of the academic staff involved in the study programme implementation complies with reaching the outcomes of the study programme as well as implementing RSU aims and objectives. The academic staff involved in the study programme within the reporting period is oriented towards professional growth and constant improvement and developing the quality of the study courses delivered.

Strengths:

1. Most of the academic staff involved in the programme are certified psychologists and supervisors in different areas of the psychology profession. This may have an advantage for students of academic bachelor's study programme to be in touch of the profession from the beginning of their study.

2. There is a good ratio between young and experienced academic staff, which is a good indicator for the sustainability of the programme.

Weaknesses:

1. The number of incoming teachers and guest lecturers could be higher.
2. Big workload for some of the academic staff.

## 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Psychology"

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma issued by RSU of the bachelor's degree of psychology fully complies with procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is a document with agreement between RSU and DU, which proves that in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued at RSU, the students will have a possibility to finish their studies at the relevant study programme implemented in DU.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is a document approved by the rector of the RSU Aigars Pētersons confirming that RSU guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the RSU (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the academic bachelor's 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.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All 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.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is a compliance with the sample of the study agreement with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.

- 9 9. The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials are well prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented. There is a compliance with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RSU has received the relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education (see annex

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme fully complies with the State Academic Education Standard.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The most of the academic staff (except those, who implements non-psychology related study courses) has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The programme meets the requirements 1-14 and can be assessed as fully compliant.

### Requirements (R6-R8)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study provision, scientific support, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision are fully compliant with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants are fully compliant with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the

respective regulatory enactments. (According to SAR p.77, during the last six years, the Department of Health Psychology and Pedagogy has hosted 33 visiting lecturers. Most of them are the leading professionals of the field).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

The RSU bachelor's study programme in psychology is a fine example of the modern academic study programme, which complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the State Academic Education Standard and is flexible enough to adapt for the new Latvian regulations. At the moment, all necessary implementation options look ready and the programme meets the European standards of quality. However, some important details related to the form of distance learning should be clarified before the implementation (the outcomes received from discussions, groupwork activities, participation in seminars, laboratory works, evaluation of the results, self-assessment procedures, etc.).

Strengths:

1. The RSU bachelor's study programme in psychology is a good basis for further professional and scientific development of the students. There is a good balance between scientific and professional components of the programme.
2. The study resources of the programme is on a high level.
3. The programme's development is up to date and meets the requirements of the market and current state of psychology in the country.

Weaknesses:

1. A big number of students do not finish their studies because of different reasons. The programme's administration needs to analyse the situation and develop a strategy on how to improve the situation in general.
2. Internationalisation is a very important aspect of the programme's development. It brings a number of benefits and positive experiences to all stakeholders - students, academic and administrative staff. However, internationalisation possibilities within the frames of the programme are limited and the programme's administration needs to develop different mechanisms and tools in order to improve it.

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

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

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

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

To increase the international mobility of students.

To look for a possibility to provide more financial support from the Faculty or RSU to well-motivated students. Studies at the students' expense force the most of them combining work with studies. The high percent of students are overloaded and cannot complete their studies.

More specific description of “Distance learning” study programme should be made (preferably discussing - self study time; how does this programme provide students the same practical skill set that on site students?; possibilities to meet with teaching staff if needed etc.).

### **Long-term recommendations**

Efforts towards internationalization and cooperation should be strengthened.

## **II. "Health Psychology" ASSESSMENT**

### **II. "Health Psychology" ASSESSMENT**

#### **1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme**

##### **Analysis**

It could be concluded that the name of the study programme (“Health Psychology”), the degree (the professional Master’s degree in Psychology) and the professional qualification to be acquired (psychologist), the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are logically interrelated and consistent.

The study programme is implemented in several study forms both in Riga and Liepaja: 1) full time studies, 1 years, 6 months (in Latvian language, 60 credit points); 2) full time studies, 2 years (in Latvian language, 80 credit points). Students choose the study form based on the previously obtained education - academic or professional Bachelor.

During the visit experts were informed that there are intentions to add English as language of implementation during the accreditation (full time studies, 2 years), although there are no specific plans to start offering studies in English for now. According to the provided plan of development of the study field there are intentions to set up a working group to evaluate the extension of the possibilities for the implementation of study programmes. It could be stated that RSU is mostly ready to implement the programme in English, however the main issue to consider is the number of internships / placements in English language.

The learning outcomes of the professional Master’s study programme “Health Psychology” correspond to EQF/LQF 7, the requirements of the Law on Psychologists, the requirement of the Profession Standard, and European Certificate in Psychology (EuroPsy) & European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations. In experts’ team opinion, the curriculum and outcomes of the study programme have been improved in line with the requirements of the law by extending the programme adding the content of clinical psychology. The curriculum of the study programme also includes study courses in counselling psychology and military psychology that correspond to two other areas of professional activity, meaning that graduates of Master’s programme can obtain a professional Master’s degree in health psychology and choose one of the following professional fields - clinical and health psychology, military psychology, counselling psychology. However, an experts’ team would recommend adding more emphasis on practical skills training, especially more time for internship, to better understand differences while working with patients with disability, psychiatric disorders or different age groups.

The learning outcomes are formulated in line with the strategic aim of the professional Master’s study programme, to ensure learning of in-depth theoretical knowledge in psychological science and

to prepare specialists in line with international psychological science standards, who are ready for both independent academic and scientific research and practical activities in the field.

