

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

Study field: Management, Administration and Management of Real Property

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Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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Concluding the analysis of the study field, experts did not identify any deficiencies, which cannot be eliminated in two years' time. Overall, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA) and its managed study field "Management, Administration and Management of Real Property" (StF) under review with its 3 consecutively levelled programs pays strict attention and mostly or fully ensures the compliance of legal requirements and shows good management and quality assurance practices. Experts have also identified several necessary and recommended improvements.

The major positive aspects of the study field and its programmes are: Overall good management and clear organizational, administrative management structure and processes in a flexible, fast to adapt dynamics of "micro-university" (term used by the higher management team of ViA), which includes strong, internally cooperative team of enthusiastic and qualified academic and administrative staff. Good cooperation and team spirit among teachers on all level programmes. Teaching staff shows enthusiasm and clear awareness of necessity to combine academic and scientific work (classes and researches) as well as emphasizes the external business environment proximity to study process and contents, e.g. via internships, guest-lectures, ViA Business incubator, ViA SmartLab, BisNet and other instruments. Students, Graduates, Teachers, Employers are all referring positively about the programs and ViA, are loyal, empathic, satisfied and can name examples of content-wise involvement of the StF quality assurance and improvement. Flexible realistic approach of teachers within the applied science dimension to offer students' knowledge and practical skills (opportunities) from professional lives - e.g. Bachelor and Master research based in actual companies or on actual case studies, or in ViA HESPI as part of a bigger scientific research. Research at ViA is close to StF study process and its programs - teachers are involved in research thus bringing the contents into study plan courses. Good financial and scientific contents regional impact and outcomes are visible. External projects (e.g. SAM 8.2.2 Project on teachers teaching - professional and personal competence; another project active at ViA - teachers internships, information exchange clubs) are also used to contribute to high quality professional studies and scientific outcomes. Visibly positive impact of ViA in regional development - economic, scientific, business culture. Experts also noted what ViA higher management refers to as "start-up thinking", and experts call it "brave innovative experiments", e.g. study finances system of 1st semester students; funds for Belorussian and Ukrainian students to study in ViA, and other. Marketing of the StF cooperates well with StP directors, students and graduates, e.g. graduates as ambassadors go to secondary school. ViA shows good student-centred approach, individual approach in study process and course materials, sufficient technical resources and infrastructure is available for all students from all levels, as well as involvement in scientific research. Students also are involved in various management structures (e.g. StF Council) within elected places and have the chance to shape the study process.

The few major weaker points and current best practices to consider followed by recommendations relate to: Information exchange among major groups - StP directors, StF director, ViA management, teachers - as some misinformation were detected during the visit (e.g. on annual course audits to avoid overlap, the perception of profession standard, ScienceLatvia and other data collection methods in use). Study Quality Assurance Policy is rather an ongoing monitoring process and quality is ensured through different check-up systems thus would benefit to be updated combining other check-up systems and new aspects e.g., on distance learning principles and the idea of Master and Bachelor topics to come from entrepreneurs as of next year. Regulation on election to academic positions document from 2007 needs to be updated. Course evaluations collection, analysis and feedback is not up to its potential. ViA would benefit if cooperation with employers would not only be in actual implementation of studies (guest-lectures, internships), but also higher in quality assurance and possible improvement planning. As in many universities the opportunity to initiate activities

within the Alumni Association (similar to employers movement) would be beneficial – they are a very valuable source, e.g. graduates do not confirm annual surveys by university. Some course e-studies material structure is too broad and hectic at times, should be more concise and organized (the course page). Possibly some central instruction to standardize e-studies as part of updates in Study Quality Assurance Policy would be in place. Although extracurricular activities are well developed, their interaction with the study process could be formalized, institutionalized. Also, consideration of the involvement of students in the organizational part of extracurricular labs and projects would make StF programmes even more attractive to employers. The DStP seems to be very well nurtured in many aspects there are few risks naturally present to new programs and yet hard to evaluate (e.g., staff qualification and expertise fields, scientific depth level of the focused field of science). As in many universities student and teacher international mobility is a place for improvement, too.

1. Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1

The aims of the study field (StF) are clearly and strongly linked to Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA) Development strategy 2016-2020 with 3 major strategic aims / priorities - 1) education, 2) science and 3) knowledge transfer and idea leadership. ViA emphasizes and shows clear awareness and active participation also in the development of the region, both strategically - linking the ViA Development Strategy to the National Sustainable Development Strategy of Vidzeme Planning Region for 2030 (p.20 of Self-Assessment Report (SAR), and also functionally - by providing the 2 professional higher education and 1 doctoral programmes in the region and closely cooperating with local municipality and its derived entities and NGOs working in the area of entrepreneurial support, including through the cooperation with ViA Knowledge and Technology Center and its SmartLabs, ViA Institute of social, Economic and Humanities Research (HESPI), a.o.

The goal of the professional Bachelor's study programme (PBStP) Business Administration is to provide training of highly qualified business administration specialists – company managers – capable of working in accordance with sustainable economic development tendencies and the changing global business environment.

The goal of the professional Master's study programme (PMStP) Business Environment Administration is to prepare highly qualified business executives – managers of organizations – for governmental, public and private sectors whose theoretical knowledge, skills and competences meet the requirements of today's labour market and the world-recognized standard of professional Master of Business Administration and who are able to lead the organization in changing global environment.

The goal of the joint doctoral study programme Economics and Business is to prepare highly qualified experts (specialists) and researchers, who are able to create new knowledge in the field.

The aims of the StF are well structured, gradually cascaded through the respective study programmes, strongly linked to ViA and national development strategies, shows clear awareness of the necessary linkage to labour market and entrepreneurial business environment and are proved to be attainable.

The compliance of the StF aims with strategic development in accordance with the ViA Development Strategy 2016-2020 (SAR, p.5., <https://va.lv/lv/par-via/dokumenti>;, p.24 https://va.lv/sites/default/files/Strategy_2016-2020.pdf) with its 3 major strategic aims / priorities - 1) education, 2) science and 3) knowledge transfer and idea leadership is clearly and visibly present in all of the 3 study programmes. The aims of the StF are strongly linked to, fully incorporated in and are an integral inalienable part of the ViA strategic priorities thus contributing highly to the achievement of these priorities. The Strategic Advisory Board of ViA in cooperation with the

Convention of Advisers is working on the development of the new higher education institution's strategy for 2021-2025, in the process of which a new development plan of the StF is elaborated in accordance with the newly defined goals for strategic priorities (SAR, p.27).

The StF and its programmes are in high compliance with the development trends of the society and national economy. This is again ensured by strong linkage between StF and ViA strategic priorities as well as by strong cooperation with the derived municipal entities, labour market companies (https://ztc.va.lv/en/cooperation_partners) and the strong involvement of the StF programmes in ViA applied and scientific projects and entities namely HESPI, Knowledge and Technology Center and its SmartLabs.

1.2

The structure of the ViA management and administration is clearly levelled and with well distributed roles facilitating its orientation toward continuous improvement of the study programmes (StPs). At the same time ViA positively and justifiably refers to itself as "flexible micro-administration" allowing all administrative management and academic structures and personnel to be involved in operative discussion and efficient decision-taking through weekly and monthly management meetings (SAR, p.6; Annex 3 - ViA Structure; Annex 6 - The management scheme of the StF). Furthermore, there is a visible student-centered approach also in the management and administration of the StF as the students' board is involved in the management discussions and decision-making. The contents development and the practical implementation of the StPs are well supported by administrative and technical structural units such as HR, Marketing, IT, International Relations, Finances, Library. The structure corresponds also to the strategy of ViA, including its current revision and development for the next period 2021-2025. The working environment and positive joint micro-climate ensures further implementation and development of the StF. At the same time, during the visit at ViA experts detected a slight misinformation among major groups involved - StP directors, StF director, ViA management, and teaching staff - including on the topics related to quality assurance of the StPs (e.g. course and their description audits (annual updates); the relevance of the professions' standards; study results mapping of the study programmes, usage of ScienceLatvia database and further collection of studies and science information from teaching staff). Given the efficient characteristics of the StF management process mentioned above, experts believe that slightly stronger cooperation in information exchange and management among all, particularly StP directors and teaching staff will open also new best practices to improve the achievement of study results. Overall, the experts group noted very good team spirit and motivation, loyal internal micro-climate of all major groups, including students and teaching staff, on all level programmes - each group referred expressly positively to one another, showing efficient internal information exchange and management, including on the realistic approach and adaptation to business environment trends through study process (e.g. strong industry cooperation) and research.

1.3

The procedures for the admission of students (SAR, Annexes 7 - 7P-DREU_ViA_VeA_RTA_Admission-regulation-to-EB_2020-2021_APST_28022020-ENG; 7P-Admission-regulation_2020-2021_APST-30102019-ENG), the recognition of the study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education (SAR, Annex 8 - 8P-Study-results-recognition-regulations-APPROVED-28082019), as well as for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students (SAR, Annex 5 - 5P-ViA_Studiju-kvalitates-nodrosinasanas-politika-APST-31012020-ENG) correspond fully to the legal requirements, are logical and efficient, and supplemented with the necessary legal internal documentation and forms - both, administrative and academic.

1.4

The academic integrity principles and mechanisms are well defined and sufficiently met (SAR, p.32; p.112) and is guided by a "Regulation of Ethics" and "Ethical Infringement Procedure Scheme" (SAR,

Annex 10). Academic integrity is also strengthened through study courses - introductory studies as well as courses "Research Methodology" and "Business Ethics". SAR mentions also that each study course description contains a reference to the principles of academic ethics (p.34). Experts ascertained that each study course description contains a section "Abiding by the Academic Ethics" with criteria on academic and research ethics. Academic integrity system is technically facilitated through Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System, one of ViA's essential anti-plagiarism tools, together with the University of Latvia. Academic integrity culture is also fostered through the ViA study process and scientific cooperation with other higher education institutions and partners in Latvian and internationally. Also, during the visit to the ViA, particularly visit to the ViA Library, experts were shown how the diploma works are run against the anti-plagiarism system upon they are submitted.

1.5

The information provided by ViA publicly on their homepage (<https://va.lv/lv>) is available in Latvian and English, and is fully sufficient for attracting potential students, and fully covers the planned target audience of the StPs implemented. The information complies with the information available in the official registers. ViA is a well known and highly recognized higher education institution within the region, and visibly promotes the recognizability and its prestige through smart integrated marketing communication, including on its homepage.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions: The aims of the StF are well structured, gradually cascaded through the respective StPs, strongly linked to ViA and national development strategies, shows clear awareness of the necessary linkage to labour market and entrepreneurial business environment and are proved to be attainable (1). The structure and the management process is efficient with "flexible micro-administration" allowing all administrative management and academic structures and personnel to be involved in operative discussion and efficient decision-taking through weekly and monthly management meetings, however communication and information exchange with the teaching staff needs to be slightly strengthened (2). The academic procedures correspond fully to the legal requirements, are logical and efficient, and supplemented with the necessary legal internal documentation (3). The academic integrity and ethics principles are well established, legally set and effectively used (4). The information published on the website is elaborate, detailed, full-fledged (5).

Strengths

1. Strong linkage between StF aims and ViA Development Strategy.
2. Efficient, all-involving and flexible micro-administration, management and the decision-making of the StF.
3. Fully integral support of administrative and technical structural units to the contents development and the practical implementation of the StPs.
4. High recognition of ViA and their positive impact within the region.
5. Overall very good team spirit and internal micro-climate of all major groups, including students and teaching staff, on all level programmes and thus realistic approach to business environment trends.

Weaknesses.

1. Slight misinformation among major groups involved - StP directors, StF director, ViA management, and particularly teaching staff - including on the topics related to quality assurance of the StPs (e.g. course and their description audits (annual updates); the relevance of the professions' standards; study results mapping of the StPs, usage of ScienceLatvia database and further collection of studies

and science information from teaching staff).

