

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: University of Latvia

Study field: Architecture and Construction

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Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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The aim of the study field is clearly defined, and the relevant study programme corresponds to the needs of the society and national economy in the country. The management of the study field and the relevant study programme enhance the development of the study contents. The system and procedures for the admission of students are targeted to an interdisciplinary approach and promote acquiring high-quality achievements and study results. The information published on the website of the UL regarding the relevant study programme of the study field provides sufficient information for the candidates and the students.

The resources and provisions allocated to the study field are adequate. With the move to the new Academic Centre, the study field is benefitting from enhanced material and technical provisions. The students have access to academic, career development and psychological support. The UL has also implemented an interesting mentorship mechanism where senior students are assisting first-year students.

Scientific research is conducted effectively, outcomes are developed and incorporated into the study content, internationalization is being enhanced, and improvement from the last accreditation. However, the students' involvement in scientific research still is moderate.

The circle of cooperation partners of the study field and the relevant programme is wide; however, the recognized professional bodies from the field of Architecture and Construction or their members could be more involved in the implementation of the programme.

The master's degree study programme in Spatial Planning is a two-year full-time programme, and the structure and the content of it is relevant and compliant with the professional standard. It certainly provides spatial planners for state and local governmental institutions. The management of the study program ensures internal communication within the study programme, learning outcomes are formulated in a student-centred approach in accordance with generally accepted good practise, integrated into the various learning and assessment methods of the study course, and proportionate to the learning course outcomes. However, the application of the internal quality assurance system of the program still could be improved. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of the employers is high, the satisfaction of the students has significantly decreased during the last period.

Highly-qualified academic staff is attracted for the implementation of the study programme, developing active scientific and research activities, or transferring professional experience from the field. A promising resource for the future changes in the academic staff is the graduates from the programme who return to the UL after getting their PhD degrees. A very high number of the teaching staff in the programme holding the PhD degrees provide a valuable intellectual potential to the study programme, however, there is a misbalance in the teachers holding PhD in geography and environmental sciences and those in architecture and construction.

1. Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1. The defined aim of the study field - to strengthen and expand research-based integrated and interdisciplinary, practice-related studies in place, urban, regional planning for the maintenance, creation and development of the quality of the human living environment following the demand for wide-profile planning specialists in Latvia and the Baltic Sea region - is clearly defined and attainable. The related study programme "Spatial Planning" (in translation from Latvian - "Planning of Spatial Development") being a part of the implementation of the Strategy of University of Latvia (UL) - to train human resources that would meet the demand of the Latvian and global labour market and the needs of society providing knowledge transfer by promoting sustainable

development of the national economy and the society – is designed in harmony with the Strategy, following its goals, seeking to integrate the potential of various branches of research and creating ever closer links between research, education and the labour market.

1.2. The UL has introduced a multi-level system of responsibilities in the implementation of study fields and study programmes – from the level of the University administration to the level of the study programme management staff. The study field is monitored by the council represented by councillors from various related branches; both research and practice. The Council approves the development strategy of the study program, evaluates and submits for approval to the Faculty Council the annual reports of the study field, as well as changes in the study programme. Responsibility for the quality of the study field and implementation of the study programme lies on the Head of the study field, the Director of the study programme and the coordinator of the study programme. Each teacher is responsible for the quality of the content and implementation of the definite study course, research activities and professional development. The students' responsibilities are defined in their rights and obligations to promote the achievement of the UL goals and excellence in studies, participating in the UL collegial institutions and regularly expressing their opinion in the student surveys. It was observed by the Panel that due to the relatively small size of the study field and only one related study programme all the involved parties were very enthusiastic and seemed personally engaged in the implementation of the study programme providing a welcoming and friendly atmosphere in the study environment.

1.3. The procedure and requirements for admission of UL students are specified in the Admission Regulations at the University of Latvia. Enrolment in the Master level study programme is based on assessments obtained during undergraduate studies. Since applicants with different previous education are welcome, there is an entrance examination used to determine the compliance of the applicant's prior knowledge with the field of the study programme. The procedures explained in detail by the management staff of the programme during the evaluation visit were found to be relevant and focused on the selection of highly motivated students with diverse backgrounds. However, the Panel observed that there was too poor information regarding the examination procedure and requirements available on the University website.

Recognition of previously acquired study courses is a prerequisite for starting studies at a later stage and is stipulated in the legal act of the UL According to that, the Director of the programme is the responsible person for this task. As stated in the report, in the study programme there has been no need for students to use the opportunity to recognize the study results obtained in previous education (including further education program) or professional experience that may indicate on not sufficient information provided by the programme management staff according to this opportunity.

1.4. To prevent violation of academic integrity, the UL has developed the Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System that verifies students' final study papers (master thesis). It is described in the report that the procedure has been established to identify the risks of plagiarism and to determine corresponding actions. In the case of receiving a signal of plagiarism suspected, the study programme director receives an overview of the test result. The programme director forwards this information to the appointed supervisor and reviewer, and, in the event of a suspected breach of academic integrity, passes on the results of the analysis to the final examination panel for final consideration. The fact that throughout the implementation of the study programme of the study field the plagiarism control system has not revealed any violations indicate on strong effectiveness of the system as well as the high level of novelty in the final thesis of the students.

1.5. The information published on the website of the UL regarding the relevant study programme of the study field complies with the information available in the official registers. It provides sufficient information for the candidates and the students and is published not only in the Latvian language in which the study programme is implemented but also in English that is useful for mobility students.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The aim of the study field is clearly defined and attainable. The study field and the relevant study programme complies with the main fields of the strategic development of the UL and corresponds to the needs and the development trends of the society and national economy in the country. The structure of the management of the study field and the relevant study programme fits the development of the study field. The support provided by the management staff contributes to meeting the needs of the relevant study programme of the study field. The UL has established a system and implements procedures for the admission of students, as well as for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students, and these procedures are logical and efficient. More attention could be paid to the recognition of the study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education, and delivering the fact of the existence of such a system to the students. The UL has set the academic integrity principles and mechanisms, and it uses plagiarism detection tools. They are effective and contribute to the development of the internal culture of the UL. The information published on the website of the UL regarding the relevant study programme of the study field provides sufficient information for the candidates and the students and is published not only in the Latvian language in which the study programme is implemented but also in English that is useful for mobility students.