Only the applicants who have obtained the degree of a Bachelor of Social Sciences in psychology (academic) or education of the Bachelor of Psychology with a professional qualification are admitted to the programme. Applicants from countries other than Latvia need an education equivalent to the Latvian Bachelor's degree, and the matter is decided in the expert examination by the Academic Information Centre. Based on students' and graduates' interviews, it is clearly stated that a study programme requires quite good English language skills, ability to cope with huge workload and managing personal finances, and work to pay for studies. The programme clearly states that professionals use the current information on psychological research and publications, which usually requires English skills. Talks with teaching staff had shown that more strict student evaluation would guarantee more motivated students. From the staff's point of view the more motivated students are, the higher achieving the programme can be. It is recommended to think about more strict appliance rules that would also be helpful for students to understand their ability to learn in this programme.

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

The name of the study programme, the degree, the professional qualification or the degree and the professional qualification to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are interrelated.

The aim of the Master's study programme is to train Bachelor degree level specialists so they can gain needed practical skills and master theoretical and empirically justified principles of psychology. The imminent change of the allocation of the programme is also spelled out clearly. It is stated that health psychology should be treated as one of the multidisciplinary team work necessities.

Strengths:

1. The programme complies with its applicable LQF/EQF 7, the requirements of the Law on Psychologists, the requirement of the Profession Standard, and European Certificate in Psychology (EuroPsy) & European Federation of Psychologists' Associations.
2. Graduates of Master's programme can obtain a professional Master's degree in health psychology and choose one of the following professional fields - clinical and health psychology, military psychology, counselling psychology.

Weaknesses:

1. More focus on practical skills training, especially more time for internship, to better understand differences while working with patients with disability, psychiatric disorders or different age groups.

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

### **Analysis**

Currently, the Master's study programme includes study plan I and II, depending on the applicant's previous education:

Master's degree plan I (previous education - academic Bachelor degree of Social Science (Psychology)). The study programme is implemented for full-time students in four semesters (two academic years), and its total volume is 80 CP (120 ECTS).

Master's degree plan II (previous education - professional higher education in psychology or Bachelor's degree in psychology with the professional qualification). The Master's study programme is implemented for full-time students in three semesters (two academic years), and its total volume

is 60 CP (90 ECTS).

The curriculum of the Master's study programme is generally composed of study courses in psychological theories, quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and the Master's thesis, and also study courses which provide an opportunity to specialise in individual current fields of clinical and health, counselling and military psychology. For graduation, all theoretical, methods and specialisation courses must be completed, by selecting from the proposed specialisation fields (courses of B and C levels), research papers should be prepared, exams should be successfully passed, the Master's thesis should be written and defended.

The descriptions of the study courses, the traineeship, and the final thesis are of high quality, the same for Riga and Liepaja, and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. In the bigger part of study courses descriptions the newest literature (no older than 5 years) in English is provided as mandatory reading. The assessment strategy and learning outcomes are clearly and precisely described. As could be seen in the descriptions of the study courses, teaching staff have published a lot of literature in the study field in Latvian language that is a great help for students in the learning process. Descriptions of courses are provided in Latvian and English languages, so you can get a good idea of study programmes. In past years there have been a lot of new learning materials such as monographs and books provided for students in Latvian language by teaching staff. Understandable that some materials such as current research papers are available only in English language. At the moment presentations for lectures are provided in Latvian language only. If programmes are thinking about including students from abroad, some English adaptations should be considered.

The curriculum of the study programme fully complies with the Regulations of Cabinet of Ministers No. 512 "Regulations on the National Standard of the Second Level Professional Higher Education" as well as European standards (EuroPsy). Of the 80 credit points to be obtained, during the first three semesters 14 compulsory study courses (50 CP) and 4 restricted elective study courses (8 CP), as well as free elective study courses (2 CP) are implemented in the programme. The last semester is fully devoted to the drafting and defence of the Master's thesis (20 CP). In the case of the 60 CP programme, during the first two semesters 14 compulsory study courses (30 CP; 45 ECTS) and 4 restricted elective study courses (8 CP; 12 ECTS), as well as free elective study courses (2 CP; 3 ECTS) are implemented. The last semester is fully devoted to the development and defence of the Master's thesis (20 CP). Thus, it is ensured that the study programme provides in-depth theoretical knowledge and research skills, as well as the skills needed in practical work. As graduates stated during discussion, the proportion of theoretical courses is relatively high, focusing on an in-depth understanding of theoretical psychological concepts, and preparing students for teaching and doctoral studies, however, graduates also expressed a wish for more practical skills training. The medical background provides the students an all rounded understanding of the human body and mind. Graduates especially state that medical background has been helpful while dealing with difficult patient cases.

The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. The main forms of learning in the study programme are lectures, which account for about 50 percent of the total number of contact hours, while the other 50 percent are seminars and practical classes. However, the number of contact hours in Master's level courses is significantly lower than the number of hours devoted to independent work, and therefore the quality of independent work is very important. The amount of compulsory literature is approximately 300-600 pages per study course per two credits. The teaching staff uses different methods: discussions, group work, problem

situation analysis, work in pairs, case study, simulated client, modelling, role play (including using a mirror wall). A written exam is the most commonly used form of assessment of a student's knowledge.