2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

2.1

ViA has established a quality policy which is publicly available at ViA homepage. The system is in compliance with external and internal laws and regulations governing higher education, as well as ViA strategy.

The quality assurance system establishes procedures for:

- 1) Study quality assurance policy and its implementation processes;
- 2) Development, approval and updating of the StPs and their components;
- 3) Student-centered teaching, learning and assessment;
- 4) Matriculation of students, study process, recognition of qualifications and certification;
- 5) Quality assurance and assessment of the work of the teaching staff;
- 6) Resources of academic work and research, support for students;
- 7) Information management;
- 8) Information to the public;
- 9) Programme monitoring and periodical review (for instance new challenges are overlooked every year and ViA is now planning on how to extend and adapt quality procedures to eLearning).

Procedures and regulations are coherent and orientated to continuous improvement and development. Also, faculty is highly involved with the quality of the StF. The faculty council decides once a month on topical issues regarding the StF and the development of the StF is assessed every year during the development and discussion of the SAR both within the StF at the faculty level and also in the ViA Senate. Cooperation between organizational structural levels for the quality system was evidenced in meeting with management and meeting with StF and StP directors.

2.2

ViA has developed a procedure for the development, approval and supervision of the StPs (Study Quality Assurance Policy of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Annex 2), where procedures are established for: Initiation of the StPs and proceeding with their development; Development of the draft StPs; Approval of the director of the study field or StP; Study course descriptions and their updating; and Assessment of the StP implementation quality/Assessment and updating of the StP content.

Quality procedures comply with regulatory standards, are logical and inclusive of students, teaching staff, graduates, and employers. Also, in 2018 ViA approved an order "Regarding establishing advisory councils of the StPs and self-assessment report work groups". Also during the visit experts assured that ViA pays focused attention to Study Quality Assurance Policy supplementing it with adjusted instructions, guidelines for ensuring a high quality study process.

2.3

A process of data collection and processing of results is defined. Nevertheless, implementation of the procedures seems to have various deficiencies.

On the one hand, ViA struggles to get students to answer course surveys (meeting with students and SAR, p.43). Also meeting with StF and StP directors showed difficulties in collecting information from teaching staff in the SAR development process as they often underestimate extra-academic activities.

On the other hand, ViA needs to improve the dissemination mechanisms regarding communication of results. Meeting with management, teaching staff and StF and StP directors showed gaps of information exchange in areas like course audits, results mapping, among others. Also, students

stated during the meeting that they don't have formal feedback regarding surveys results or changes that come from their feedback through surveys.

2.4

ViA has specified the standards set forth in Part 1 of the ESG. ViA recognizes need for improvement in some standards and shows measures for challenges except for Standard 1.6 "Study resources and student support" where ViA identifies the lack of access to the necessary databases of academic scientific publications due to limited ViA budget (SAR, p.43), but doesn't present aims or measures to deal with this challenge.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions :

ViA has developed a Quality Assurance System oriented to continuous improvement of the relevant StPs. Procedures and regulations cover all relevant dimensions of a quality system. ViA faces some difficulties regarding system implementation, namely in collecting feedback from students and in disseminating information through main stakeholders.

Strengths:

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

Weaknesses:

1. Difficulties in motivating the teaching staff to provide detailed information relevant for quality assessment.
2. Lack of efficacy in the model implemented to get feedback from students.
3. Deficiencies in procedures to share information and results with relevant stakeholders like students and teaching staff.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

There is an established and controlled budget for the StF in ViA, separating financial resources for the implementation of the StPs and research activities (Annex 11). The research budget is not divided by the StFs, but is directed to scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned work. This makes it difficult to assess the exact amount of resources dedicated to this particular StF, however it must be admitted that during the onsite visit it was mentioned that ViA is among three leading universities in acquiring financial resources for research activities.

Each faculty every year defines their financial needs for the following year and those requirements are openly discussed and agreed in administration, StP directors and teaching staff meetings. From the joined university budget, each faculty gets a percentage specifically for development and can be used according to current programme needs (new courses, materials, etc).

ViA has two buildings in Valmiera, where 2387 m², 38 lecture rooms, including 3 computer classrooms and 12 laboratories are dedicated for the study process for all StFs (SAR, p.45). The resources are not allocated specifically for any of the StFs but effectively shared among them and available for all level students. There are available rooms for group work.

Library is shared between the ViA and the city, which provides greater effectiveness of resource usage and also allows students to broaden their spheres of interests. Every year, following requests from teaching staff, new book titles are purchased and databases bought, if necessary and affordable. During the last three reporting years ViA has invested more than 19 thousand EUR for purchasing of new books, periodicals and electronic documents, which helps to maintain information

resources up to date (SAR, Annex 11). The books are also cross checked within the available databases and, therefore, a percentage of them are also available in the digital environment. However, during the onsite visit it was discovered that there is minor risk for inconsistency between expectations from teaching staff and deliverables from library side, therefore the procedure of selection of necessary resources could be elaborated and formalized.

There are different online databases available, both in Latvian and English, for electronic material search, including full text databases like EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science and others (SAR, p.47). There is cooperation with Latvian National library, where access to their databases is available. Library management is responsible for availability of those databases, but the IT department is helpful to make them accessible. During the year 2020 and Covid-19 pandemic period, with the help of IT department databases were made available remotely. Neither students nor teaching staff complained about missing databases, however it was mentioned from the StPs` directors that higher amounts of financial resources would help to extend the list or improve the quality.

The teaching staff is attractive and active, there is a good balance between academic and practical experience. ViA has a procedure for election to academic positions (Annex 12), however it was approved in 2007 and could be considered for revision. In general procedure is well elaborated, but, for example, it is stated there that the vacant academic position is announced in the Latvian press, not mentioning other contemporary possibilities. The procedure is related to academic staff, it might be considered to add a chapter or introduce a separate formal procedure for recruiting other teaching staff. It has to be admitted that participation of professional guest lecturers with high reputation shows ViA ability to attract talented teaching staff.

ViA participates in SAM 8.2.2. project, which is dedicated to help for professional and didactic development. During the onsite visit it was discovered that teaching staff participate in professional development activities, participate in each other's lectures, thus sharing experience and finding room for improvements.

The workload of teaching staff between academic and research work is balanced, however it is difficult to determine the exact amount since it varies in different time periods and from involvement in different projects. The targeted division of workload is: 40% for academic activity, 40% research activity and 20% for administrative work. The teaching staff remuneration system provides financial benefits for participation in each direction; monthly salary consists of remuneration for academic work, research performed, work on the examination commissions and other activities (Annex 13).

The teaching staff participates in outgoing mobility (15 visits during the last five reported years, financed from Erasmus+ programme) and there is incoming mobility for guest lecturers and administrative staff (22 visits during the last five reported years, financed from Erasmus+ programme, Valmiera municipality and SAM 8.2.2. programme) (Annex 17). In outgoing activities only few teachers participate, therefore it is suggested to encourage also other members of the teaching staff to take part in Erasmus+ or other programmes.

Students, teaching staff and administration are using LAIS for study administration purposes and Moodle system for e-learning environment, which supports the overall study management process (SAR, p.9). ViA uses Webex platform for e-learning and distance learning processes, therefore the transition to remote learning process due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation in year 2020 was smooth and without interruptions.

StPs directors are available for student's questions and problem solving, teachers are helpful, accessible. The support system is established and well functioning, there is a well used advantage of a comparably smaller number of students in the study field. During the visit in the discussion with the management experts ascertained, as it is also stated in ViA web page (<https://va.lv/lv/toposajiem-studentiem/uznemsana-2020>), that there is established system for higher amount of state budget subsidized study places for first year first semester students. This approach needs to be examined at later stages and information about it should be well presented in

order to avoid any misunderstandings.

There is an established discount system for future and existing students, as well a special support system for students from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia (<https://va.lv/lv/toposajiem-studentiem/studiju-maksas-atlaides>).

There is available funding for student`s self-government activities (SAR, Annex 11).

Experts' attention was caught by the remark in SAR (p.43) "Serious challenges are related to Standard 1.6 "Study resources and student support" – both students and lecturers do not have sufficient access to the necessary databases of academic scientific publications due to limited ViA budget.". Experts did not find this as a major issue however.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions :

The StF has established a financial provision system with a good amount of budget for research activities. There is sufficient technical infrastructure and resources to support a qualitative learning process, including remote learning possibilities.

Strengths:

1. Well organized overall system of acquiring funding for research activities for ViA.
2. Facilities and other infrastructural resources are modern and sufficient.
3. The teaching staff is developing their professional and didactic competences, participating in SAM 8.2.2. project.
4. Support system for students is effective and responsive.

Weaknesses:

1. The budget for research activities is not divided between StFs nor programmes, therefore it is not possible to determine financial outcomes of each StF.
2. There is a risk and possibility of inconsistency in provision of informational materials between expectations from teaching staff and deliverables from the library side.
3. The procedure for election to academic positions is outdated; there is no formal procedure for attraction of talented teaching staff.

4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

4.1

ViA was established in 1996 and acquired the status of a scientific institution in 2015 (SAR, p.54). The StP are connected with the research activities run by the ViA: economics and business. There is a noticeable quite high research effort of the ViA in the field of the environment which is especially relevant to the Master Programme.

The joint doctoral programme was started in 2020/2021 and it is delivered together with Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeA) and Rēzekne Academy of Technologies (RTA). Together there are 21 lecturers involved – 8 of them are from ViA.

Scientific and applied research areas clearly and visibly relate to the strategic and development aims of ViA (see more analysis in the Chapter 1 of the Report) and are also well integrated in the ViA participation in regional development in cooperation with other municipal and industry partner institutions. E.g. students for the doctoral program are attracted specifically related to the international scientific research projects of ViA. Also, students of the master program conduct research within ViA international scientific research projects.

4.2

The teaching staff involved in research in business and economy at ViA has a quite high domestic recognition. The BA direction is mostly equipped by the staff from the Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research (HESPI) which is coherent with the delivered programme (SAR, p.55). Lecturers transfer their research experience into lectures. Based on the visit, it was visible the high engagement of the teaching staff and positive approach for designing activities involving students to research. Students have a positive opinion about the teaching staff and they see the practical and science approach of the staff - it is adjusted to type of courses. The basic courses are delivered by the teaching staff with more academic background, the more advanced courses are delivered by the staff with professional experience.

4.3

There is research conducted with foreign partners. SAR lists quite a big number of international projects where the teaching staff was involved. At the same time, international cooperation is recognized by ViA as an important direction for further development. ViA declares that cooperation intensity in science could be higher (SAR, p.59). Running project "Support for Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences Effective Involvement in International Science Circulation (ViA-Int) should be good leverage for incrementing international activeness of the teaching staff. During the visit it was visible that the teaching staff is diverse. The meeting with the teaching staff showed the international approach of the staff, for example in the meeting it has participated a guest teacher from Croatia.

4.4

ViA is successfully developing its mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research. Main activities are run at HESPI level. During the accreditation period (2014-2020) 3 lecturers defended their doctoral thesis. There are 4 planned defenses in the 2021 year. Lecturers are engaged in many non-scientific activities which are valuable especially for professional programmes (SAR, p.61). The visit showed that there might be risk with overloading the staff with duties that might have a negative impact on the teaching and learning. The main motivators for enhancement in teaching and learning of the teaching staff are internal. External motivating systems recognize more research involvement. But the authorities of the ViA recognize this problem.

4.5.

Students are involved in research - there are students' conferences, the participation of students in research projects on the different levels: state and regional. There are also some publications with students' contributions (SAR, p.64). Because the joint doctoral programme "Economics and Business" started in the academic year 2020/2021, there is not a lot of evidence of research involvement of doctoral students but there is a strong ViA declaration that students' participation in research is one of the key components of the doctoral programme.