Strengths:

1. The study field and the relevant study programme corresponds to the needs of the society and national economy in the country.
2. The advisory board of the study field and the management staff of the study programme works effectively and the members are motivated.
3. The admission procedures provide an intake of students with different backgrounds and previous experience.
4. Welcoming and friendly study environment attracts new students.

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient usage of the tools of the recognition of the study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education may cause an overload of the students.

2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

2.1. UL sets out quality principles of Total quality management, referring to the quality management methodology - EFQM (European Foundation of Quality Management) as preconditions and actions required to achieve the Quality Policy, which is openly obtainable in the UL website, as Quality Policy of University of Latvia and Quality Action Policy of UL. Both of the documents are an integral part of the Quality Assurance System and follow Latvian legislation, European Standards, and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and internal necessity. The UL has a system of quality assessment of study fields and study programs included therein in the UL quality management system. The internal quality control of the study field is carried out by the directors of the study programs, the director of the study field, the dean, the faculty councils, Study Programme Quality Assessment Board (SP QAB), and, in case of external quality assessment, the UL Senate. Collaboration between organizational structural levels for the quality system was verified in meeting with management and StF and StP directors. As a result, procedures and regulations are coherent and orientated to continuous improvement and development. Also, faculty are vastly involved with the quality of the StF, which is reflected in the Annual Study Field Report assessed every year during the development and discussion of the SAR both within the StF at the faculty level and in the UL

Senate.

2.2. The procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programs of the study field have been very well defined in SAR, and they are logical and efficient. UL has developed a procedure for the establishment of StPs (Regulations of the University of Latvia Study Programmes and Continuing Education Programmes) and reviewing of the StPs (Procedure for Preparing the Annual Reports of the Study Fields of the University of Latvia), where procedures are established for: elaboration of the StPs concept; coordination within the council of study field; submission to the Department of Studies; development of a full-time StPs following external and internal regulations and submission for evaluation and approval to the council of study field and faculty council or councils of scientific councils of scientific institutes; submission of the full-time study program to the Department of Studies for assessment and approval by two independent experts and at SP QAB; The examination and approval of StPs in the Senate of the UL and advancement of the study program license application. At the same time, the feedback mechanisms (including feedbacks to students, employers, and graduates) are not available for all stakeholders. During the interviews, the Expert Panel found some cases where this high level of QA was not well adapted and formalized into feedback mechanisms. The Experts want to motivate UL to stay on track with its development in QA. The Expert Panel is aware that this process of creating a quality culture is complex and long-term.

2.3. The process of data collection and analysis of the results is performed each academic year centrally (according to The procedure for Organizing Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at UL). The student survey is conducted regularly and efficiently used to improve the study field through the Annual Study Field Report. Nevertheless, implementation of surveys and feedbacks from other external stakeholders seems to have various shortages. During the interviews with the Expert Panel, the process of closed QM circle with inputs, outputs, changes, and check-ups was unclear. The SAR (p.16) mentions the RADAR methodology. At the same time, during the meeting, students, graduates, and employers stated that they don't have formal and systematic feedback regarding survey results or changes that come from their feedback through surveys. The expert team would like to emphasize that according to the plan-do-check-act principle generally accepted in quality assurance, it is essential to close the feedback loop and assess the achievements to set new goals and move forward.

2.4. The UL has identified the standards outlined in Part 1 of the ESG, which require special attention and are elaborated throughout the SAR. The most well-established are the design and approval of programs; student-centered learning; student admission progression, recognition, and certification; policy for QA; teaching staff; learning resources; whereas the need more attention is ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programs. To improve the performance of the evaluated StPs of the StF, the UL has determined aims and measures integrated into a joint quality assurance system.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The UL Quality Assurance System ensures coherent planning and implementation of the UL activities. Quality Assurance System applies to all areas of the StF and StP and is implemented at all levels of the UL governances. However, the UL faces some difficulties regarding the process of closed QM circle with inputs, outputs, changes, and check-ups.

Strengths:

1. Effective Quality Assurance System oriented to continuous improvement.
2. High faculty involvement in the StF quality.

Weaknesses:

1. Deficiencies in procedures to share information and results with relevant stakeholders like students and teaching staff.
2. Lack of implementation of surveys and feedbacks from other external stakeholders seems to have various shortages

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

3.1. The UL has developed a system of funding according to national laws and regulations. Each year, UL Senate approves the budget including the revenue and expenditures of each structural unit. According to Annex nr 2.15, the cost of the study programme 'Spatial planning' is 2602 € per seat. The budget is complemented by performance and national or international research contract funding. This allows the Faculty to support scientific activities like participation in international conferences, publish scientific papers or organise further scientific events. From the self-evaluation report (SWOT) and the interviews, LU is considering that the current funding level is insufficient but does not provide a clear target or analysis. The number of state-funded seats has decreased in 2017 to 17 while the current student/staff ratio is 8.8 which is quite comfortable. Considering the small size of the study programme and the perceived lack of funding, the Panel recommends developing a strategic vision for funding and closely monitoring corresponding indicators.

3.2. With the move of the Academic Centre closer to the Faculty, the Study Field is benefitting from enhanced material and technical provisions. UL provides a good wireless network coverage and UL provides their students and staff with a free Microsoft license together with statistical (R, SPSS, PC-Ord) or geoinformatics (ESRI ArcGIS, QGIS) specialised software. Computer classrooms and available workplaces are largely sufficient for the programme. Additionally, the FGES provides extensive spatial data for studies and research, which is very positive. The virtual tour organised during the visit confirmed the very high quality of the infrastructure. In terms of provisions, the main focus of the programme lies in available literature references. During the reporting period, the FGES invested heavily in the library and the self-evaluation report states that 90% of the needs are covered, which is credible considering the various resources available (books and e-resources or databases).