Student-centred learning and teaching principles are taken into account: an independently learning student is at the centre of the study process; learning outcomes are clearly formulated and known, and the student studies to achieve them; students know and understand the intended learning outcomes of the study programme or course; evaluation of the student's achievements is formed in a way that it is possible to check whether and at what level the planned learning outcomes have been achieved; the lecturer's task is to facilitate the study process of the student so that the student achieves the set learning outcomes, etc.

Equal learning and internship possibilities are provided to both RSU Riga students and Liepaja branch students, with possibilities for Liepaja branch students to take part in lectures and practical classes that are located in Riga. However, it seems that the internship opportunities for foreign students (with no Latvian language skills) are rather low.

The practical placement courses include psychologist-supervisor monitoring sessions that contribute to the development of the necessary competencies of the psychologist's profession - communication skills, skills to express own opinions, case study skills, self-awareness, self-reflection. It is worth mentioning that students of the programme are included as part of the psychological help centre in RSU, so they can consult other students as part of practice while promoting psychological help services.

In the study process students are provided with the possibility to use a psychological laboratory for their research. As a very good example of involving students into research, "vertically integrated project" could be mentioned. Lecturers of the Department of Health Psychology and Pedagogy implement the project, where students are actively involved and work in a team with experienced researchers, and this fact was positively evaluated by Bachelor's, Master's and PhD students, who have had the opportunity to take part in the research field. Best students are provided with the possibility to publish.

Students systematically evaluate the study process in two quantitative surveys: a) each study course is evaluated in detail in an anonymous survey after its completion; b) a survey of graduates evaluates the studies as a whole. The outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students, employers, and graduates are used to improve the quality of studies, and this fact was confirmed by both current students, and graduates of the programme.

Once a year, students of the study programme have the possibility to participate in a competition to study in one of the foreign universities, using the Erasmus scholarship. However, as Master studies last only 2 years or 1 year and 6 months for students of 60 CP programme, and students often work professionally and/or do not want to leave the country for a longer period because of family conditions, both students and graduates confirmed that, so far, a relatively small number of students have taken advantage of this opportunity. As shown in the Annex 8.2 of SAR, only one student of the programme has studied psychology at the University of Padua (Italy) since 2016.

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

The descriptions of the study courses, the traineeship, and the final thesis are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. The content of the courses of

Master's programme Health psychology provides a wide range of high quality knowledge, and it complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the relevant industry and the scientific trends.

Graduates of the professional Master's study programme may, in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Psychologists, perform the professional duties of a psychologist under the supervision of a certified psychologist-supervisor, as well as may continue studies in doctoral study programmes. Students are provided with the newest information about the field of psychology that is stated in course rules.

Strengths:

1. The Master's study programme includes study plans I and II depending on the applicant's previous education.
2. The medical background provides the students an all rounded understanding of the human body and mind. Graduates especially state that medical background has been helpful while dealing with difficult patient cases.
3. The concentration on a wide theoretical background that goes well with European standards for Health psychology programme.
4. Students are encouraged and demanded to take part in the research field; best students are provided with the possibility to publish.
5. In the study process students are provided with the possibility to use a psychological laboratory for their research as well.
6. Health psychology Master students are included as part of the psychological help centre in RSU, so they can consult other students as part of practice while promoting psychological help services.
7. Equal learning and internship possibilities are provided to both RSU Riga students and Liepaja branch students, with possibilities for Liepaja branch students to take part in lectures and practical classes that are located in Riga.

Weaknesses:

1. It is hard to use mobility possibilities because of intense study courses and practical skill training that is not provided abroad and is more specific for Latvian population. As well, many students combine studies with work to pay off the study fee.

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

#### **Analysis**

In total, about 14-19 students are admitted in the programme every year. The number of students enrolled in some years has reached even 28 students (for example, in 2020). This is a significantly better result than in the period of financial and economic crisis and in the post-crisis period (2009-2012). The professional Master's study program "Health Psychology" is mainly implemented with private funding. Only 4 students have state-funded study places – 2 since the academic year 2019/2020 and 2 since the academic year 2020/2021. The annual tuition fee is EUR 2389 (in the academic year 2019/2020 the tuition fee was EUR 2110). It is worth noting that if the programme is implemented in English, then the tuition fee is 1.5 times higher than for students studying in Latvian.

The study provision, scientific support, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the

future.

Resources of RSU provided to academic staff and students are of very high standards. The study base formed for the study field used for providing the study programme could be evaluated as excellent (library, classrooms, technical supplies, computers, cameras, internet connection, etc; see more in Chapter 3, Assessment of the Study Field). Advanced technological equipment is used in the study process; the e-studies environment is modern, interactive and convenient. Specific learning resources are almost entirely provided in e-studies, including descriptions of study courses, tasks and tests, and required readings. Educational literature is mostly provided through e-books and e-journals or by scanning key pieces of text and by placing in e-studies, or using internet sources.

Cooperation with the Psychology Laboratory (PL) successfully contributes to the development and adaptation of psychological assessment tools. A publicly available register of questionnaires and tests has been established in the PL for the purpose of informing students and lecturers of the psychological instruments developed and adapted by RSU. PL is equipped with digitised psychological tests, equipment for electroencephalogram and a biofeedback system. PL provides students in the study process with simulation placement that enables them to study without risks to the health of the client/patient and to develop and improve psychological counselling and assessment competencies. The programme provides students the necessary skills to do research in line with international level. However, the psychological laboratory is located in Riga and there are limited possibilities to use it in the Liepāja branch.