4.6

There is a pre-incubation platform available for students to start their business (SAR, p.65). There are some certification possibilities for BA undergraduate students (accounting, international certificate) (SAR, p.66). ViA is active in the development of teaching & learning methods and equipped them with modern infrastructure, for example, there are dedicated spaces for the project-based study processes. Skills of teaching staff are enhanced, for example, ESF project "Improvement and Development of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences Teaching Staff" was implemented. The visit assured that there are innovative solutions implemented in the study process, for example the space for teaching and learning, working in projects is the strength of the ViA.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

Scientific research is conducted successfully, results are integrated into the StPs, internationalization

is sufficient. Some risks may appear with no balance between research and teaching and learning recognized by the central motivation systems and high workload of the teaching staff.

Strengths:

1. Good research activities of the teaching staff connected with the field of study.
2. Transferring research into courses.
3. Possibilities of involving students in research activities.
4. The international involvement of the teaching staff is at the good level.
5. Innovative solutions involved in the StPs.

Weaknesses:

1. The risk with the too high workload of the teaching staff.
2. Motivation system is based more on research activities than teaching and learning.

5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

ViA has 12 cooperation agreements in place, within different areas of interest revolving around studies and scientific research with 11 local higher education institutions (SAR, Annex 19). The main criteria for forming new cooperation agreements are the possible improvements for the StF itself, attraction of new students (local and/or international) and scientific research development (SAR, p.67).

The internationalization strategy (ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027) is developed and works in directions in EU and outside it, essentially involving exchange between students, lecturers and experience (SAR, p.70). Mechanisms for attracting foreign lecturers include participation in conferences and through personal contacts of ViA teaching staff (SAR, p.71). Currently there are lecturers acquired from cooperation with institutions from Croatia, Malta, Kazakhstan and Belarus (SAR, p.69).

Mechanisms for acquiring new international students include online marketing (Facebook, international university search engines), brochures and higher education exhibits in target countries. Improvements in the mechanisms for attracting international teaching staff and especially students could be beneficial as the current student amount in Masters programme create doubts about its sustainability. In the expert's opinion the ViA Erasmus Policy Statement could be separated from Erasmus mobility programmes and separate strategy for internationalization, including a marketing plan would be beneficial to create. Development of the cooperation between foreign higher education institutions and strengthening of those between local institutions would be beneficial for further improvements.

ViA has established strong collaboration with the local and regional municipalities regarding internship placement, future employment possibilities and scientific research (SAR, p.68). The local Valmiera municipality supports ViA with research grants (SAR, p. 68). Although there is a cooperation with employers within the study course and programme realization (guest-lecturers, internships), in expert's opinion ViA would benefit, if cooperation with employers would also include quality assurance and improvement planning as well as managing. The cooperation with Valmiera Business Incubator and Businet provides a platform for students to pursue their business ideas outside the academic environment. However, the collaboration with Valmiera Business Incubator could be established by tying it together with ViA Smart Labs pre-incubation programme even more. There is a collaboration with regional high schools, allowing grade 12 students to join the ViA Smart Labs pre-incubation programme. Ties to the industry would be improved, if the activities within the ViA Alumni would be initiated, perhaps by creating an active Facebook page. During the on-site visit graduates did not confirm their involvement in the StP quality assurance, as well as the annual

survey fulfillment is relatively low.

The internships are an integral part of StP realization in ViA, the time and duration of those is specified within each StP. There is Internship Regulation for each of the StPs in place, which states clearly what are the tasks of both sides, responsibilities and expected outcomes (SAR, Annex 20). ViA has 79 cooperation agreements with organizations in which students are able to do their internship (SAR, Annex 21). This list is complemented every year, in 2020, 12 new cooperation agreements were signed. Although these internship possibilities are provided, students can also choose an internship provider on their own, depending on their interests. It is clear from the on-site visit that working students use this opportunity to carry out their internships in their place of work. However, in expert's opinion there are also possibilities within the university that are not made use of regarding internships, for example, involving students in the organizational side of the extracurricular activities ViA provides – Smart Labs, Business Centre.

The joint Doctoral StP “Economics and Entrepreneurship” was formed within ViA, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeA) and Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA). The choice of those higher education institutions corresponds to the priorities of The National Development plan of Latvia - ensuring the economic development in regions – in which the higher education institutions have an important role to play (SAR p.72). During the on-site visit the management also stressed that as a university of applied sciences, business fields are focused on more specific and individual needs and that was in common with the other two universities. ViA hopes to find some international partners in the future, possibly through the European University. For the development and implementation there is a working group in each of the partnering universities and the development progress is discussed regularly within those groups (SAR p.73). There is a plan for the joint Doctoral programme development and implementation for years 2020-2026 with a detailed explanation. However, as the plan seems to be detailed and well nurtured it is hard to evaluate their efficacy as the programme was licenced only on the 5th of February 2020.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

Overall, the cooperation implemented in ViA contributes to the specific features of the StF and the StPs within it. The cooperation enhances the possible achievements of the strategic goals and the learning outcomes defined by ViA in these StPs.

Strengths:

1. International lecturers acquired from Croatia, Malta, Kazakhstan and Belarus currently teach in ViA.
2. Cooperation with various entrepreneurs, organizations such as Valmiera Business Incubator, Businet and municipalities gives a wide range of possibilities for the students.
3. Ongoing cooperation with high schools through ViA Smart Labs might be beneficial for attracting potential students.
4. Various opportunities for internship implementation, students have the opportunity to choose their internship provider based on their needs.
5. A detailed plan in place for the development and implementation of the joint Doctoral StP.

Weaknesses:

1. The mechanisms for attracting more international teaching staff and students are not efficient. ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027 is missing a marketing plan and could benefit from creating a separate internationalization strategy.
2. Cooperation with employers does not seem to include quality assurance and improvement planning as well as managing.

3. ViA Alumni movement is not active, annual survey fulfillment among graduates is relatively low and thus there is unused potential of Alumni involvement in the StP quality assurance.
4. The collaboration with Valmiera Business Incubator and ViA Smart Labs shows unused potential in terms of resources sharing and institutionalized framework regarding the study process, e.g. cooperation agreement or internal internships as part of the StP study plan thus might not be reaching its full potential, which is clearly there.

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

Analysis

In 2012 Bachelor's StP Business Administration (BA) and Master's StP Business Environment Administration (BEA) were accredited for 6 years. There were 10 recommendations formed (Annex 22).

1. The content of the Master's and Bachelor's programmes should be re-evaluated, ensuring courses in appropriate level and avoiding overlapping.
2. Introducing special admission criteria or providing selection barriers accompanied with providing preparatory courses would raise the quality of studies.
3. Opportunities to perform research (creative) work jointly with students and teaching staff of foreign HEIs StPs could be widened.
4. The quality and connection of research work of students and teaching staff to the regional interests should be improved.
5. Cooperation with other Latvian HEIs, especially regarding implementation of the StPs should be widened.
6. Cooperation with foreign universities could be strengthened by introducing joint StPs.
7. Particular niche for research and studies could be considered.
8. Students could be encouraged to take courses (optional) in other Latvian and foreign HEIs.
9. Examination in written form in economics and business courses would be always preferred.
10. To put stronger emphasis on Alumni, which was just established at ViA, to develop it into a working body of enthusiasts to support the College and the regional centre of Valmiera.

According to information provided in SAR, it is visible that the ViA has considered the previous assessment visit recommendations. There were reported answers to all recommendations (Annex 22).

Especially significant action linked with recommendation No 5 is launching the joint doctoral StP Economics and Business. ViA pays more attention and provides answers also to other recommendations; however, there is still room for improvement in the field of internationalization (Recommendations No 6 and 8). It is a continuous process so it might be always improving especially in the field of building joint degrees or double-degree diplomas with universities from West Europe. The mobility of students for the Erasmus program is rather small and decreasing (SAR, p.97). On the other side, ViA builds a consortium for European University with St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences (Austria), Polytechnic Institute of Setubal (Portugal), Polytechnical University of Timisoara (Romania), Szent Istvan University (Hungary), UC Leuven-Limburg (Belgium). This programme forms the pressure for ViA to focus more attention on the international approach.

During licensing process of the joint doctoral study programme the experts formed the below recommendations (Annex 23):

1. It is necessary to increase the proportion of ViA teaching staff in the programme implementation.
2. The necessary number of LCS experts should be attracted for the programme implementation (+1).
3. In order to develop the doctoral programme and achieve its goals, it is necessary to create an appropriate quality system, taking into account the strategic direction of the involved higher

education institutions.

4. To assess the possibility to provide the programme with the study courses of parts B and C in order to ensure student mobility possibilities.

5. To develop a study programme development plan for the next two years.

ViA answered to all recommendations. The answer is on a satisfactory level but because the programme has just started, it is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

According to SAR with annexes and information collected during the visit, it was visible that the ViA has taken into account the previous assessment visit recommendations and. All recommendations are fully implemented. ViA answered to recommendations referred to the joint doctoral study programme and they cannot be perceived as not fully implemented.

Strengths:

1. ViA responded to all recommendations received during the previous assessment procedures and referred to the joint doctoral study programme.

2. The responses are adequate to recommendations and they provide a good solution.

Actions based on recommendation enhance teaching and learning at ViA.

Weaknesses:

None

7. Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: ViA has several mechanisms for study quality improvement, including Study Quality Assurance Policy as well as the mechanisms for evaluating teaching stuff, getting feedback and updating StPs (SAR, p.7-8).

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: ViA maintains a Study Quality Assurance Policy (SQAP) that includes a strategy for quality assurance and development of StPs with clearly defined laws and procedures. Although legally compliant, in expert's opinion the SQAP would benefit from an update on internal information exchange procedure (e.g. course descriptions updates / audits), distance learning principles and industry cooperation e.g. Master and Bachelor thesis topics to come from entrepreneurs.(SAR, p.7; Annex 5; information gained during the on-site visit)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Via applies the rules of "Procedure for the Development, Approval and Supervision of the StPs", which together with other regulations govern the high quality study process. (SAR, p.7)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: ViA Study Regulations define the criteria, forms and terms of students' knowledge assessment. Descriptions of the study courses are published and define requirements for goals and planned learning outcomes.
(SAR, p.33; Annex 9)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: ViA has a system to make sure that the teaching staff have required qualifications and competences, which are laid down in the ViA Regulations on Elections to Academic Positions and ViA Remuneration Regulations.
(SAR, p.119)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: ViA key performance indicators are assessed and analyzed and reflected in self-assessment reports. Information on the student progress, academic achievements, drop-out rates, student satisfaction with the StPs, and graduate career is summarized using statistical methods and surveys, although during the on-site visit the graduates did not confirm filling out the surveys. (SAR, p.11)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Internal quality and the continuous improvement is maintained by the principles in Study Quality Assurance Policy. The Assurance Policy is developed and renewed based on the views and needs of ViA's internal and external shareholders, however the exact mechanism for it is not clearly defined and coherent.
(SAR, p.7)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: ViA has 12 cooperation agreements in place, within different areas of interest revolving around studies and scientific research with 11 local higher education institutions (SAR, Annex 19, 19P-BV-virziena-sadarbibas-ligumi-saraksts.docx). The internationalization strategy is developed and works in directions in EU and outside it (SAR, p.70)
The cooperation implemented in ViA contributes to the specific features of the StF and the StPs within it.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: ViA is successfully developing mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research. Summary of scientific research can be found in SAR, Annex 18 (18P-projekti-konferences-publikacijas-preciz-04012021.zip).

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Taking into account the information given in SAR, its annexes and information acquired during the on-site visit it was evident that the previous recommendations have been implemented.

8. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

1. To foster the cooperation in information exchange among particularly StP directors and teaching staff to avoid misinformation on the study process quality assurance (e.g. course annual audits, updates). Experts believe this shall also open new best practices for the further even better achievement of study results.
2. Higher involvement of teaching staff in overall information exchange to motivate the teaching staff to provide detailed information relevant for quality assessment (e.g. extracurricular scientific and professional qualification development activities).
3. To improve course evaluations collection and analysis from students surveys, including ensuring the feedback to students` evaluations also formally posted online via e.g. moodle. 3.1. Consider legal aspects of the idea of not allowing students to register for next semester before course evaluations are done as it might contradict to the study agreement provisions and the objectivity of the course evaluations. Rather motivational than sanctioned push might be more efficient. 3.2. Students themselves suggest filling the evaluation form during the last lecture of the respective course. 3.3. Ensure the feedback process to inform all students and relevant stakeholders about results of surveys and feedback mechanisms.
4. Consider defining research activities budget between StFs, if possible, which could help to determine more precisely the return (financial performance) of each StP/field.
5. The procedure of selection of informational materials necessary for StPs could be revised, formalized, standardized to avoid inconsistency between expectations from teaching staff (in course descriptions) and deliverables from the library side.
6. Consider the necessity to update the regulations and procedure for election to academic positions (Annex 12) as the current one was approved in 2007. Possible supplements could relate to e.g. pedagogical qualification in the context of digital (online) teaching skills. Consider to introduce a formal procedure for attracting talented teaching staff.
7. ViA would benefit if cooperation with employers would not only be in actual implementation of studies (guest-lectures, internships), but also in quality assurance and improvements planning and monitoring of the StPs and their study courses.
8. Consider developing a separate internationalization strategy from ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027. The current strategy could be improved with a more clearly defined and implemented marketing plan as well as a mechanism for attracting more international students and teaching staff.
9. Develop statistics regarding incoming mobility by study fields.
10. Ties to the industry would be improved, if more activities within the ViA Alumni movement would be initiated (perhaps by considering an active and separate social media (e.g. Facebook) profile creation). Also, Alumni and particularly recent graduates is valuable source of information for objective evaluations and improvements.

11. To improve the collaboration and avoid inefficient use of resources consider closer and institutionalized cooperation between Valmiera Business Incubator and ViA Smart Labs pre-incubation programme. ViA and students could also benefit from creating internal internship placements, where students are involved in the organizational side of the extracurricular activities ViA provides – Smart Labs, Business Centre.

12. Monitoring and recognizing the workload of the academic staff to avoid decreasing quality of teaching and learning caused by lack of enough time resources of the academic staff.

13. Recognize more teaching and learning activities of the academic staff in the motivation system.

Long-term recommendations

II. "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

II. "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

1.1

The name of the professional bachelor StP “Business Administration” meets the conventional perception of business studies at bachelor level. The name of the programme is already a brand within the business environment of the region. (StP SAR, Section 1.3.) The name of the StP corresponds to the code 42345 of the StP according to Latvian Education Classification (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers Regulations (Cab.Reg.) No.322, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitiba-klasifikaciju>), meaning that first two digits `42` notes that the StP is professional bachelor program (level 6 of Latvian and European Qualification Framework) and the last three digits `345` notes the StP belongs to the group of programme in “Management and administration”. Consequently, the awarded degree and qualification “Professional Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration / Manager of Company” corresponds to the programme’s code and title. Furthermore, the professional nature of the programme and the qualification “Manager of Company” corresponds to the Latvian Cab.Reg. No.512 - Regulations on the State Standard of the Second Level Professional Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/268761-noteikumi-par-otra-limena-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitiba-valsts-standardu>) and to the national professional standard of “Manager of Company”(2019) (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-115.pdf>). ViA has provided the Compliance sheet of the StP Business Administration with the State Education Standard (see StP Annex 25 - 25P-BA_compliance-educ-standard_edited-02012020.docx) and the Compliance sheet of the StP “Business Administration” with the occupational standard COMPANY MANAGER (see StP Annex 26 - 26P-BA compliance to prof occupation-edited-02012021.docx).

The programme is offered in a full-time studies format of the period of 4 years (8 semesters) in Latvian in the amount of 160 Latvian study credit points or 240 ECTS.

The aims, objectives (goal, tasks; see StP Application and StP SAR, Section 1.3.) are strongly linked with the ViA Development strategy priorities (see Experts joint report chapter I.1. Management of the Study Field) and clearly reflects the contents` scope and also professional impact of the programme. Student-centered approach and principles are integrated in the formulation of the study results (learning outcomes) according to the conventional best practices, as well as are visible in the

various teaching and assessment methods which allows, helps and encourages students to develop the envisaged respective skills and competences in an evidence-based and clear manner (e.g. presentation, argumentation, independent and supervised literature research, case-studies analysis, professional ethics). StP's results (learning outcomes) are mapped against the study courses results (StP SAR, Annex 24 - 24P-BV-BVV-Studiju-rezultatu-kartejums.2020.xlsx).

The admission requirements are set centralized at ViA (StF SAR, Annex 7 - 7P-Admission-regulation_2020-2021_APST-30102019-ENG) and corresponds fully to the legal requirements, are logical and efficient, and supplemented with the necessary legal internal documentation and forms - both, administrative and academic.

The relevance between the programme goals and outcomes is discussed at the end of each academic year at the StF council of ViA, and individually discussed with the academic staff of the StF (StP SAR, Section 1.3).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The interrelation of the analysed StP elements - name, degree, professional qualification, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements - is strong, which is the result of the awareness of their importance (content-wise, legal-wise, marketing-wise) to the StP, StF and ViA management.

Strengths

1. The aims, objectives (goal, tasks) are strongly linked with the ViA Development strategy priorities.
2. Learning outcomes are formulated in the student-centered approach according to the conventional best practices and are integrated in the various teaching and assessment methods of the study courses and are mapped against the study courses results.
3. The name of the programme is a brand within the business environment of the region.

Weaknesses

None

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.1

The descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the traineeship, and the final thesis mostly generally comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments, however few technical improvements are to be in place (see Compliance criteria 9 and recommendations). Regulations like "Methodological Guidelines For Development And Defence Of State Examination Papers And Annual Projects" and "Internship Regulations" are clear and relevant.

Descriptions of courses are well structured, and contents generally comply with the aims of the StP "Business Administration", and the learning outcomes, and needs of the industry. Few study course descriptions will benefit from literature list update topicality-wise (more recent sources) e.g. Ekon3013 Vadības grāmatvedība and amount-wise (more sources to add) e.g. "Eksporta mārketinga principi un rīki" (course code missing, too) has just two compulsory sources. Conventional best practices suggest also identifying additional literature sources.

The StP "Business Administration" is improved based on the student, graduate and employer recommendations. Besides the results of surveys of employers, ViA gathered in a forum for programme development representatives of the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Latvian Food Bioeconomy Cluster, Vidzeme Planning Region and the State Examination Commission

on the labor market needs. Based on those recommendations several changes were made, namely new modules of professional specialization were created.

Regarding internships, regulations are clear and as of 2020 internship is done starting from the second year, while the undergraduate students will do internship in the 2nd or 3rd semester, depending on the duration of the programme (SAR, p.72). The description of the organisation of the traineeship is provided in SAR (Annex 20P-BV-virziena-Praksu_nolikumi) and traineeship agreement list in: (21P-BA-study-field-internship-agreement-list-edited). See addition analysis in the Assessment of the Study Field (chapter 5).

2.2

ViA studies regulations (SAR, Annex 9) define the criteria, forms and terms of students' knowledge assessment and requirements for achieving study results. Descriptions of the study courses clearly define requirements for the commencement of studies, goals and planned learning outcomes, outline the content necessary for achieving learning outcomes, a study calendar, compulsory and additional literature, and other sources of information, describe organization and tasks of students' independent work, define criteria for evaluation of learning outcomes and performance evaluation. The criteria, conditions and methods published in the course descriptions are used to assess the results achieved by the students, and are applied consistently.

To avoid overlapping of courses, teaching staff present to the Council their courses. Evidence from student-centred learning and teaching principles comes from studies in small groups, interactive study methods and individual communication between lecturers and students (as confirmed in meeting with students).

2.3

After each course students are required to answer a survey which provides an overall evaluation of assessment methods, organization of the study process, lecture's work and student involvement. In the academic year of 2018/2019, the total assessment of the courses taught by the lecturers of the StP (in the 5-point system) lecturers' professional ratings ranged from 4 to 5 points (SAR, p.94). In order to improve the quality of the StP results of surveys are discussed at BA direction council meeting, StP "Business Administration" advisors convention and BA direction self-assessment development working group.

Although students are encouraged and reminded to fill in course evaluation surveys, ViA assumes difficulties in motivating students to answer them and is rethinking the process in order to ensure more feedback.

Feedback from graduates is also assessed by surveys and considered by the StF council, for improvement of the StP "Business Administration".

Employers feedback emerges from ViA Convention, StP "Business Administration" Council and BA Direction Self-Assessment Development working group members, members of State Examination Commissions, participating in business forums, meeting with representatives of local governments and business organizations (SAR, p.95).

Also StP "Business Administration" Advisory Council has been established, consisting of programme director, student representatives, graduates, industry representatives, employers' organization representatives and other external stakeholders at least 7 persons (SAR, p.96).

Meeting with employers, meeting with the StF and StP director, meeting with graduates and meeting with students provided several evidences of use of feedback to improve quality of studies like intensifying English language in programme, improving digital skills and more focus on global market knowledge.

2.4

Regarding incoming mobility according to SAR (p.96), there are no incoming mobility student statistics regarding the study fields, as students take courses from the joint offer "International Study Module". This lack of statistics compromises an accurate analysis of the level of

internationalization of the StP "Business Administration" .

Regarding outgoing mobility, although ViA has sufficient scholarship funds for Erasmus +, the number of students involved in mobility is decreasing in the BA direction, going from 16 in 2012/2013 to 4 in 2019/2020 (SAR, p.97). Among other reasons SAR (p.97) points out the lack of students confidence in their English language skills and abilities, as well as by insecurity in intercultural communication. The ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2020-2027 establishes a set of good measures to increase mobility namely the increase of courses taught in english, development of double StPs and joint study courses. No measures are presented to deal with the challenges of intercultural communication.

Recognition of learning outcomes during mobility are ensured and adequate as stated in the evaluation report from European Commission Erasmus +: "The institution is committed to ensure full automatic recognition of periods abroad and describes a method that is coherent with the Council Recommendation for full automatic recognition." (Document Ref. Ares (2020)7583944 - 14/12/2020, p.2).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusion:

Overall, descriptions regarding all parts of the StP are high quality and largely or fully comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. Nevertheless, some study course descriptions are not technically not entirely in full compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 561, Paragraph two (See n° 9 of section 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the StP in this report). Content is in line with learning outcomes and industry needs and trends. Study implementation methods are adequate and feedback from students taken into account although lack of motivation of students in answering surveys may fragilize the process. Good system regarding mobility processes but a decreasing number of students in mobility.

Strengths:

1. Great involvement of employers and regional stakeholders in the programme design.
2. Good practises of student-centred learning policy.
3. Good evaluation from European Commission Erasmus + regarding recognition of learning outcomes procedures.