3.3. The recruitment and selection are regulated by the 'Regulatory enactments on academic and administrative positions at the University of Latvia'. Each open position is advertised publicly on the website and in national journals. For the academic positions, the applicants must deliver an open lecture assessed by two reviewers. The final selection is made by the relevant body (Faculty Council or Professor Council). This procedure complies with the minimal requirements and could be further improved by involving other stakeholders or external experts, at least with an advisory role, in the selection procedure. The usual workload for academic staff is 60% for academic tasks and 40% for research work. This is well-balanced on paper but quite variable in practice. The emphasis on research is quite recent and still requires attention to allow academic staff to develop their expertise and original contributions. Regarding professional development, UL has developed clear strategies and regulations. The self-evaluation report shows very active participation in scientific or specialised activities but very limited participation in pedagogical or didactical training (2 participations only for the reporting period). The participation of the teaching staff in outgoing and incoming mobility is weak as well (Annex 2.5), limiting the opportunities for international exposure for both staff and students. The Panel recommends developing incentives and mechanisms to foster the participation of the academic staff in pedagogical or didactical training and international mobility programmes (incoming and outgoing).

3.4. The students have access to academic, career development and psychological support. UL has also implemented a very interesting mentorship mechanism where senior students are assisting first-year students. The Career Centre plays an important role in terms of individual counselling for employability and career prospect. Considering the small size of the study field, the Panel could

observe that this leads to a very friendly environment for the students.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The resources and provisions allocated to the Study Field are adequate. The number of state-funded seats has decreased in 2017 to 17 while the current student/staff ratio is 8.8 which is quite comfortable. With the move of the Academic Centre closer to the Faculty, the Study Field is benefitting from enhanced material and technical provisions. This procedure complies with the minimal requirements. In terms of professional development, there is very active participation in scientific or specialised activities but very limited participation in pedagogical or didactical training. The students have access to academic, career development and psychological support. UL has also implemented a very interesting mentorship mechanism where senior students are assisting first-year students.

Strengths:

1. The FGES provides extensive spatial data for studies and research.
2. During the reporting period, the FGES invested heavily in the library and with 90% of the needs covered.
3. The UL has developed a clear strategy and regulations regarding recruitment and professional development.
4. Very friendly environment for the students.

Weaknesses:

1. Considering the small size of the study programme and the perceived lack of funding, there is a lack of strategic vision for funding and monitoring of corresponding indicators.
2. Insufficient participation of the academic staff in pedagogical or didactical training and international mobility programmes.

4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

4.1 According to the audit report (SAR, p.80), FGES is one of the two faculties of the UL, which has a large proportion of scientists, which has been achieved through the implementation of successful scientific activities and large-scale scientific projects. Moreover, the academic staff carried out research activities mainly in significant international and several projects financed by the Latvian Council of Science (LCS), as well as was involved in applied research commissioned by state institutions and commercial companies, all of the above including and the joint publications of teaching staff and students, imply the relevance of the research projects with the development of the aims of the UL and StF as well as relevant industry. However, since the Latvian Council of Science has changed the procedure for awarding grants, the number of Latvian state-funded research projects implemented by the staff involved in implementing study programs has significantly decreased. In contrast, the number of international projects has increased (SAR, p.80); therefore, the Expert Panel encourages further UL involvement and development in the international research project realm.

4.2 The relation between scientific research in the StF and the study process has been defined and ensured, and it is efficient. Referring to SAR, (p.82), there is an apparent relatively high research effort of the UL in the field of the: land-use change and development of an ecological succession of landscapes; Improvement of landscape assessment and planning methodology; Climate change management tools and their application in Latvia; Regeneration of urban areas; Population mobility

and population development; Development and planning of traffic infrastructure; Environment which is especially relevant to the Master Programme. Scientific research and the outcomes thereof are integrated into the study process in the StPs of all levels. The teaching staff involved in research in local/international governmental and non-governmental institutions transfer their research experience into lectures. During the interview, the high engagement of the teaching staff and progressive methodology for designing activities involving students to research was visible. Students have a favourable opinion about the teaching staff, and they see the practical and scientific approach of the academic staff - it is adjusted to the type of courses. Most of the professional courses are delivered by the academic staff with professional experience and invited lectures from professionals from the industry, even though the students during the interview could not clearly describe if they are engaged in research projects.

4.3 International cooperation in scientific research within the StF and the relevant study programs is ensured and improved in a target-oriented manner. The teaching staff of the field has provided the management of international (52) or local (12) projects necessary for the program or participated in their implementation (SAR, p.81). The recommendations from the previous accreditation expert group on increasing the internationalization of the program have been utterly developed. Expansion of the research activities was continued, such as EU URBACT II program project, Norwegian Financial Mechanism project, Project GrassLIFE, Three Nordplus Higher Education projects, and Nordplus Horizontal 2019 - 2021; while the complete list of projects (Annex 2.6) confirms the increase of the internationalization of the program same as the implementation of several study courses in English.

4.4 The UL has developed mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research through UL Academic Remuneration Regulations, where academic work at the UL besides pedagogical work, includes research projects, organizational work, and scientific work (research) financed from study funding. The same was verified during the interview with the teaching staff, and it appears to be well-functioning and efficient.

4.5 The UL has developed mechanisms to promote the involvement of the students in scientific research. The promotion of the participation of the teaching staff in research is realized by strengthening the development of the study content with the solutions of research-relevant topics, consequently offering the possibility of students' involvement in these projects. Furthermore, the program students can present in the annual scientific conferences of the University of Latvia in the subsection Spatial Planning. There are also some publications with students' contributions (SAR, p.84 and 85). Although the students of the StPs are relatively involved in scientific research, the Expert Panel encourages to find other innovative approaches for these mechanisms to be well-functioning and efficient.