RSU involves foreign visiting academic staff and visiting lecturers. The lectures/classes and master classes by visiting lecturers implemented so far have significantly supplemented the curriculum of the study programme “Health Psychology”, which is in line with learning outcomes. This is a great opportunity to learn from the experience of other countries, to study new methods and technologies for improving the quality of studies and the Experts team would encourage further development of cooperation with other universities.

In addition to Riga as to the place of implementation of the study programme, another place of implementation of this study programme in Liepāja was approved by the Academic Information Centre on 13 July 2018, and it is planned to start organising Master’s level studies in 2021-2022 academic year. The organisation and management of the study process of the study programmes in the Liepāja branch foresees that the study process is provided both in person and in the form of online video lectures simultaneously in Rīga and Liepāja. The achievement and evaluation system for students in Liepāja branch is identical as for students in Rīga and the descriptions of study courses are the same.

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

The study provision, scientific support, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the future.

Strengths:

1. Successful cooperation with the Psychology Laboratory contributes to the development and adaptation of psychological assessment tools.
2. The most advanced new generation IT facilities are technically available, advanced technological

equipment is used in the study process; the e-studies environment is modern, interactive and convenient.

3. The attraction of foreign visiting lecturers greatly enriches the curriculum and outcome of the study programme.

4. To both locations (Riga and Liepaja) the best quality libraries with databases and books are provided.

5. The methodical aspects of teaching new assessment methods and statistical softwares is very well organised.

6. The programme provides students the necessary skills to do research in line with international level.

Weaknesses:

1. The number of incoming academic staff mobility could be further encouraged.

2. Students of the Liepāja branch have access to all the resources of the Psychology Laboratory, except for the EEG equipment, as there is only 1 device and it is located in Riga.

#### **4. Teaching Staff**

##### **Analysis**

Master programme is based on the multidimensional understanding of health as defined by the World Health Organisation and in a biopsychosocial approach, where disease and health are defined as the interaction between biological, psychological and social factors. Programme's focus is to prepare specialists who will work on the preservation and restoration of the health of an individual and a group. Study courses have been made so that lectures complement each other.

Academic staff are responsible for making changes to the programme if needed and the implementation of the study programme. As stated in SAR, in past years there have been only few changes made in the teaching staff itself, so it proves the quality of academic teachers. The academic staff is regularly encouraged to participate in new research projects or publishing. Both teaching staff and doctoral level students approve that RSU are supportive and provide necessary money resources or technologies, literature needed. They are recognised quite well both at national and international level. There is a regular collaboration between the teaching staff members from both branches. The mutual cooperation of the academic staff is required, so meetings to discuss progress and make changes are held at least once a year. In SAR it is stated that many master study programme graduates often become lecturers of specific fields they have interest in and are using the possibility to continue with doctoral studies in RSU.

The qualification of the teaching staff fully complies with the requirements for such a programme. There are a wide enough variety of professionals from academic and professional fields (health and clinical psychology, counselling psychology, military and organisational psychology, etc.). Most of the academic staff involved in the teaching process are certified supervisors and differently qualified psychologists, which guarantees a wide range of opportunities for students to learn about the experience of working professionals. New technologies are used to guarantee both branch students to receive equal possibilities of education - there are live lectures transferred through video, after lectures all videos are uploaded in the Moodle system, lecture materials and suggested reading literature are provided. From interviews with staff and students - it is approved that necessary technologies and programmes are provided. Students especially underline that during the pandemic all teaching staff tried their best to maintain the best education process. Video lectures and needed materials were provided.

Most academic staff continuously take part in national and international level research even during a pandemic. In the past 5 years the teaching staff has published 8 new books in the field of psychology, and many other informative materials for society and students were made. It is important to mention that these books and materials have been released in Latvian language. For some teaching staff it is possible to gain scholarships with work that has been rated as exceptional. Published research and books by teaching staff are available for students in both branch libraries.

As it is stated in SAR and as told by the teaching staff, twice a year study programme and teaching staff evaluation is organised. Regularly - once a week there are teaching staff meetings organised to discuss the current needs of teaching staff or problems raised by students. Teachers are regularly asked to provide students with current information about available resources and research. By feedback from students and graduates- changes are being made by suggestions as soon as possible. For more availability to study psychology, the RSU Liepaja branch offers a master study programme "Health Psychology" as well.

To provide a more international approach for learning there are some C section courses that are held by visiting lecturers. As an example, in SAR it is stated that the study course "Social neuroscience" was partly read by lecturers from abroad - J. Kropotov (Russia), J. Pavlov (Germany), S. Montemurro (Italy), J. Vinnik (Portugal).

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

The academic staff is responsible and actively takes part in improving the masters health psychology programme, courses are frequently updated with current information. Most of the staff are working professionals in different fields of psychology as well actively take part in research and publishing. That gives students possibilities to gain more diverse knowledge. Student based approach is used on daily bases, there are different consultations (research, feedback about internships/patient cases, help in the study process ect.) and supervision provided to students, students opinions about the study process and courses are taken into consideration.

Strengths:

1. RSU financially supports staff who are willing to publish either research papers or books.
2. Student oriented approach is used - it is shown by staff availability for students, available group and single supervisions.
3. Programme provides a diverse teaching staff from different specialisations of the psychology field.