Weaknesses:

1. Difficulties in motivating students to answer surveys.
2. Low international mobility.
3. No incoming mobility student statistics regarding the study fields.
- 4.No specific measures to deal with challenges of intercultural communication are presented in ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2020-2027.
5. Few study course descriptions would will benefit from literature list update topicality-wise (more recent sources) e.g. Ekon3013 Vadības grāmatvedība and amount-wise (more sources to add) e.g. "Eksporta mārketinga principi un rīki" (course code missing, too) has just two compulsory sources. Conventional best practices suggest also identifying additional literature sources.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

According to the SAR (p.98) resources and provisions are not allocated to each specific StP, but assigned for the whole StF. Furthermore, funding for scientific activities is distributed and accounted

for among scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned work performed by teaching staff of different StFs (Annex 11). Therefore it is difficult to evaluate in detail particular resources for Business Administration programme (SAR, chapter 3). However, the sharing of resources increases efficiency of use.

The overall study infrastructure, information sources and facilities, material and technical provision and funding are sufficient and appropriate for the implementation of the StP “Business Administration” and ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Books, periodicals, electronic information materials and databases are at student’s disposal and concord with defined needs of study courses. However it needs to be admitted that the Business Administration programme is executed in Latvian language, but some of the courses (for example – Innovation Management, Organization behaviour) compulsory literature is available only in English language (Annex 28). During the on site visit it was not discovered as a problem, however this could be the obstacle for some of the students to assess necessary information and needs to be examined.

Bachelor theses are part of scientific activities and they are practically oriented, often closely linked on regional enterprises topical problems. Support for students on organization of internships and preparation of bachelor theses is sufficient, library is helpful for proper citations arrangements.

The study process is managed with LAIS and Moodle information systems, for the provision of remote learning, the Webex platform is available. Students are offered specific voluntary course for training how to use databases and e-learning environments, including Moodle system. Teaching staff uses the Moodle information system for course management, but from a student's point of view, sometimes this management is inconsistent and differs from course to course, which creates some confusion.

Students have access to Socio-Technical Systems Engineering institutes programmes and facilities. 51 students in 2021 have been assigned with the pre-incubation programme in this institute.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The necessary material, technical and financial provisions comply with the conditions for the implementation of the StP and reaching aimed learning outcomes. Informational sources are available and sufficient, information systems are in place and used in the study process management.

Strengths:

1. There are proper funding procedures and sufficient resources for reaching aimed learning outcomes.

Weaknesses:

1. Some of the courses` (for example – Innovation Management, Organization behaviour) compulsory literature is available only in English language.
2. Information in the Moodle learning environment sometimes is inconsistent and confusing for students.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

4.1

29 lecturers are involved in the programme - 16 of them represent ViA. According to SAR (p. 99) during the accreditation period, the composition of lecturers has not changed significantly. There are

not visible risks in the structure of the teaching staff – the staff has adequate competences linked with the delivered courses. (Annex 15 + CVs)

4.2

The StP “Business Administration” has a professional approach so there should be involved staff with some professional experience. More than 50% of the teaching staff has practical background linked with delivered courses and learning outcomes of Business Administration programme (Annex 15 + CVs). During the visit, there were not identified any gaps in the composition of the teaching staff from the perspective of legal requirements. According to SAR, the English language skills of teaching staff can be improved at ViA (SAR, p.99). The strength of the teaching staff is the high engagement recognized by students.

4.3

Not applicable.

4.4

There is a visible contribution of the teaching staff in the research in the field of economy and business. The teaching staff is involved in research (SAR, Annex 18). But the international contribution might be increased, especially international staff mobility (SAR, Annex 17) - during the last 3 years (2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20) only 2 lecturers participated in the mobility. The obtained information is used in the study process.

4.5

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff was discussed during interviews and there were identified some areas for improvement in the field of collaboration between the director of the programme “Business Administration” and the teaching staff. Based on the visit, the collaboration between the teaching staff is at the relevant level. Because there are courses delivered by the same teachers and the courses have the same names, there may appear some risk with overlapping content of the courses.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The qualification and research record of the teaching staff is in general on a satisfactory level. The mechanism of collaboration between the teaching staff and also on information flow between the director of the programme “Business Administration” and the teaching staff might be improved. There is a risk of content of courses being repeated. The international mobility of the teaching staff might be increased.

Strengths:

1. Proper professional qualification and research record of the teaching staff.
2. High engagement of the staff in teaching and learning recognized by students.
3. Good collaboration between the teaching staff.

Weaknesses:

1. Relatively weak collaboration between the director of the programme “Business Administration” and the teaching staff.
2. Relatively low participation of the teaching staff in international mobility.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Business Administration"

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The diploma sample provided in SAR (StP Annex 30) fully complies with the procedure and regulations by which Latvian state-recognised documents of higher education are issued (Cab.Reg.No 202, <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=256157>).

- 2 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: Partially compliant

Justification: Agreement in place with BA School of Business and Finance

(StP SAR, Annex BA_study-ensurance-agreement-translation.doc, Agreement, No. 11-12/3).

However, the agreement needs to be renewed as the BA School of Business and Finance has updated their StPs, incl. the title mentioned in the agreement (<https://www.ba.lv/studijas/>).

- 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

Justification: Confirmation can be found in study agreement.

(StP SAR, Annex 29, section 2.8)

- 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

Justification: Confirmation shall be found in SAR, Annex 15 (15P-BV_docetaju parskata tabula.edoc).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Confirmation that it is in compliance with Cabinet regulations No 70 "Mandatory Provisions to be Included in the Study Agreement"

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/152072-studiju-liguma-obligati-ietveramie-noteikumi>) can be found in StP SAR, Annex 29 (29P-Studiju-liguma-paraugs-bv.docx).

- 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

Justification: Some study course descriptions are not entirely in compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 561, Paragraph two, for example, “E-commerce” study course description in Latvian does not contain specific evaluation criteria for grading (the same as in English version). Study course description “Digital Marketing” study course implementation time is not mentioned. (StP SAR, Annex 28, 28P-BV-kursu-apr.-BA-course-discr.-30122020.zip).

- 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

Justification: Confirmation that it is compliant with the valid professional standard is found in StP SAR, Annex 26, 26P-BA compliance to prof occupation-edited-02012021.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

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: According to StP SAR, Annex 25 (25P-BA_compliance-educ-standard_edited-02012020.docx) the StP complies with the State Professional Higher Education Standard (Cab.Reg. No 512, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/268761-noteikumi-par-otra-limena-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitibas-valsts-standartu>).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Referring to SAR teaching staff publications (Annex 18, 18P-publication-confer-projects-edited-04012021.zip) and CV's (Annex 16, 16P-CV2019-precizets-22122020.zip), each member of the teaching staff has either relevant and up to date publications or at least 5 years of practical work in the field unrelated to implementation of the StP.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The study program mostly, but in two aspects still partially complies with the legal requirements set forth in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments. Few technical improvements would be in place: 1) Renew of Agreement with BA School of Business and Finance and 2) For few study courses, e.g. E-Commerce, the assessment criteria for grading needs to be specified, “Digital Marketing” study course implementation time is missing. See more in recommendations.

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study provision complies with conditions for implementation of the StP (SAR, Section 3, Annex 11).

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The compliance of the qualification of the permanent and invited (temporary) academic staff members to the respective regulatory enactments (Law on Higher Education Institutions, <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) as well as to the good management practices is sufficient.

According to SAR, Annex 15 (15P-BA-study-field-academic-staff-list-edited-30.12.2020.xlsx), 4 professors, 1 associate professor, 2 docents, 9 lecturers and 12 guest-lectures of the ViA are involved in the implementation of StP. Visiting lectures are being invited and ensured in the StP.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable for PBStP

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The related requirements for PBStP Business Administration have been fully or largely met both, in relation to legal requirements and to good management practices. Experts identified few technical and striving for best practices aspects (see weaknesses and recommendations).

Strengths:

1. ViA and the StP pays serious and strict attention to ensuring the compliance of legal requirements in many cases exceeding the requirements.

Weaknesses:

1. Some study course descriptions are not entirely in compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education Section 561, Paragraph two, point 5 - determine the evaluation criteria of learning outcomes (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>), e.g. the course E-Commerce specific assessment criteria need to be added, "Digital Marketing" study course implementation time is missing.
2. The agreement between BA School of Business and Finance and ViA to provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in case ViA program is discontinued, is technically no longer up to date as BA School of Business and Finance has updated their StPs, incl. the title of the program mentioned in the agreement.

Evaluation of the study programme "Business Administration"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration"

Short-term recommendations

1. Study course descriptions need to be reviewed and verified against ViA regulation (course description template) and legal enactments (Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 561, Paragraph two), paying attention to whether criteria for learning outcome grading, study course implementation time, and sufficient compulsory and additional literature is mentioned. For example, E-commerce study course description in Latvian does not contain specific criteria for grading as well as in the study course description "Digital Marketing" study course implementation time is missing. In case of variable study course implementation time between semesters, that should also be mentioned. Few study course descriptions will benefit from literature list update topicality-wise (more recent sources) e.g. Ekon3013 Vadības grāmatvedība and amount-wise (more sources to add) e.g. "Eksporta mārketinga principi un rīki" (course code missing, too) has just two compulsory sources. Conventional best practices suggest also identifying additional literature sources.
2. In the course descriptions, where possible, the compulsory literature list should also contain sources in Latvian language.
3. The agreement in place with BA School of Business and Finance (StP SAR, Annex BA_study-ensurance-agreement-translation.doc, Agreement, No. 11-12/3) about the alternative host StP for students in the unlikely case of ViA StP is discontinued needs to be renewed as the BA School of Business and Finance has updated their StPs, incl. the StP title mentioned in the agreement (<https://www.ba.lv/studijas/>).
4. Consistency of the Moodle learning environment could be improved by developing joint guidelines for the teaching staff.
5. Encourage international mobility among teaching staff and students (where possible, also online remotely in current epidemiological times).
6. Add specific measures to deal with challenges of intercultural communication in ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2020-2027.
7. Develop statistics regarding incoming mobility by study fields.
8. To improve course evaluations collection and analysis from students surveys, including ensuring the feedback to students` evaluations also formally posted online via e.g. moodle. 8.1. Consider legal aspects of the idea of not allowing students to register for next semester before course evaluations are done as it might contradict to the study agreement provisions and the objectivity of the course evaluations. Rather motivational than sanctioned push might be more efficient. 8.2. Students themselves suggest filling the evaluation form during the last lecture of the respective course.
9. Strengthen the collaboration and information exchange between the director of the programme and the teaching staff.
10. Level of the participation of the teaching staff in international mobility might be improved.

Long-term recommendations

II. "Business Environment Administration" ASSESSMENT

II. "Business Environment Administration" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

1.1

The name of the professional master StP “Business Environment Administration” smartly follows and distinguishes it in relation to professional bachelor level programme. ViA has put efforts in ensuring the compliance of the name of the programme with the degree and the professional qualification to be awarded (StP SAR section 1.3.).

The name of the StP corresponds to the code 47345 of the StP according to Latvian Education Classification (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers Regulations (Cab.Reg.) No.322, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju>), meaning that first two digits `47` notes that the StP is professional master program (level 7 of Latvian and European Qualification Framework) and the last three digits `345` notes the StP belongs to the group of programme in “Management and administration”. Consequently, the awarded degree and qualification “Professional Master degree in Business Management / Manager of Organization” corresponds to the programme`s code and title. Furthermore, the professional nature of the programme and the qualification “Manager of Organization” corresponds to the Latvian Cab.Reg.No.512 - Regulations on the State Standard of the Second Level Professional Higher Education

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/268761-noteikumi-par-otra-limena-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitibas-valsts-standardu>) and to the national professional standard of “Manager of Organization” (<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-114.pdf>).

ViA has provided the Compliance sheet of the StP with the State Education Standard (see StP Annex 1P-BEA-compliance-education-standardd-edited-02012021.docx) and with the occupational standard ORGANIZATION MANAGER (2019) (see StP Annex 32P-BEA compliance to prof occupation-edited-02012021.docx).