4.6 In SAR (p.85 and 86) listed some innovative solutions integrated into the study process. By employing new solutions, UL is trying to enhance teaching & learning methods through its involvement with international cooperation and local planning agencies. Especially with a recently equipped modern infrastructure, which can foster and encourage innovative approaches.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

Scientific research is conducted effectively, outcomes are developed and incorporated into the study content, internationalization is being enhanced, and improvement from the last accreditation. However, the student's involvement in scientific research is moderate. Therefore, the UL should find ways of endorsing greater engagement.

Strengths:

1. Good research activities of the teaching staff connected with the field of study.
2. The research outcomes are well integrated into the study content.

3. Possibilities of involving students in research activities.
4. The international involvement of the teaching staff is at a reasonable level.

Weaknesses:

1. Motivation system for students' involvement in scientific research activities.

5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

5.1. As stated in the report, the circle of cooperation partners of the study field is wide, and the partners are selected taking into account mutual interest, similar study and activity profiles, quality of knowledge and experience in the field of spatial planning, as well as cooperation experience in implementing joint projects. They are selected from various interested parties – municipalities and state planning bodies, academic and research institutions as well as private companies from Latvia and abroad. International cooperation of the study field is mostly depicted by faculty level experience that, because of a very broad and general competence, only partially may be referred to the specifics of the study field “Architecture and Construction”. More relevant is the cooperation picture at the programme level, however, there are no indications that the recognized professional bodies – Association of Architects, Association of Landscape Architects, Association of Civil Engineers, Association of Engineers of Heat, Gas and Water Supply Technologies, etc. or their members would be somehow involved in the implementation of the programme. Thus, the programme is more focused on general territorial development and planning features only; less on the understanding of the relations between spaces, buildings and people in the built environment that would allow the graduates to gain more competence in work with smaller-scale planning documents – at local or detail plan level. Since the study programme is focused on the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills, the students are encouraged to take an internship in foreign planning institutions and offices. However, the comparatively low study mobility activity may indicate the probable insufficiency of adequate international partners, especially, in the academic environment.

5.2. The attraction of the teaching staff from abroad in the HEI in Latvia is painfully dependant on the available financial resources that in terms of the funding of the definite study field and the relevant programme cannot generally be considered sufficient. In the years 2019–2021 attraction of two visiting professors was possible due to the project Renewal of Academic Staff and Improvement of Competencies at the University of Latvia. The positive outcome of the project is that the collaboration with the attracted professors still is ongoing, however, it cannot be evaluated as a regular system and procedure for the attraction of the teaching staff from abroad. As stated in the report, the students from abroad have been involved in the internship only. That may mean that the students are more attracted to the definite internship placement bodies rather than to the study programme at the university.

5.3. A significant part of the study process, especially, in the professional study programmes is devoted to the internship by the legislation of Latvia. Since the study field “Architecture and Construction” in the UL is represented by just one study programme, there is no difference between internships at the study field level and the study programme level. The internship in the study programme is split into three semesters that allows the study programme diversification of the contents in each separate semester. The organisational system of the internship is introduced in the whole UL, and it is flexible to consider the specific needs of each study programme or even each study semester. A good option is taking an internship in foreign institutions with the support of mobility programmes.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The circle of cooperation partners of the study field and the relevant programme is wide, and the partners are selected taking into account mutual interest, similar study and activity profiles, quality of knowledge and experience in the field of spatial planning, as well as cooperation experience in implementing joint projects. Nevertheless, they are selected from various interested parties – municipalities and state planning bodies, academic and research institutions as well as private companies from Latvia and abroad, the recognized professional bodies from the field of Architecture and Construction or their members could be more involved in the implementation of the programme. The attraction of the teaching staff is dependent on the available financial resources that due to the small size of the study field and the relevant programme cannot generally be considered sufficient. The system of the organisation of the internship is functioning overall in the whole UL, and it is flexible enough to consider the specific needs of each study programme or even each study semester.

Strengths:

1. Participation in the international and local workshops provide a wider overview of the various scales and relevant problems in spatial planning and urban development.
2. An internship can be taken in foreign institutions with the support of mobility programmes.

Weaknesses:

1. The limited size of the study field and the relevant programme that results in limited funding does not leave much space for attracting teaching staff from abroad. Otherwise, there is no information available on common vision between the study field “Architecture and Construction” and other study fields represented in the Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences in this particular issue.
2. Implementation of the study programme mainly in the Latvian language may cause the relatively low interest from mobility students for studies in the UL.
3. The comparatively low involvement of local partners from the field of Architecture and Construction in the study programme, especially, from the academic environment, may result in a narrower view towards the wide spectrum of the up-to-date problems in urban development.

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

Analysis

6.1. The previous accreditation of the study programme was performed in 2013 and led to 7 recommendations. (i-vi) Although the participation in international conferences and the number of scientific papers have increased, no specific target has been set yet and their number remains fair. Additionally, it is not clear whether these conferences are, at least partially, focused on spatial planning. To support the development of the programme, it is recommended to monitor closely the specific participation in research outcomes in the field of spatial planning. (ii-iii-iv) Regarding the library facilities, the development of the new Academic Centre has fully addressed the recommendations regarding the lack of hardware, software and well-equipped rooms. (v) The experts' concerns about the availability of funding for the future remains and is even worse since the number of state-funded seats has decreased from 2017 to 17, as expressed in Section 3.1 of this report. (vii) Regarding internationalisation, UL has concluded a cooperation agreement with KULeuven (Belgium) and Bauhaus University Weimar (Germany) and is planning to conclude a similar agreement with Klaipeda University (in Lithuania). Although this is positive, the recommendation cannot be considered as "carried out" as this is a work in progress and the programme is encouraged to continue its efforts to extend its international network.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The previous accreditation of the study programme was performed in 2013 and led to 7 recommendations that have been partially addressed.