Weaknesses:

1. As stated in interviews only on site working hours for staff members are clearly stated, but more precise working hours for research projects should be made.
2. Teachers provide supervision and answer to the student questions even after stated work hours if needed.
3. Big workload for some of the staff impacts lecturers' ability to use more mobility possibilities.

## **5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Health Psychology"**

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is a sample of diploma available with qualification of master's degree; information about study programme - list of study courses are provided; procedure by which state recognised documents of higher education are explained well. The document complies with legal requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is a document with agreement between RSU and Daugavpils University provided. It confirms that the higher education institution will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution, in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

It is correct. This document was approved by the rector of the RSU Aigars Pētersons on 26.04.2021.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the professional Master's 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.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There has been provided certification that confirms that teaching staff of the Master's study programme "Health psychology" is at least level-B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (according to the classification of levels on [www.europass.lv](http://www.europass.lv))

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The agreement complies well with the mandatory provision.

- 9 9. The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Descriptions of courses are provided in Latvian and English languages, so you can get a good idea of study programmes. In past years there have been a lot of new learning materials such as monographs and books provided for students in Latvian language by teaching staff.

Understandable that some materials such as current research papers are available only in English language. At the moment presentations for lectures are provided in Latvian language only. If programmes are thinking about including students from abroad, some English adaptations should be considered.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Programme complies with the requirements of the professional qualification. It was approved by the president of the psychological certification council R. Niedre on 27.07.2021.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All required documents and mapping of the study programme are provided that proves the programmes compliance

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As can be seen from the provided academic staff CV (Annex 6.2), each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions or a five-year practical work experience.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The programme meets the requirements 1-8 and 10-14 and can be assessed as fully compliant. The requirement for course descriptions was assessed as "Partially compliant", however, in the Panel opinion, this partial compliance does not affect the assessment of all requirements.

### **Requirements (R6-R8)**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As stated in Chapter 3 (Resources and Provision of the Study Programme)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification of teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme corresponds to the conditions of implementation of the study programme and the requirements of regulatory enactments, as stated in Chapter 4 (Teaching staff)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As stated in Chapter 2 (The Content of Studies and Implementation).

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

The Master's study programme „Health psychology“ promotes the possibility of implementing a full cycle of higher education studies in psychology (Bachelor's, Master's, doctoral level studies), in line with the Bologna Process. The related requirements for the Master level study programme “Health psychology” have been met.

Currently, the study programme includes study plan I (the total amount is 80 CP) and study plan II (the total amount is 60 CP), which the student chooses considering the previously obtained

education. The curriculum of the study programme is created in line with the sectoral labour market and higher education laws, policy guidelines and current trends in the psychology science. The proportion of theoretical courses is relatively high, since the strategy of the study programme provides that in the current situation it is more important to focus on an in-depth understanding of theoretical psychological concepts preparing students also for teaching and doctoral studies. The academic staff constantly updates the curriculum and literature. It could be concluded that the study programme provides in-depth theoretical knowledge and research skills, as well as the skills needed in practical work.

Given that the analysis raised concerns about the implementation of the program in English, it is advised to look for internship opportunities for English speaking students (e.g. private health clinics, rehabilitation centers etc).

Strengths:

1. The RSU Master's study programme in psychology provides practical and theoretical skills so that after graduation a new specialist is ready to work in his chosen work field (health psychology, clinical psychology, educational psychology, military psychology ect.).
2. There is a good balance between scientific and professional skill learning components of the programme;
3. Teaching staff are encouraged and provided with support to publish new research and literature.
4. Provided study resources of the programme are on a high level;
5. Development of the programme meets the requirements of the current state of psychology in the country and globally.

Weaknesses:

1. Studying in a Master's study programme requires good foreign language skills, ability to maintain a large workload combining it with a job, which for most students is needed to pay for studies. All this should be more explained and considered more carefully while admitting new students.
2. Possibilities for student mobility are mostly impacted by internships and practical courses through the years of programme. Shorter mobility programmes or experience exchange possibilities should be considered.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Health Psychology"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Health Psychology"**

### **Short-term recommendations**

Only on-site working hours for staff members are clearly stated, but more precise working hours for research projects should be made.

It is recommended to think about more strict appliance rules that would also be helpful for students to understand their ability to learn in this programme.

More focus on practical skills training, especially more time for internship, to better understand differences while working with patients with disability, psychiatric disorders or different age groups.

The number of incoming academic staff mobility could be further encouraged.

It is recommended to actively search for the possibility to provide an internship for foreign students.

### **Long-term recommendations**

Strengthening internationalization and English language programmes would be a new positive feature.

It is necessary to find the new social partners (state or private organizations) in order to implement placements for master's students of military and counseling psychology.

## **II. "Psychology" ASSESSMENT**

### **II. "Psychology" ASSESSMENT**

#### **1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme**

##### **Analysis**

The name of the RSU doctoral study programme "Psychology", the degree (scientific degree of a doctor (Ph.D.) in psychology), the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements of the study programme are logically interrelated and consistent. This study programme is implemented in Latvian and English languages, the study type and form is full time studies. The duration of studies is three full academic years. The admission requirements are: Master's degree in psychology or a corresponding higher education diploma in social and human action sciences or healthcare, or social welfare, or in teacher education and education sciences or in humanities and proof of English language knowledge. In case an applicant who has not obtained a Master's or Bachelor's degree in psychology must additionally pass an examination in the basic branches of psychology: general (cognitive) psychology; developmental psychology; personality psychology; social psychology; clinical psychology, health psychology.