The programme is offered in a full-time studies format in Latvian and English of the period of 3 semesters (60 Latvian study credit points / 90 ECTS) or 4 semesters (80 Latvian credits / 120 ECTS) depending on students` previous professional bachelor education, which is in accordance to legal standards.

The aims, objectives (goal, tasks; see StP Application and StP SAR, section 1.3.) are strongly linked with the ViA Development strategy priorities (see Experts joint report chapter I.1. Management of the Study Field) and clearly reflects the contents` scope and also professional impact of the programme. Student-centered approach and principles are integrated in the formulation of the study results (learning outcomes) according to the conventional best practices, as well as are visible in the various teaching and assessment methods which allows, helps and encourages students to develop the envisaged respective skills and competences in an evidence-based and clear manner (e.g. presentation, argumentation, independent and supervised literature research, case-studies analysis, professional ethics). StPs results (learning outcomes) are mapped against the study courses results (StP SAR, Annex 24P-BV-BVV-Studiju-rezultatu-kartejums.2020.xlsx). Relevance and coherence between outcomes of the StP and outcomes of specific study courses are annually assessed by preparing a self-assessment report. Information on the StP implementation and achievement of the tasks is assessed every academic year by meeting with students and members of the advisory council, by carrying out analysis at the study field council meetings (StP SAR, section 1.3.).

The admission requirements are set centralized at ViA (StF SAR, Annex 7P-Uznemsanas_noteikumi_2020-2021_APST-30102019-ENG.docx) and corresponds fully to the legal requirements, are logical and efficient, and supplemented with the necessary legal internal documentation and forms - both, administrative and academic. Section 2.4.1.6. of the Regulations (“additional documents for applicants, for beginning the studies in ViA study programmes which are implemented in English” provisions the submission of additional documents for studies in English

such as certificate of English language proficiency or a document confirming the language proficiency issued by an international testing institution and confirmation issued by the Latvian Academic Information Centre if the previous education has been acquired abroad.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The interrelation of the analysed StP elements - name, degree, professional qualification, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements - is strong, which is the result of the awareness of their importance (content-wise, legal-wise, marketing-wise) to the StP, StF and ViA management.

Strengths

1. The aims, objectives (goal, tasks) are strongly linked with the ViA Development strategy priorities.
2. Learning outcomes are formulated in the student-centered approach according to the conventional best practices and are integrated in the various teaching and assessment methods of the study courses and are mapped against the study courses results.
3. The name of the programme smartly follows and distinguishes it in relation to professional bachelor level programme.

Weaknesses

None

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.1

The descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the traineeship, and the final thesis comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. Regulations like “Methodological Guidelines For Development And Defence Of State Examination Papers And Annual Projects” and “Internship Regulations” are clear and relevant.

Descriptions of courses are well structured, and contents comply with the aims of the StP “Business Environment Administration”, the learning outcomes, and the needs of the industry. Mapping of study courses for achieving the learning outcomes of the StP “Business Environment Administration”(SAR, Annex 24) clearly presents the fulfilment of this requirement. Few study course descriptions will benefit from literature list update topicality-wise (more recent sources) and amount-wise (more sources to add). Conventional best practices suggest also identifying additional literature sources.

Adequacy to industry needs comes, for instance, from meetings with employers and by including recommendations of representatives of employers, entrepreneurs’ professional associations and regional municipalities in the programme restructuring in 2016 (SAR, p.136). Also, StF considered suggestions of representatives of the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vidzeme Planning Region, opinions of ViA Advisory Convention and the State Examination Commission regarding needs of the labour market.

Study programme provides study and internship opportunities abroad, developing creative, student-centered and international study environment (SAR, p.127). The description of the organisation of the traineeship is provided in SAR (Annex 20P-BV-virziena-Praksu_nolikumi) and traineeship agreement list in: (21P-BA-study-field-internship-agreement-list-edited). See addition analysis in the Assessment of the Study Field (chapter 5).

2.2

ViA Studies regulations (SAR, Annex 9) define the criteria, forms and terms of students' knowledge assessment and requirements for achieving study results. Descriptions of the study courses clearly define requirements for the commencement of studies, goals and planned learning outcomes, outline the content necessary for achieving learning outcomes, a study calendar, compulsory and additional literature, and other sources of information, describe organization and tasks of students' independent work, define criteria for evaluation of learning outcomes and performance evaluation. The criteria, conditions and methods published in the course descriptions are used to assess the results achieved by the students, and they are applied consistently.

The diverse range of study methods and technological tools ensures that students acquire relevant academic and professional skills. Evidence from student-centred learning and teaching principles comes from interactive teaching methods based on students' participation in the study process and easy access to individual consultations with lectures (as confirmed in meeting with students).

2.3

Feedback from employers, graduates and students are at the basis for changes in the content and planning of the study courses.

After each course students are required to answer a survey which provides an overall evaluation of assessment methods, organization of the study process, lecture's work and student involvement. On a scale of 1 to 5 the average evaluation of the StP "Business Environment Administration" given by students is 4.5 (SAR, P.143). In order to improve the quality of the StP results of surveys are discussed at StF council meeting, advisors convention and StF self-assessment development working group.

Although students are encouraged and reminded to fill in course evaluation surveys, ViA assumes difficulties in motivating students to answer them and is rethinking the process in order to ensure more feedback.

Feedback from graduates is also assessed by surveys and considered by the StF council, for improvement of the StP "Business Environment Administration".

As confirmed in the meeting with employers, their recommendations are considered by the StP "Business Environment Administration". Employers express their views in ViA Convention, BA Advisory Council, State Examination Commission, in business forums, and meetings.

Also BA study program advisory council has been established, consisting of program director, student representatives, graduates, industry representatives, employers' organization representatives and other external stakeholders at least 7 persons (SAR, p.144).

Meeting with employers, meeting with the StF and StP director, meeting with graduates and meeting with students provided several evidences of use of feedback to improve quality of studies like intensifying English language in programme and use of the latest IT developments.

2.4

Regarding incoming mobility according to SAR (p.144), there are no incoming mobility student statistics regarding the study fields, as students take courses from the joint offer "International Study Module". This lack of statistics compromises an accurate analysis of the level of internationalization of the StP "Business Environment Administration".

Regarding outgoing mobility, although ViA has sufficient scholarship funds for Erasmus + number of students involved in mobility is extremely low (an average of 2 per academic year since 2012/2013).

The ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2020-2027 establishes a set of good measures to increase mobility for the StF namely by development of double StPs and joint study courses and the increase of use of opportunities by network BUSINET.

Recognition of learning outcomes during mobility are ensured and adequate as stated in the evaluation report from European Commission Erasmus +: "The institution is committed to ensure full automatic recognition of periods abroad and describes a method that is coherent with the Council Recommendation for full automatic recognition." (Document Ref. Ares (2020)7583944 - 14/12/2020,

p.2).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusion:

Overall, descriptions regarding all parts of the StP are high quality and most of them comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. Nevertheless, some study course descriptions are not entirely in compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 561, Paragraph two (See nº 9 of section 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the StP in this report). Content is in line with learning outcomes and industry needs and trends. Study implementation methods are adequate and feedback from students taken into account although lack of motivation of students in answering surveys may fragilize the process. Good system regarding mobility processes but a very low number of students in mobility.

Strengths:

1. Great involvement of employers and regional stakeholders in the programme design.
2. Good range of study methods and technological tools for students to acquire relevant academic and professional skills.
3. Availability of lectures to individual work with students.
4. Good evaluation from European Commission Erasmus + regarding recognition of learning outcomes procedures.

Weaknesses:

1. Difficulties in motivating students to answer surveys.
2. Low international mobility.
3. Few study course descriptions would benefit from literature list update topicality-wise (more recent sources) and amount-wise (more sources to add). Conventional best practices suggest also identifying additional literature sources. See Compliance criteria No.9 and recommendations.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

According to the SAR (p.98) resources and provisions are not allocated to each specific StP, but assigned for the whole StF. Furthermore, funding for scientific activities is distributed and accounted for among scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned work performed by teaching staff of different StFs (Annex 11). Therefore it is difficult to evaluate in detail particular resources for Business Environment Administration programmes (see chapter 3). However, the sharing of resources increases efficiency of use.

The study, informative, material, technical and financial provision comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the StP “Business Environment Administration”, 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.

Students have a support system for provision of internship places. Employers in collaboration with teaching staff are providing good support for selection of topics for master thesis. However during the on-site visit it was pointed out that enterprises and companies could be more involved in the implementation of research projects in order to provide the infrastructure and new perspective to different problem situations.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The StP is well supported with financial, technical and information provisions. There are necessary prerequisites for achievement of learning and research outcomes. Management of the programme lies well in ViA strategic development e.g. via cooperation with HESPI and SSII.

Strengths:

1. Good cooperation with ViA HESPI. Some Master's thesis research is conducted as part of HESPI and SSII research.

Weaknesses:

1. Cooperation with companies and enterprises in regards to infrastructure for scientific project implementation shows some unused potential.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

4.1

19 lecturers are involved in the programme - 11 teaching staff (7 with a doctor's degree) (SAR, p.146; p.151, Annex 15). According to SAR (p.146) during the accreditation period, the composition of lecturers has not changed significantly. During the next accreditation perspective, the number of the teaching staff with a Ph.D. degree should increase. There are not visible risks in the structure of the teaching staff - the staff has adequate competences linked with the delivered courses. (Annex 15 + CVs)

4.2

The programme has a professional approach so there should be involved staff with some professional experience. More than 50% of the teaching staff has practical background linked with delivered courses and learning outcomes (Annex 15 + CVs). During the visit, there were not identified any gaps in the composition of the teaching staff from the perspective of legal requirements. According to SAR and based on the visit, the English language skills of teaching staff can be improved at ViA (SAR, p. 99, and experts meeting with the director). All teaching staff implemented in StP realization have at least B2 level knowledge of English. Confirmation shall be found in SAR StP Annex 15, 15P-BV_docetaju parskata tabula.edoc). Although the study program director with English proficiency A1 is not the StP teaching staff and although it is clearly visible how Mrs.Vija Melbarde as StP director brings high value to the program's organizational, cooperation and contents development aspects (experts ascertained of it through meetings with student, graduates, teachers), experts however suggest considering that MStP in English would possibly benefit of English proficiency also in the management. The strength of the teaching staff is the high engagement recognized by students.

4.3

Not applicable.

4.4

There is a visible contribution of the teaching staff in the research in the field of economy and business. The teaching staff is involved in research (SAR, Annex 18). But the international contribution might be increased, especially international staff mobility (SAR, Annex 17) - during the last 3 years (2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20) only 2 lecturers participated in the mobility. The obtained information is used in the study process.

4.5

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff was discussed during the visit and there were identified some areas for improvement in the field of collaboration between the director of the programme and the teaching staff, e.g. compilation of study and scientific activities information throughout the academic year, information exchange on updates of courses`

topicalities, organizational cooperation aspects with industry and other. Based on the visit, the collaboration between the teaching staff is at the relevant level. Because there are courses delivered by the same teachers and the courses have the same names, there may appear some risk with overlapping content of the courses.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The qualification and research record of the teaching staff is in general on a satisfactory level. The mechanism of collaboration between the teaching staff and also on information flow between the director of the programme and the teaching staff might be improved. There is a risk of content of courses being repeated. The international mobility of the teaching staff might be increased.

Strengths:

1. Proper professional qualification and research record of the teaching staff.
2. High engagement of the staff in teaching and learning recognized by students.
3. Good collaboration between the teaching staff .