Strengths:

1. The participation in international conferences and the number of scientific papers have increased.
2. The development of the new Academic Centre has fully addressed the recommendations regarding the lack of hardware, software and well-equipped rooms.
3. UL has concluded a cooperation agreement with KULeuven (Belgium) and Bauhaus University Weimar (Germany) and is planning to conclude a similar agreement with Klaipeda University (in Lithuania).

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient monitoring of the specific participation in research outcomes in the field of spatial planning.
2. The international network and activities are still limited.

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

UL has set out quality principles of Total quality management, has a clear methodology for evaluation of student results, has methods and principles in place for gathering feedback in order to develop the study program. Structures for approval of changes to the study fields are in place and are functioning properly. Although some shortcomings are found, especially for closure of the feedback loop, in experts' opinion, the internal quality assurance system is efficient.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The UL has set out quality principles of Total quality management, referring to the quality management methodology – EFQM (European Foundation of Quality Management) as preconditions and actions required to achieve the Quality Policy, which is openly obtainable in the UL website, as Quality Policy of the University of Latvia and Quality Action Policy of the UL. Both of the documents are an integral part of the Quality Assurance System and follow Latvian legislation, European Standards, and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and internal necessity. The UL has a system of quality assessment of study fields and study programs included therein in the UL quality management system.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The internal quality control of the study field is carried out by the directors of the study programs, the director of the study field, the dean, the faculty councils, SPQAB, and, in case of external quality assessment, the UL Senate. Collaboration between organizational structural levels for the quality system was verified in meeting with management and StF and StP directors.

- 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

Procedure for organization of examinations of study courses at the UL is set out and available publicly. It clearly sets out methods and procedures for evaluation of student results, achievable goals and outcomes.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The recruitment and selection are regulated by the 'Regulatory enactments on academic and administrative positions at the University of Latvia'. The final selection is made by the relevant body (Faculty Council or Professor Council). This procedure complies with the minimal requirements and could be further improved by involving other stakeholders or external experts, at least with an advisory role, in the selection procedure. UL has developed clear strategies and regulations for professional development. The self-evaluation report shows very active participation in scientific or specialised activities but very limited participation in pedagogical or didactical training

- 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 process of data collection and analysis of the results is performed each academic year centrally (according to The procedure for Organizing Regular Surveys for the Evaluation of the Study Process at the UL). Nevertheless, implementation of surveys and feedbacks from other external stakeholders seems to have various shortcomings, e.g. closure of feedback loop to students, graduates and employers is insufficient as has been evident throughout the on-site visit.

- 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 student survey is conducted regularly and efficiently used to improve the study field through the Annual Study Field Report.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The circle of cooperation partners of the study field and the relevant programme is wide, and the partners are selected taking into account mutual interest, yet broader participation of representatives from recognised professional bodies from the field of Architecture and Construction could improve the implementation of the study programme.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Scientific research is conducted effectively, outcomes are developed and incorporated into the study content, yet student participation in the scientific research is rather limited and often shows a lack of knowledge of ways to participate.

- 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

The shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study direction have been addressed, but in experts opinion, only partially.

8. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

Better adoption of the well-designed QA policies and processes in the “daily UL life” would significantly improve the quality culture. Furthermore, implementing the mechanisms on regular sharing of information and results with relevant stakeholders like students and teaching staff and external stakeholders like alumni and employees will open new practices for further even better achievement of the study results.

The students' involvement in scientific research is moderate. Therefore, UL should find ways of endorsing greater engagement and develop a motivation system for students' involvement in scientific research activities or stimulate students and researchers to apply for the independent research grant and funds from external funding, donors, and projects

More cooperation forms and activities with partners from the field of Architecture and Construction, especially, from the academic environment, would be essential for obtaining more diverse overlook on the up-to-date challenges in urban development processes.

Wider usage of the tools of recognition of the study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education should be used to enlarge the scope of the evaluated experience of the students in the current study process.

The Study Field is recommended to enhance the Quality culture and focus on PDCA loops.

Long-term recommendations

The scope of the international network and activities has been enhanced; however, it is still limited. Therefore, consider developing a distinct internationalization strategy that could be improved with a more clearly defined and implemented marketing plan and a mechanism for attracting more international students and teaching staff. Furthermore, enhance the participation of the academic staff in pedagogical or didactical training and international mobility programs. Also, better cooperation between the present program and other programs of the UL in the related fields would be recommended in attracting teaching staff from abroad.

Development of the strategic vision for funding and monitoring of the corresponding indicators.

Development of more study courses and other formal and non-formal study activities in the English language would be recommended to become more attractive within the incoming mobility students.

II. "Spatial Planning" ASSESSMENT

II. "Spatial Planning" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

1.1 The title of the study program, "Professional Master's Study Program in Spatial Planning follows from the professional qualification Spatial Planner and corresponds to the master's degree Professional Master's Degree in Spatial Planning obtained as a result of studies. During the interview, it was revealed that the program's name is already known within the industry environment of the region. The name of the StP corresponds to the code 47581 of the StP according to Latvian Education Classification, meaning that the first two digits `47` notes that the StP is a professional Master's program (level 7 of Latvian and European Qualification Framework). The last three digits, `581` note the StP belongs to the group of a programme in " Architecture and urban planning".

The degree to be acquired or professional qualification is a professional master's degree in Spatial Planning. The qualification to be obtained of a Spatial Planner corresponds to the program's code and title. The content of the study program and the results to be achieved are based on the new professional standard of the Spatial planner agreed at the meeting of the Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council for Vocational Education and Employment on February 6, 2019, (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-106.pdf>). However, it should be noted that there is an insufficiency of the study courses directly aimed at strengthening the understanding of the relations between people, buildings and spaces in the built environment, especially, for those students who do not have obtained this specific knowledge during their previous education.