The doctoral study programme with a doctoral degree in psychology is well organized, and beside the research expertise provides a high level professional expertise in health psychology. The study programme is implemented in a thorough manner. The learning outcomes are in agreement with the general strength of RSU psychology, with a "Health Psychology" concentration. Based on interviews with faculty and students, the programme requires quite good English language skills, ability to cope with huge workload and managing personal finances, and work to pay for studies.

RSU doctoral study programme is created in accordance with the recommendations for development of the European Higher Education Area, including three priorities of Europe 2020 strategy that have been set as requirements for education: smart, sustainable, and integrating growth, to prepare highly qualified specialists – researchers and academic staff – that meet international requirements, to develop modern research and to take part in international research projects.

The doctoral study programme allows strengthening national and international competitiveness, ensuring the integration of the Latvian science and research system in the European common research area, supporting participation in the activities of joint international events and developing world-class scientific infrastructure in Latvia. Knowledge-based resources such as databases, libraries, archives, as well as any other tool essential for achieving excellence in research are used as the research infrastructure.

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

The basic strength of the programme is its clear health science orientation, which suits well with a medical school environment. In general the need for applied psychology research is very crucial both in Latvia and around the whole of Europe. The specific orientation of the school is all the more important since over two thirds of applied psychology has a general clinical orientation.

The aims of the doctoral study program are clearly stated. It is to train research minded health psychology experts. This is clearly specified in the learning outcomes, and is in line with the general orientation of RSU psychology programmes to train experts in health psychology.

The imminent change of the allocation of the programme is also spelled out clearly. In the near future, a health psychology PhD shall be treated as a chapter in a multidisciplinary health sciences doctoral school. This change would even more clearly characterize the commitment of the doctoral programme. However, there should be an accommodation of the classification at all levels.

The RSU doctoral program in health psychology clearly meets the requirements to provide doctoral degrees in "Psychology".

The relevant criteria for a doctoral degree in psychology have clearly been met. There is a concentrated, focussed doctoral training and intensive research work. The doctoral school participates in broad health science projects. The publication criteria are clearly spelled out and required.

Strengths:

1. Clear health science vision.
2. Strong independent research expectations are met.
3. PhD students are involved in the research projects with scientific advisors at the national level.

Weaknesses:

None.

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

### **Analysis**

The descriptions of the study courses/ modules and traineeship are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. The content of the study programme is relevant and complementary. The courses and the to be chosen modules are clearly spelled out. They meet the requirements for doctoral studies. The quality of the final PhD thesis was not possible to assess, because there were no defended PhD theses available within this new PhD programme by the time of the experts' visit.

The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are taken into account. The entire programme emphasizes the student centered nature of the training. This is shown by three main factors. The intelligent use of distance based teaching methods, provision and requirement of extensive reading and considering student based feedback towards the school. This was also supported by taléks with

students.

The outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students and employers are used to improve the quality of studies. There are no graduates of the programme by the time of the experts' visit.

It is possible for students to receive help, consultations and support from lecturers during the study process, as well as in case of uncertainties it is possible for students to contact the Department of Doctoral Studies or the Head of the study programme, receiving consultations on the most successful implementation of the study process both individually and for students in general.

There is a relatively small hierarchy of academic management for the implementation of the study programme. Students are regularly invited to comment on the quality of studies, as a result of which shortcomings and possible results are revealed in order to promote students' motivation in further study process.

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

The entire doctoral program of health psychology has a clear focus, meets the legal requirements for doctoral studies both organizationally and in its substance.

Research work by the students is serious and improving.

Strengths:

1. The clear concentration of studies on applied psychology, and relating and connecting students into engaging large scale national and international health programmes;
2. The clear requirement of individual independent research, while providing for efficient mentoring;
3. The strong and strict expectation of publications by the students.

Weaknesses:

1. It would be preferable to require publications even with the submission of a thesis.

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

#### **Analysis**

The doctoral study programme (DSP) "Psychology" is intended to be implemented over a period of 3 years, where the annual tuition fee is set at EUR 2100; the estimated number of students over the entire study period is 18. However, there should be more state/government financial support. A system of tuition waiver and scholarships should be introduced, at least for yearly 5-6 students. This is merited on the basis of the achievements of the schools, and would increase the scientific productivity of the school.

Resources of RSU are of exemplary high standards. Both the library and laboratory resources are rather rich and of international standards (see more in Chapter 3, Assessment of the Study Field). Studies at the university are significantly facilitated by the European-level library and the informative resources available there. The subscribed databases provide access to approximately 403,300 subscribed electronic resource units. Doctoral students have access to the RSU library of national significance and its databases: electronic joint catalogue of libraries of national significance, database of publications of RSU academic staff and doctoral theses, BMJ Clinical Evidence, BMJ Journals, Cambridge Journals, Cochrane Library, DynaMed, EBSCO, JAMA and Archives, MD and First Consult, MolPort, ProQuest, PubMed, SAGE Publications, ScienceDirect etc.

The much needed subject pools for health psychology are at hand in the clinics of the medical faculty. Altogether, the intellectual and research background is exemplary, and is well farming high quality health psychology research. Students get the opportunity to study by using the most advanced possibilities both in information circulation, using advanced technological equipment in the study process, and in modern approaches, using interactive approaches, advantages and convenience of the e-studies environment.