Weaknesses:

1. Relatively weak collaboration between the director of the programme and the teaching staff.
2. Although all teaching staff in StP realization have at least B2 level knowledge of English (SAR StP Annex 15, 15P-BV_docetaju parskata tabula.edoc), and although the StP director with English proficiency A1 is not the StP teaching staff and it is clearly visible how Mrs.Vija Melbarde as StP director brings high value to the program`s organizational, cooperation and contents development aspects (experts ascertained of it through meetings with student, graduates, teachers), experts however suggest considering that MStP in English would possibly benefit of English proficiency also in the management, this going together with ViA own remark (SAR p.99) that English language skills of teaching staff can be improved.
3. Relatively low participation of the teaching staff in international mobility.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Business Environment Administration"

Requirements

1. The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: The diploma sample provided in SAR (StP Annex 36) fully complies with the procedure and regulations by which Latvian state-recognised documents of higher education are issued (Cab.Reg.No 202, <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=256157>).
2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Agreement in place with BA School of Business and Finance (SAR StP Annex BVV_study-ensurance-agreement.doc, Agreement, No. 08-5/2)
3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Confirmation can be found in study agreement.
(SAR StP Annex 29, section 2.8.)

- 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

Justification: Confirmation shall be found in SAR, Annex 15, 15P-BV_docetaju parskata tabula.edoc.

- 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

Justification: All teaching staff implemented in StP realization have at least B2 level knowledge of English. Confirmation shall be found in SAR StP Annex 15, 15P-BV_docetaju parskata tabula.edoc)

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Confirmation that it is in compliance with Cabinet regulations No 70 "Mandatory Provisions to be Included in the Study Agreement"

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/152072-studiju-liguma-obligati-ietveramie-noteikumi>) can be found in SAR StP Annex 29, 29P-Studiju-liguma-paraugs-bv.docx.

- 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

Justification: Study course descriptions generally are well outlined, still not entirely in compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 56.1, Paragraph two.

To meet the best practices experts recommend to review all the course descriptions and fill in the few technically missing parts that are attached to the course description template according to ViA procedure envisaged by Section 56.1, Paragraph one of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education - e.g. "Smart Technologies and Data Security" course description does not contain compulsory literature; "External Communication of the Organization" and "Ilgtspējīgas sadarbības attīstības plānošana un vadība" is missing the study course implementation time; Ekon5016 Reklāmas tendencies has just 2 literature sources which would benefit from update (amount and more recent).

As the programme is implemented in English, the study course descriptions are also provided in English (SAR StP Annex 34, 34P-BVV-kursu-apr.-BEA-course-discr.-30122020.zip)

- 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

Justification: Confirmation that it is compliant with the valid professional standard is found in SAR StP Annex 32, 32P-BEA compliance to prof occupation-edited-02012021.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

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: According to SAR StP Annex 31 (31P-BEA-compliance-education-standardd-edited-02012021.docx) the StP complies with the State Professional Higher Education Standard (Cab.Reg. No 512, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/268761-noteikumi-par-otra-limena-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitiba-valsts-standartu>).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Referring to SAR teaching staff publications (Annex 18, 18P-projekti-konferences-publikacijas-preciz-04012021.zip) and CV's (Annex 16, 16P-CV2019-precizets-22122020.zip), each member of the teaching staff has either relevant and up to date publications or at least 5 years of practical work in the field unrelated to implementation of the StP.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The StP overall generally complies with the legal requirements set forth in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments.

Still, study course descriptions would benefit to be complemented with a few technical details (see recommendations) according to best practices.

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study provision complies with conditions for implementation of the StP. SAR Part 3, Annex 11.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: All representatives of the teaching staff from ViA have appropriate qualifications according to the conditions for the implementation of the StP and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments. 19 lecturers are involved in the programme - 11 teaching staff (7 with a doctor's degree). The business community is represented by industry professionals that are invited for lectures.

- 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

Justification: The StP is based on the advances and findings in the field of study. Topics and research developed namely in master thesis show clear relevant findings in the field.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The related requirements have been fully or largely met both, in relation to legal requirements and to good management practices. Experts identified few technical and striving for best practices aspects (see weaknesses and recommendations).

Strengths:

1. ViA and the StP pays serious and strict attention to ensuring the compliance of legal requirements in many cases exceeding the requirements.
2. Student-oriented approach and ViA future-orientation towards that is visible in course descriptions.

Weaknesses:

1. Study course descriptions generally are well outlined, still not entirely in full technical compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 561, Paragraph two (see recommendations).

Evaluation of the study programme "Business Environment Administration"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Environment Administration"

Short-term recommendations

- | |
|--|
| 1. To improve course evaluations collection and analysis from students surveys, including ensuring the feedback to students` evaluations also formally posted online via e.g. moodle (please see StF Recommendations). |
| 2. Encourage international mobility among teaching staff and students (where possible, also online remotely in current epidemiological times). |

3. Study course descriptions need to be reviewed and verified against ViA regulation (course description template) and legal enactments (Law on Institutions of Higher Education (https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967) Section 561, Paragraph two), paying attention to whether criteria for learning outcome grading, study course implementation time, and sufficient compulsory and additional literature is mentioned. To meet the best practices experts recommend to review all the course descriptions and fill in the few technically missing parts that are attached to the course description template according to ViA procedure envisaged by the abovementioned Law - e.g. "Smart Technologies and Data Security" course description does not contain compulsory literature; "External Communication of the Organization" and "Ilgtspējīgas sadarbības attīstības plānošana un vadība" is missing the study course implementation time; Ekon5016 Reklāmas tendencies has just 2 literature sources which would benefit from update (amount and more recent).
4. Strengthen the collaboration and information exchange between the director of the programme and the teaching staff.
5. Level of English knowledge of the academic staff might be improved.
6. Envisage measures to manage the challenges of intercultural communication within ViA Erasmus Policy Statement 2020-2027
7. Enterprises and companies could be more involved in the implementation of research projects in order to provide the infrastructure and new perspectives to different problem situations.

Long-term recommendations

II. "Economics and Business" ASSESSMENT

II. "Economics and Business" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

1.1

The name of the joint doctoral StP "Economics and Business" meets the conventional perception of doctoral studies as well as corresponds well to the newest OECD science fields classification. The name of the programme in English is slightly misspelled in StP SAR, section 1.3. ("Economics and Entrepreneurship"). The name of the StP corresponds to the code 51345 of the StP according to Latvian Education Classification (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers Regulations (Cab.Reg.) No.322, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitiba-klasifikaciju>), meaning that first two digits `51` notes that the StP is doctoral program (level 8 of Latvian and European Qualification Framework) and the last three digits `345` notes the StP belongs to the group of programme in "Management and administration". Consequently, the awarded degree Doctoral degree Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in Economics and Business corresponds to the programme's code and title according to both, the above mentioned Cab.Reg.No322 and also to the Cab.Reg.No.49 on Latvian Science Fields and Subfields (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/296661-noteikumi-par-latvijas-zinatnes-nozarem-un-apaksnozarem>) point No.5.2. following OECD science fields classification. According to information provided by ViA the joint doctoral council for the defense and award of the PhD degree will be established after receiving the accreditation of the study field, because the Latvian Council of Science provides an opinion on

the doctoral council only when the study program is accredited. ViA and partner institutions have started the work on the planning of the joint council to ensure its compliance to Cabinet Regulations No. 1001

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/124787-zinatniska-doktora-grada-pieskirsanas-promocijas-kartiba-un-kriteriji>) - the joint Council will include experts from the Latvian Council of Science, who are already participating in the implementation of the program; joint working group of ViA and partner institutions (RTA and VeA) have already drafted a preliminary list of possible joint council members paying attention to ensuring that consortium council consists of scientists with Latvian Council of Science expert rights in economics and business.

The programme is offered as a joint program together with 2 other regional well-recognized higher education institutions in Latvia. Joint programme complies with the state regulation (Section 551 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions) and respective compliance sheet is provided by ViA (37P-EB-dr-coppliance-to-law.docx).

The programme is offered in a full-time studies format in Latvian and English of the period of 3 years (6 semesters) covering 120 Latvian study credit points / 180 ECTS, which is in accordance with legal standards.

The aims, objectives (goal, tasks; see StP Application and StP SAR, Section 1.3) are strongly linked with the ViA Development strategy priorities (see Experts joint report chapter I.1. Management of the Study Field) and clearly reflects the contents` scope and also scientific impact of the programme. Student-centered approach and principles are integrated in the formulation of the study results (learning outcomes) according to the conventional best practices, as well as are visible in the various teaching and assessment methods which allows, helps and encourages students to develop the envisaged respective skills and competences in an evidence-based and clear manner (e.g. presentation, argumentation, independent and supervised literature research, case-studies analysis, professional ethics). Study programme results (learning outcomes) are mapped against the study courses results (see StP Annex 24P-EuD-kartejums-Eb-mapping-edited-30122020.xlsx). Relevance and coherence between outcomes of the StP and outcomes of specific study courses is met through a study process which is organized in such a way that each course is practically viewed through the theme of the doctoral thesis (StP SAR, Section 1.3.).

The admission requirements are set centralized at ViA (StF SAR, Annex 7P-DREU_ViA_VeA_RTA_Admission-regulation-to-EB_2020-2021_APST_28022020-ENG.docx) and corresponds fully to the legal requirements, are logical and efficient, and supplemented with the necessary legal internal documentation and forms - both, administrative and academic. Section 5 of the requirements specifies the requirements of the documents to be submitted to the ViA Admission Committee, among which is also the requirement (point.5.6.) of English level proficiency at least level B2 or previous education in English. The applicants must have a Master's degree in social sciences or in an equivalent area of professional activity in order to begin studies in this programme. If the Master's or Bachelor's degree is not obtained in social sciences or in the corresponding area of professional activity, the applicant in accordance with the procedure established in the Cabinet Regulations No. 505 "Regulations on recognition of competences acquired outside formal education or through professional experience and on the recognition of learning outcomes achieved in previous education" has to evidence his/her work experience/non-formal education relevant to the knowledge, skills and competences specified in the LQF Level 7 (StP SAR, Section 1.3).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The interrelation of the analysed StP elements - name, degree, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements - is strong, which is the result of the awareness of their importance (content-wise, legal-wise, marketing-wise) to the StP, StF and ViA management.

Strengths

1. The aims, objectives (goal, tasks) are strongly linked with the ViA Development strategy priorities.
2. Learning outcomes are formulated in the student-centered approach according to the conventional best practices and are integrated in the various teaching and assessment methods of the study courses and are mapped against the study courses results.
3. The doctoral study process is organized in such a way that each course is practically viewed through the theme of the doctoral thesis.

Weaknesses

None

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.1

The StP “Economics and Business” just started in the present academic year. The analysis and evaluation made for the process of licensing by the Study Quality Commission pointed out recommendations by licensing experts related to the programme, namely, to assess the possibility to provide the programme with the study courses of parts B and C in order to ensure student mobility possibilities and to develop a StP development plan for the next two years. “Plan of the implementation of the expert recommendations in the joint StP” (SAR, Annex 23) fully plans actions for implementation.

Development of the StP “Economics and Business” was based on the findings reports of the experts of the World Bank Group, as well as advice and recommendations from the World Bank experts who visited higher education institutions of Latvia. Evidence of implemented recommendations is, for instance, the inclusion of an agreement between the supervisor of the Doctoral thesis and the doctoral student in the StP “Economics and Business”.

Students for the doctoral program are attracted specifically related to the international scientific research projects of ViA carried out together with the international academic, municipal and industry partners.

Results of ViA research “Compliance of education offered in Valmiera and Vidzeme region with entrepreneurs’ demand and employment forecasts” and the survey of higher education quality experts (local and foreign) carried out by ViA, among others, were considered.

2.2

At the time of preparing the report, no study course has been completed in the StP “Economics and Business”. As so only design of process can be addressed. In that context orientations implemented seem adequate to achieve a quality system process. Examples of that are the fact that assessment criteria and methods are made public in advance and assessment provides doctoral students with a possibility to show the extent to which they have achieved learning outcomes. Also examples of student centred learning is the personal feedback that students get on their research and interactive methods to provide a good ecosystem between students and teaching staff. Feedback from meetings with students shows a high level of satisfaction with implemented methods.