The program is offered in a full-time studies format of 2 years in Latvian in the amount of 80 Latvian study credit points or 120 ECTS.

The aims, objectives, and learning outcomes reflect the program's scope and professional realm according to the professional standard of the Spatial Planner approved in 2019. The study outcomes (SAR, p.104 and 105).

The admission requirements have been thoroughly explained. The criteria with indicators and corresponding evaluation points, including evaluation of the outline of applicant's work experience according to the profile of the study program in points (StP SAR, p.103). Following the Enrolment rules at the University of Latvia (Regulations on Requirements, Criteria, and Procedures for Admission to Study Programs) there are approved entrance examination questions, and evaluation

criteria of the study program and are within the legal framework. Therefore, they are sound and efficient, in an administrative manner as well as academic.

The relevance between the program goals and outcomes is ensured through the internal quality assurance mechanism and procedures set in relevant documents (SAR, p.51 and chapter 1), analyzed and discussed at the end of each academic year through the Annual Study Field Report.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The interrelation of the analyzed StP - name, degree, professional qualification, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements - is vital, resulting from the focused reflection from the previous accreditation recommendations and the alertness of their content-wise importance.

Strengths:

1. The aims, objectives (goal, tasks) are strongly linked with the ViA Development strategy priorities.
2. Learning outcomes are formulated in the student-centred approach according to the conventional best practices, integrated into the study courses' various teaching and assessment methods, and mapped against the study courses' results.
3. Program's name is already known within the industry and academic environment of the region.

Weaknesses:

1. While the StP can be developed under the StF of 'Architecture and Construction,' there is an insufficient correlation between the StF name, contents of the StP and the major profile of the Faculty (Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences) it belongs to.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.1. The master's degree in Spatial Planning is a two-year full-time programme (120 ECTS or 80 Latvian credit points, LCP). It is divided into 30 ECTS/20 LCP (25%) of compulsory subjects, 15 ECTS/10 LCP (13%) of restricted electives, 6 ECTS/4 LCP (5%) of free electives, 39 ECTS/26 LCP (32%) of practice and 30 ECTS/20 LCP (25%) for the master's thesis. The programme structure is relevant. In 2020/2021, the programme has been reviewed and new courses have been designed and developed to reflect contemporary trends and challenges: Community Planning and Regeneration (15 ECTS/10 LCP, English-taught), Principles of Spatial Planning (12 ECTS/8 LCP) and Spatial Analysis and Modelling Methods (6 ECTS/4 LCP). The content of the programme is relevant and compliant with the professional standard. The programme structure is relevant and the description of the study courses, placement and final thesis complies with the regulatory enactments. It certainly provides spatial planners for state and local governmental institutions. It is less clear for international institutions, although some students managed to find placements there. The master programme is very well-sequenced and it is very positive to gradually develop the final thesis, starting in the second semester. However, it should be noted that there is an insufficiency of the study courses directly aimed at strengthening the understanding of the relations between people, buildings and spaces in the built environment, especially, for those students who do not have obtained this specific knowledge during their previous education.

2.2. The course descriptions have been provided and are detailing the expected aspects. The assessment methods are detailed and offer an appropriate set of exams, assignments, individual or team projects. They are related to course learning outcomes. The number of course learning outcomes is, however, often too high to be addressed and managed. Too much emphasis is put on knowledge with verbs like understand, describe, etc. which are too low-level for a master's degree.

The programme is recommended to limit the number of course learning outcomes and phrase them with active verbs and clear context. Overall, the number of student-centred activities is adequate for this field. The link to the research is mostly developed during the master's thesis and the programme is encouraged to expose the students to the research earlier to develop corresponding skills and be able to participate in the debates in the field. A very important aspect of the programme is the internship which is jointly assessed by the site and LU supervisors.

2.3. The surveys are adequately collected among the students, employers and graduates.

How the students are feeling prepared for the labour market has remained stable in the recent surveys (about 65% of the student agree or strongly agree). This means that about one third of the students do not feel prepared, or are uncertain about it, and this is insufficiently analysed or complemented by interviews to identify the possible causes.

The Quality culture, particularly the importance of PDCA loops, is not yet fully developed in the programme. Nevertheless, the Panel found some evidence that the surveys have supported recent changes in the programme, which is positive.

2.4. Regarding outgoing mobility, the programme is facing a major obstacle since most of the students are already working preventing them to go abroad for long period. This has been confirmed by the students who are well aware of the mobility opportunities. The programme has positively developed some activities for internationalisation at home, like inviting foreign lecturers or developing courses and activities in English. This is positive and the programme is encouraged to pursue their effort in this direction. Some students take the opportunity of the internship for an international experience, which is positive as well.

There are, for the moment, no incoming students. The reason, according to the self-evaluation report, is the language of teaching. Beyond the development of courses in English, the programme may wish to develop a strategic partnership in the Baltic area to attract regional students and increase the international exposure of their students.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The master's degree in Spatial Planning is a two-year full-time programme (120 ECTS) and the programme structure is relevant. In 2020/2021, the programme has been reviewed and new courses have been designed and developed to reflect contemporary trends and challenges. The content of the programme is relevant and compliant with the professional standard. It certainly provides spatial planners for state and local governmental institutions. The course descriptions have been provided and are detailing the expected aspects. The assessment methods are detailed and offer an appropriate set of exams, assignments, individual or team projects. They are related to course learning outcomes. The link to the research is mostly developed during the master's thesis. The satisfaction of the employers is high and this has been confirmed during the interviews. The satisfaction of the students has significantly decreased during the last period. The programme has positively developed some activities for internationalisation at home, like inviting foreign lecturers or developing courses and activities in English.