Computer equipment, sound equipment, and a video projector are available to lecturers, upon request for this multimedia equipment for specific classes, or are stationary in auditoriums. Audiences with seats for more than 100 people are used for presentation of doctoral theses and conferences. Doctoral students can use the Information Centre computers (24 computers) and computers in auditoriums, as well as the library (20 computers) etc. Doctoral students can use wireless Internet connection. Doctoral students also have an auditorium, where lectures and classes are planned as a priority.

The program is intellectually, practically, and research wise well organized. The basic strength of the programme is its clear health science orientation, which suits well with a medical school environment. In general the need for applied psychology research is very crucial both in Latvia and around the whole of Europe. The specific orientation of the school is all the more important since over two thirds of applied psychology has a general clinical orientation.

Also, the methodical aspects of teaching new assessment methods and statistical software are very well organized. It provides the necessary skills to do innovative applied research in line with international expectations.

The exchange of experience of junior scientists and scientific supervisors in foreign science centres, as well as participation in conferences and symposia is encouraged. The teaching staff involved in the study programme are members of international professional organisations, and they participate in further training activities both in their field and in university pedagogy. Doctoral students are also involved in the work of organising international conferences.

The RSU Department of Health Psychology and Pedagogy maintains close contact with other Latvian and foreign universities, including in the United States, Greece, Italy, Israel, Cyprus, Russia, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Germany. A study course for visiting lecturers is organised on a regular basis, which is related to the interests of doctoral students. There have been such study courses about neuroscience, psychometrics, qualitative research, and trauma management. Good international relations provide an opportunity to learn the experience of other countries, to learn new methods and technologies for improving the quality of studies. For example, two foreign professors also supervise doctoral theses and two provide consultations.

As it is stated in SAR, doctoral theses are developed in cooperation with various organisations, health care institutions, including Riga East University Hospital (REUH), Riga Psychiatry and Narcology Centre (RPNC), as well as with the Latvian National Armed Forces (NAF). It can be seen that there is a wide variety of study and scientific resources that are provided in collaboration with other scientific institutions and higher education institutions, assessment, including at the international level.

There are two aspects where the programmes could be widened or broadened. First, in relating health psychology to biological factors, organized teaching of psychogenetics would be a fruitful extension. Similarly, in the rich computer related statistical software teaching, one could also see

teaching of computer based distance methods, as well as new internet surfaces for computer based questionnaires like mass data gathering methods. That would help to align Latvian health psychology research with the new “big data” move in social sciences.

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

The study provision, scientific support, informative provision, material and technical provision, and financial provision comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the future.

The study provision and the scientific support, including the resources provided within the cooperation with other scientific institutions and institutions of higher education, comply with the requirements for the implementation of the doctoral study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of learning and research outcomes.

Strengths:

1. Clear focus of all research.
2. The methodical aspects of teaching new assessment methods and statistical softwares is very well organized. It provides the necessary skills to do innovative applied research in line with international expectations.
3. The intellectual and material (including methodological) resources, as well as information support is sufficient to implement the study programme.

Weaknesses:

1. In relating health psychology to biological factors, organized teaching of psychogenetics would be a fruitful extension.
2. Similarly, in the rich computer related statistical software teaching, one could also see teaching of computer based distance methods, as well as new internet surfaces for computer based questionnaires like mass data gathering methods. That would help to align Latvian health psychology research with the new “big data” move in social sciences.
3. There should be more state/government financial support. A system of tuition waiver and scholarships should be introduced, at least for yearly 5-6 students. This is merited on the basis of the achievements of the schools, and would increase the scientific productivity of the school.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

16 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the DSP “Psychology”. The total number of students as of 1 October 2021, was 19, thus the students/lecturers ratio is 1.19.

The changes in the teaching staff are small, the involved academic staff has proven to be a strong team. The changes have taken place for objective reasons (change of workplace) and this has not affected the quality of studies. It should be noted that RSU purposefully takes measures so that changes in the teaching staff, if any, do not negatively affect the quality of the study programme implementation and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements specified in regulatory enactments.

All academic staff involved in the implementation of the doctoral study programme have a high qualification as well as a great academic experience. As can be seen from the annexes, the

qualification of the academic staff corresponds to the conditions of implementation of the study programme and the requirements of regulatory enactments, as well as ensures the achievement of aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and respective study courses. All lecturers have appropriate higher education and a doctoral degree, as well as teaching experience.

Teachers of the DSP “Psychology” constantly participate in research work, as well as present their research findings at scientific conferences, including international ones. Several lecturers are authors or co-authors of scientific monographs, including on research methodology and scientific writing and dissemination of research results, as well as several collective monographs developed in the field of psychology. All lecturers prepare internationally cited publications and review scientific articles. Several lecturers work on the editorial boards of scientific journals, participate in funded research projects, and are experts in various projects. Lecturers participate in Erasmus+ mobility on a regular basis, teaching at foreign universities.

Lecturers are members of professional organisations, members of the board, council, chairpersons of the board, e.g., in the Latvian Health Psychology Association, the Latvian Clinical Psychology Association, the Latvian Society of Psychologists. Lecturers also represent or work in international organisations such as the European Health Psychology Society, the International Test Commission. The majority of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme, who implement other study courses, are also experts of the Latvian Council of Science.