2.3

It is planned to have student, graduate and employer surveys to enhance the content and organizational performance of the StP “Economics and Business”. At the time, because the programme is in its early beginning, no surveys were still made.

2.4

As the StP “Economics and Business” was implemented only 3 months before the submission of SAR, no data is presented regarding students' mobility. Students may participate in outgoing mobility within the framework of the ERASMUS programme and the Nordplus programme. The StP will also

receive incoming student mobility, including for the purposes of carrying out research for the Doctoral thesis. The director of the StP is in charge of informing students about mobility opportunities.

Recognition of learning outcomes during mobility are ensured and adequate as stated in the evaluation report from European Commission Erasmus +: "The institution is committed to ensure full automatic recognition of periods abroad and describes a method that is coherent with the Council Recommendation for full automatic recognition." (Document Ref. Ares (2020)7583944 - 14/12/2020, p.2).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusion:

The descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the traineeship are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. ViA provides a plan of action to licensing experts' recommendations. As this joint doctoral programme is only at an early stage efficiency of implementation methods and outcomes can't be formally assessed. Nevertheless, meetings with students show high satisfaction with the process.

Strengths:

1. Good interaction with the industry.
2. Good evaluation from accreditation of European Commission Erasmus+ regarding recognition of learning outcomes procedures.

Weaknesses:

None

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

According to the SAR (p.98) resources and provisions are not allocated to each specific StP, but assigned for the whole StF. Furthermore, funding for scientific activities is distributed and accounted among scientific institutes, grant programmes, research projects and commissioned work performed by teaching staff of different StFs (Annex 11). Therefore it is difficult to evaluate in detail particular resources for the Economics and Business program (see chapter 3). However, the sharing of resources increases efficiency of use.

The Economics and Business doctoral StP was licensed on the 5th of February 2020 and first admission to the program started in the 2020/2021 academic year (SAR p.108). This is new development for ViA and therefore a good amount of financial and also emotional resources are allocated for this programme.

The necessary practical facilities, informational resources are at good disposal for the students. Webex platform is available and used for online collaboration, meetings and remote learning. As this programme is Joint with RTA and VeA they have the following resources that are available for all students:

- Center of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Regional Development are available at VeA;
- Resources of all libraries of the consortium universities, including subscribed resources, are available;
- This infrastructure of all universities is equally accessible to all doctoral students and lecturers of the programme.

Although the resource diversity between the consortium seems vast, ViA does not have a specific list of resources which are available to students. In experts opinion gathering the information about

all available resources within the consortium could help the potential or newly admitted students to evaluate the options they have the possibility to use in order to develop their Doctoral thesis.

ViA has established a financial budgeting system calculating income and costs, providing necessary financial provisions for development of the StP “Economics and Business”.

ViA's main unified research direction is digital solutions to social challenges (SAR, p.114). Professors who take active part in doctoral theses research activities, also use this knowledge in other StPs, which contributes to overall teaching staff and study process resource improvement.

During the on site visit it was discovered that doctoral students are content with available resources and provided computer programmes, such as SPSS from their personal computers, which is crucial for continuing to do research. Remote access to the library resources is well functioning, the databases are also easily accessible.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The StP is supported with financial, technical and information provisions. There are necessary prerequisites for achievement of learning and research outcomes. Since this StP is new, there were no particular weaknesses discovered.

Strengths:

1. Good amount of available technical and informational resources, if necessary, study director is open to provide additional resources.

Weaknesses:

1. ViA does not have a specific list of resources which are available to students within the consortium between VeA and RTA.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

4.1

9 lecturers from ViA are involved in the programme. All of them have Doctoral degrees (Annex 15 + CVs). Because the programme has started in the academic year 2020/21, there were no changes. There are not visible risks in the structure of the teaching staff – the staff has adequate competencies linked with the delivered courses. (Annex 15 + CVs)

4.2

The qualification of the teaching staff is adequate. All courses are led by doctors of economics, management plus additionally philosophy, psychology, engineering science, business administration, and geography. The diversity of the staff is quite high and there could appear the risk of losing attention on the primary field of the doctoral programme of economics and business. The staff is still under development because the programme has just started.

4.3

The research and publication activities of the teaching staff might be increased. Only 3 lecturers have presented a record with a significant number of internationally recognized publications but 1 of these 3 is only active in the field of tourism which does not cover the whole field of economics and business. (Annex 18).

4.4

The teaching staff is involved in scientific research. All involved lecturers are doing or were doing research projects during the last 3 years. The main sources of funding for these projects are on the national level, Municipal level, and Ministries level and on the international level: Interreg and

Erasmus (for 2 persons) (SAR, p.121-124). The involvement may be perceived as satisfactory but definitely, there is room for strengthening the involvement in international research like Erasmus and Horizon2020. The StP is based on the advances and findings in the field of economics and business however, the diverse qualification of the staff in other fields of science may lead to the risk of the too broad an approach of the programme. Significant ratio of the teaching staff does not represent the field of economics and business (10 out of 21; see StP SAR, Annex EUd-docetaju-saraksts-anglu-valoda-precizets-26122020.edoc).

4.5

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff was discussed during interviews and there were identified no gaps in this field. The director of the programme cooperates well with the academic - the teaching staff understands the structure of the programme well. Based on the visit, the collaboration between the teaching staff is at the relevant level.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The qualification and research record of the teaching staff is on a satisfactory level. The diversity of the staff is high and many of the involved teaching staff do not represent the field of economics and business. The research activity measured in internationally recognized publications might be improved. The involvement of the teaching staff in research projects is at a satisfactory level, but the international involvement might be improved. It is visible a good collaboration between the teaching staff, and between the staff and the director of the programme.

Strengths:

1. All teaching staff involved in the programme have a doctoral degree.
2. All teaching staff are involved in research projects activity.
3. Good collaboration between the teaching staff and between the staff and the director of the programme.

Weaknesses:

1. Significant ratio of the teaching staff does not represent the field of economics and business.
2. International recognized publications and research activities of the teaching staff in the field of economics and business might be improved.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Economics and Business"

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The diploma sample provided in SAR (StP Annex 41, 41P-Joint-DR-diploma-example.doc) fully complies with the procedure and regulations by which Latvian state-recognised documents of higher education are issued (Cab.Reg.No 202, <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=256157>)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Agreement in place with Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (SAR StP Annex 14, Pielikums_14_Vienosanas_LLU_RTA_ViA_VeA_stud turp.pdf)

- 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

Justification: Confirmation can be found in study agreement.

(SAR StP Annex 40, section 2.8., 40P-EUd-kopiga-DR-studiju-liguma-paraugs.pdf)

- 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

Justification: Confirmation shall be found in SAR Annex 15, 15P-BV_docetaju parskata tabula.edoc.

- 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

Justification: All teaching staff implemented in StP realization have at least B2 level knowledge of English. Confirmation shall be found in SAR StP Annex EUd-docetaju-saraksts-anglu-valoda-precizets-26122020-TRANSLATION.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: Fully compliant

Justification: Affirmation that this criteria is fulfilled can be found in the Rector signed confirmation letter No 1-7/2 (SAR StP Annex Apliecinajums-EUd-AL.55.pants-Latvian-only.zip)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Affirmation that this criteria is compliant with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Institutions of Higher education

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967-law-on-higher-education-institutions>) can be found in SAR StP Annex Apliecinajums-EUd-AL.55.pants-Latvian-only.zip

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Confirmation that it is in compliance with Cabinet regulations No 70 "Mandatory Provisions to be Included in the Study Agreement"

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/152072-studiju-liguma-obligati-ietveramie-noteikumi>) can be found in SAR StP Annex 40 (40P-EUd-kopiga-DR-studiju-liguma-paraugs.pdf).

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Study course descriptions are fully in compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>) Section 561, Paragraph two.

As the programme is implemented in English, the study course descriptions are also provided in English

(SAR StP Annex 39, 39P-EB-study course descriptions-ENG-edited-04012021.zip).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Positive decision has been made from the Council for Higher Education that has been received in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education No 1.10/21.

(SAR StP Annex AIP_atzinums-EUd-250st.pdf)

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification: Not applicable.

- 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: Fully compliant

Justification: The compliance with the Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967-law-on-higher-education-institutions>) is found in SAR StP Annex 37 (37P-EUd-doktorantura_atbilstiba_Augstskolu_lik.docx)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Referring to SAR teaching staff publications (Annex 18, 18P-publication-confer-projects-edited-04012021.zip) and CV's (Annex 16, 16P-CV2019-precizets-22122020.zip), each member of the teaching staff has either relevant and up to date publications or at least 5 years of practical work in the field unrelated to implementation of the StP.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The StP complies with the legal requirements set forth in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments.

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study provision complies with conditions for implementation of the StP. SAR Part 3, Annex 11.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: All representatives of the teaching staff from ViA have appropriate qualifications according to the conditions for the implementation of the StP and the provisions set out in the respective 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

Justification: The StP is based on the advances and findings in the field of economics and business however, the diverse qualification of the staff in other fields of science may lead to the risk of the too broad an approach of the programme. At the same time, considering that the StP is new and that first students will graduate in 2023 at the earliest, it is yet not fully possible to assess the scientific achievement and impact on full scale.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The related requirements have been fully or largely met both, in relation to legal requirements and to good management practices. The comparatively newly launched joint doctoral study program is very well nurtured at ViA in many aspects (organizational, managerial, scientific, marketing) despite some risks naturally present to new programs and yet hard to evaluate the impact of such risks in long term (e.g. staff qualification and expertise fields, scientific depth level).

Strengths:

1. ViA and the StP pays serious and strict attention to ensuring the compliance of legal requirements in many cases exceeding the requirements.
2. Student-oriented approach and ViA future-orientation towards that is visible in course descriptions and particularly in DStP case also in the whole study process organization.

Weaknesses:

1. Significant ratio of the teaching staff does not represent the field of economics and business (10 out of 21; see StP SAR, Annex EUd-docetaju-saraksts-anglu-valoda-precizets-26122020-TRANSLATION.docx).
2. International recognized publications and research activities of the teaching staff in the field of economics and business might be improved.

Evaluation of the study programme "Economics and Business"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Economics and Business"

Short-term recommendations

1. The ratio of the teaching staff representing the field of economics and business might be improved.
2. The number of internationally recognized publications and research activities of the teaching staff in the field of economics and business might be improved.
3. Gathering the information about all available resources within the consortium could help the students to evaluate the options they have in order to develop their Doctoral thesis.

Long-term recommendations

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
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		ViA has several mechanisms for study quality improvement, including Study Quality Assurance Policy as well as the mechanisms for evaluating teaching staff, getting feedback and updating StPs (SAR, p.7-8).

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
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.	Fully compliant		ViA has 12 cooperation agreements in place, within different areas of interest revolving around studies and scientific research with 11 local higher education institutions (SAR, Annex 19, 19P-BV-virziena-sadarbibas-ligumi-saraksts.docx). The internationalization strategy is developed and works in directions in EU and outside it (SAR, p.70) The cooperation implemented in ViA contributes to the specific features of the StF and the StPs within it.
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).	Fully compliant		ViA is successfully developing mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research. Summary of scientific research can be found in SAR, Annex 18 (18P-projekti-konferences-publikacijas-preciz-04012021.zip).
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.	Fully compliant		Taking into account the information given in SAR, its annexes and information acquired during the on-site visit it was evident that the previous recommendations have been implemented.

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)

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Business Administration (42345)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
2	Business Environment Administration (47345)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
3	Economics and Business (51345)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

The experts do not have any dissenting opinions.