Strengths:

1. In 2020/2021, the programme has been reviewed and new courses have been designed and developed to reflect contemporary trends and challenges.
2. The master programme is very well-sequenced and it is very positive to gradually develop the master's thesis, starting in the second semester.
3. A very important aspect of the programme is the internship which is jointly assessed by the site and LU supervisors.
4. The satisfaction of the employers is high.

Weaknesses:

1. The number of course learning outcomes is often too high to be addressed and managed. Too much emphasis is put on knowledge with verbs like understand, describe, etc. which are too low-level for a master's degree.
2. The Quality culture, particularly the importance of PDCA loops, is not yet fully developed in the programme.
3. Weak international attractiveness and limited international exposure of home students.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

3.1. As explained for the Study Field, the study provisions are very satisfactory. In particular, the spatial data available in the FGES Map Browser is an important teaching and research tool. This covers 60% of the Latvian territory and is quite unique.

3.2. Not applicable.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

As explained for the Study Field, the study provisions are very satisfactory. In particular, the spatial data available in the FGES Map Browser is an important teaching and research tool. This covers 60% of the Latvian territory and is quite unique.

Strengths:

The spatial data available in the FGES Map Browser covers 60% of the Latvian territory and is quite unique.

Weaknesses:

None.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

4.1. The composition of the teaching staff of the study programme is aimed at competence on the one hand and a purposeful and gradual renewal on the other. The change of the teaching staff is based on gaining a long-term positive effect on the implementation of the study programme. There is evidence that during the previous accreditation period gradual changes of the lecturers have taken place; including involvement in the programme of the present and former PhD students of the UL Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences. Qualitative growth of the involved teaching staff has occurred – several young lecturers have been preparing for the defence of their doctoral theses; among them the graduates from the programme. Young doctors working for other HEI return to the programme as supervisors of master theses.

4.2. There is a very high number of teaching staff in the programme holding PhD degrees. Most of them hold a doctoral degree in geography and geology; one of them in architecture, one in engineering and one in law. It is expected that the number of lecturers with a doctoral degree in the programme will increase by two more in the next one or two years. The quality of studies is ensured by the active participation of the academic staff in scientific research, academic and applied research projects, including the involvement of students in the implementation of projects and professional activities. The professional activity of the academic staff ensures the accumulation of the latest global and sectoral policies, knowledge, and experience, and transfer of that knowledge

and experience to students. However, considering that the qualifications and research experience of the majority of the teachers are focused on geography and environmental sciences, there is a risk that the program provides an asymmetric amount of information and training skills in geography and environmental sciences compared to architecture and construction, especially for those students who have not had obtained the previous experience in that particular field.

4.3. N/a.

4.4. The academic staff provides an active research practice and disseminates the research outcomes at conferences, workshops and congresses. However, as stated by the report, the thematic research directions cover various sub-branches of geography and environmental science rather than architecture and construction.

4.5. A recognizable cooperation developed between the teaching staff not only from the UL but also other HEI from Latvia and abroad promotes a high-quality study process and effective exchange of knowledge. The cooperation of the teaching staff is facilitated by the management team of the study programme based on regular meetings in person or online communication. The issues of the study process are discussed in individual negotiations and are periodically reviewed by the council of the study field. Besides, some study courses are shared between several study programmes of the faculty, and students work in interdisciplinary working groups.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

There exists some consequence in the composition of the teaching staff and a purposeful and gradual renewal of it in the programme. A promising resource for the future changes in the academic staff is the graduates from the programme who return to the UL after getting their PhD degrees. A very high number of the teaching staff in the programme holding the PhD degrees provide a valuable intellectual potential to the study programme, however, there is a misbalance in the teachers holding PhD in geography and environmental sciences and those in architecture and construction.

Strengths:

1. A very high number of the teaching staff in the programme holding PhD degrees provide a valuable intellectual potential to the study programme.
2. Involvement of young teachers in the study programme makes it more attractive for the students.
3. The developed cooperation links of the study programme with other study programmes within the UL and outside it provides good options for students and teachers in the development of common study work as well as research and creative activities.

Weaknesses:

1. The misbalance in the teachers holding PhD in geography and environmental sciences and those in architecture and construction may result in future weakening of the links between the contents of the study programme and the topical issues in the field of architecture and construction
2. Attraction of the former graduates from the programme in the positions of young teachers may increase the risk of decreasing the focus of the programme on the field of architecture and construction.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Spatial Planning"

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: Partially compliant

The sample of the diploma provided by the Self-evaluation report (SAR) (StP Annex 3.9.2_3.9.3_Diploma and diploma supplement.docx) is slightly different from the regulations on Latvian state-recognized issuance of higher education documents (Cabinet Regulation No. 202 of 16.04.2013, <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=256157>): 1) There is no Page 1 of the diploma as shown in Cab. Reg. No. 202; Page 2 of the diploma differs from the information layout approved in the regulations of the Cab. Reg. No. 202; 2) Diploma Supplement 3.3. point "Admission Requirements" is displayed as "Access 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

Document signed by the Rector on the possibility to continue studies in the study program "Geography" of the study direction "Geography and Earth Sciences" of the University of Latvia is attached to the SAR (StP Annex 3.9.6_Rector certification for study continuation in other program.docx). The requirement is fulfilled, however, taking into account that the study program of geography represents another study field, as an alternative to continuing studies it would be desirable to offer a suitable study program in the field of study "Architecture and Construction" at another university, thus providing students with appropriate professional qualification.

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

Document signed by the Rector confirming that the University of Latvia will reimburse the losses in the amount of the tuition fees paid if the study program "Spatial Planning" of the study direction "Architecture and Construction" will not be accredited or the license will be annulled is attached to the SAR (StP Annex 3.9.7_Rector certification about compensation.docx).