As can be seen in the CVs of the academic staff, their research work is related to current topics in the field, in an interdisciplinary context. The research conducted by the academic staff is an important contribution to both the development of the field and the development of the study programme, as well as the improvement of the study content. Through research, the lecturers bring the novelties of the field to their study courses.

Doctoral theses at RSU are supervised only by scientists with the rights of the expert of the Latvian Scientific Council, which confirms that scientists are constantly doing research and publishing research results at international level.

The attitude of the teaching staff towards the duties to be performed clearly confirms the possibilities of sustainable development of the doctoral study programme. The teaching staff is regularly invited to discuss issues related to the study process and improvement thereof. Mutual feedback seminars on current topics, such as CEG, are organised for mutual cooperation with lecturers. Several lecturers cooperate with each other, jointly implementing study courses, working on research projects, and managing students’ work. Lecturers and supervisors of doctoral theses are involved in scientific activities together with doctoral students, for example, preparing joint publications, as well as collective monographs, such as Health Psychology, Scientific Writing and Dissemination of Research Results. A Glossary of Research Terms has also been prepared. This expenditure has an impact on further scientific research.

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

RSU undertakes measures in a target-oriented manner to avoid negative effects on the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, as a result of the changes in the composition of the teaching staff.

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the

requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses.

The scientific publications of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the doctoral study programmes and the involvement of the academic staff in research-related projects contribute to the implementation of a high-quality doctoral study programme.

The academic staff is involved in scientific research in the fields related to the content of the study programme both at national and international level. The obtained information is used in the study process.

There is a mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members in place, which contributes to the improvement of the study courses/ modules and their correlation.

Strengths:

1. The teaching staff has over 200 publications/faculty internationally visible outlets in the given period. The quality of the papers is high.
2. Similarly, their participation on large national projects is remarkable.

Weaknesses:

1. Some teachers should obtain their PhDs, and some should participate more in publications.
2. The school should make new efforts to engage the faculty and the students in large European health psychology projects.
3. There should be more incoming teaching staff from other foreign universities. For example, a visiting professor position might be introduced.

## 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Psychology"

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is a sample of diploma available with qualification of doctor's degree; information about study programme - list of study courses are provided; procedure by which state recognised documents of higher education are explained well. The document complies with legal requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There is a document with agreement between RSU and Daugavpils University provided. It confirms that the higher education institution will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution, in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

It is correct. This document was approved by the rector of the RSU Aigars Pēteršons on 26.04.2021.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the Doctoral 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.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

There has been provided certification that confirms that teaching staff of the PhD study programme "Psychology" is at least level-B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (according to the classification of levels on [www.europass.lv](http://www.europass.lv))

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As can be seen from academic staff CVs, 14 teaching staff members have a doctoral degree and six of them are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the field of psychology.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As could be seen in the Annexes 24.6 and 24.7, the academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The agreement complies well with the mandatory provision.

- 9 9. The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Descriptions of courses are provided in Latvian and English languages.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RSU has received the relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education (see annex 24-9\_pielik\_AIP\_atzinums\_DSP\_Ps.lv)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As can be seen from the provided academic staff CV (Annex 6.2), each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions or a five-year practical work experience.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The programme meets the requirements 1-14 and can be assessed as fully compliant.

## Requirements (R6-R8)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As stated in Chapter 3 (Resources and Provision of the Study Programme)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The qualification of teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme corresponds to the conditions of implementation of the study programme and the requirements of regulatory enactments, as stated in Chapter 4 (Teaching staff).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

As stated in Chapter 2 (The Content of Studies and Implementation).

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

RSU doctoral study programme has a distinct inclination in clinical and health psychology and is a logical continuation of the master's study programme.

Most RSU remarkable psychology publications are related to the field.

The admission requirements provide a fine opportunity to study psychology at PhD level for students with different educational backgrounds.

Strengths:

1. There is a remarkable concentration in health science related learning and research.
2. There is a psychology laboratory in RSU, which substantially supports the research.
3. Most of the PhD students are involved in the research projects together with scientific advisors.

Weaknesses:

1. The students of the PhD study programme have different scientific backgrounds. They may have different previous education and research experience. It might be rather challenging to lead them all together to the same level of understanding of psychological science.

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

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

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

### **Short-term recommendations**

To increase the number of scientific publications elaborated by PhD students.
To increase an international mobility of PhD students.
To provide a possibility for leading RSU psychology researchers to reduce academic load in order to increase the research productivity.

### Long-term recommendations

To look for a possibility for being involved in research networks at the international level.
To transform RSU doctoral study programme in psychology into visible and internationally recognizable school of psychology.
To apply for international research grants for scientific projects.

## 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 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:	Fully compliant		RSU fully complies with relevant regulations and the internal quality assurance system is used well and efficiently (see Chapter 2).
R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.		Partially compliant	Cooperation with local higher education institutions can still be improved. Where there currently is cooperation, it ensures the achievement of the study field (see Chapter 5).
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).	Fully compliant		The research output is good in all levels and considerable from a health science perspective.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.		Partially compliant	One recommendation received during the licensing procedure that has not been implemented yet - due to the reorganisation of the Faculty of Communication, the number of staff lecturers - psychologists has not increased yet (see Chapter 6).

### 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	Psychology (43313)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
2	Health Psychology (47313)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
3	Psychology (51313)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

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