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

Certification by the head of the study direction confirming the State language proficiency of the academic personnel involved in the implementation of the study programme "Spatial Planning" is attached to the SAR. (StP Annex 3.9.4_Certification by the head of the direction about Latvian language skills.docx)

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

Certification by the head of the study direction confirming that all teaching staff implemented in Study Programme realization have at least B2 level knowledge of English is attached to the SAR. (StP Annex 3.9.5_Cerification by the head of the direction about English language skills.docx)

- 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

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

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 study agreement complies with the requirements of the Cabinet Regulation No. 70 of 23.01.2007 "Regulations to be Included in the Study Agreement".

(<https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=152072>) (StP Annex 1_Studiju_līguma_forma_kons_30.06.2021.doc; 2_Studiju_līguma_forma_kons_30.06.2021.doc)

- 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

Study course descriptions comply with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education. (StP Annex 3.6_COURSE DESCRIPTIONS Eng.docx, 3.2_Study plan.docx). However, the scope and focus of course learning outcomes could be improved.

- 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

Document confirming that the study programme is in compliance with the valid professional qualification (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-106.pdf>) can be found in the StP Annex 3.4_Compliance with the professional standard.docx.

- 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

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

The confirmation of the study program's compliance with the State Professional Higher Education Standard (Cabinet Regulation No. 512 of 26.08.2014., <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=268761>) can be found in the StP Annex 3.3_Compliance with the state education standard RCM ENG p.docx.

- 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

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

Referring to SAR teaching staff publications (Annex 2.6 Teaching staff publ proj conf.docx) and CV's (Annex 2.4_CV.pdf), each member of the teaching staff has either relevant and up to date publications or at least 5 years experience of practical work in the field unrelated to implementation of the StP.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The study program almost fully complies with the legal requirements specified in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments. It is necessary to ensure full compliance of the diploma sample with the requirements of Cabinet Regulation No 202. It is recommended to improve the scope and focus of the course results. It is also recommended to look for an opportunity for students to continue their studies in the study program of the study field "Architecture and Construction" if this StP is closed.

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 provisions are very satisfactory. In particular, the spatial data available in the FGES Map Browser is an important teaching and research tool. This covers 60% of the Latvian territory and is quite unique.

- 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 level of the academic staff is very high - more than half of the teaching staff have a doctoral degree, 3 professors and 5 associate professors are involved in the provision of the program. All teaching staff complies with the conditions of the study program implementation and the requirements of regulatory enactments.

- 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: Partially compliant

The content of the study program reflects modern trends and challenges in the field of spatial planning. However, the qualifications and research experience of the academic staff are mainly focused on geography and environmental sciences, so there is a risk that the program provides an asymmetric amount of information and training skills in geography and environmental sciences compared to architecture and construction.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The content of the study program complies with the requirements of regulatory enactments and the standard of the profession and is relevant and required. Highly-qualified academic staff is attracted to the implementation of the study program, which develops active scientific and research activities or are experienced professionals in its field. Learning outcomes are formulated in a student-centred approach following generally accepted good practice, integrated into the various learning and assessment methods of the study course, and proportionate to the learning course outcomes. The management of the study program ensures internal communication within the study program, however, the application of the internal quality assurance system of the program still could be improved. The study program develops cooperation with other study programs at the UL as well as international cooperation.

Strengths:

1. Very good technical and informative provision of studies.
2. A well-thought-out study plan that ensures the gradual development of a master's thesis, while ensuring a strong emphasis on the acquisition of practical knowledge and internship.
3. Highly-qualified academic staff that provides active research practice and involves students in research.

Weaknesses:

1. An asymmetrically high proportion of teachers representing the field of geography and environmental sciences, which can potentially weaken the link between the content of the study program and current events in the field of architecture and construction.
2. Limited student international mobility is affected by student employment.

Evaluation of the study programme "Spatial Planning"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Spatial Planning"

Short-term recommendations

It would be necessary to ensure compliance of the diploma sample with the Cabinet Regulation No. 202 requirements.

The programme is recommended to review study courses regarding a consistent, state of the art use of learning taxonomies and the use of active verbs to emphasize critical thinking and analytical skills that define learning outcomes, reduce the number of learning outcomes and formulate them in a clear context, and clarify their content and context.

To attract academic staff representing the field of architecture and construction to reduce the dominance of geography and environmental science sub-sectors among the teaching staff of the study program and to strengthen the links between the content of the study program and current events in the field of architecture and construction.

Long-term recommendations

Renew the academic staff to ensure the balance between teachers of geography and environmental sciences and architecture and construction.

Considering the small size of the study programme and the perceived lack of funding, it is recommended to develop a strategic vision for funding and closely monitor corresponding indicators.

To support the development of the programme, it is recommended to monitor closely the specific participation in research outcomes in the field of spatial planning.

It is recommended to look for an opportunity to conclude an agreement on the transfer of students to the study program of the study field "Architecture and Construction" at another university if the existing program is terminated.

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

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

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
<p>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:</p>	Fully compliant		<p>UL has set out quality principles of Total quality management, has a clear methodology for evaluation of student results, has methods and principles in place for gathering feedback in order to develop the study program. Structures for approval of changes to the study fields are in place and are functioning properly. Although some shortcomings are found, especially for closure of the feedback loop, in experts' opinion, the internal quality assurance system is efficient.</p>
<p>R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.</p>		Partially compliant	<p>The circle of cooperation partners of the study field and the relevant programme is wide, and the partners are selected taking into account mutual interest, yet broader participation of representatives from recognised professional bodies from the field of Architecture and Construction could improve the implementation of the study programme.</p>
<p>R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).</p>	Fully compliant		<p>Scientific research is conducted effectively, outcomes are developed and incorporated into the study content, yet student participation in the scientific research is rather limited and often shows a lack of knowledge of ways to participate.</p>
<p>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.</p>		Partially compliant	<p>The shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study direction have been addressed, but in experts opinion, only partially.</p>

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	Spatial Planning (47581)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

None.