

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: University of Latvia

Study field: Information and Communication Sciences

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# Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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The Information and Communication Sciences, hereafter ICS, study field has a unique position in Latvian higher education environment due to the interdisciplinary approach and strong links between the academia, media industry and libraries as well as memory institutions. The bachelor's degree programme in information management and the master's degree programme in library science and information are not offered in other universities in Latvia.

The Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) of University of Latvia (UL) implements studies in communication and information science (and management) at three levels - bachelor's, masters' and doctoral studies.

The leaders of the study field as well as the staff are open for listening to the needs of the students and employers. The good relations between staff, students, graduates and employers enable the study programmes to attract experts to become guest lecturers and therefore provide nationally competitive education with very low cost. During the onsite visit the experts' group also got an impression that the friendly and supportive environment as well as the value of the academic community are the features that motivates people to do their best (for very little pay).

However, the future development of the information and communication science study field focuses on internationalisation of the studies. In order to become internationally competitive, the composition of the staff, career models, motivation system and funding should be different from what it is currently. For example, currently, the most prominent quality assurance tool - regular feedback from the students - in the first instance supports the orientation towards the local market. Also the importance of the number of paying students motivates the leaders of the study field to focus on the needs of Latvian employers and employees. Meanwhile the support for grant applications, strong motivation system for international research and publishing, fund-raising activities is missing.

The experts' group came to the conclusion that this is a conflict of values that can not be solved neither on the level of the ICS study field nor on the level of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Quick internationalization and competitiveness might mean a neoliberalistic turn for the ICS study field, the discourse of the quality assurance system includes elements of this turn (e.g. expression "human resources") and also the experts' group uses the expression "business model". The experts' group notes that in-depth discussions on the basic value conflicts might be helpful.

Having said that the experts' group points out that the study field has created notable international network: since 2006 faculty members and doctoral students from the Department of Communication Science have been involved in European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA); staff has also been active partners of the regional Baltic Media research Association (BMRA); the department of Communication Studies is an institutional member of the European Public relations education and research Association (EUPRERA) as well as in the European Communication Research and Education Association's Central and East European (CEE) Network. Faculty members from the Department of Information and Library Studies take part in the unified Nordic and Baltic Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science's (NORSLIS) doctoral programme. Since 2015, the FSS has had a UNESCO media and information literacy office. Senior academic staff has been involved in research networks organized by foreign universities and other institutions.

Summer schools have been an important format in order to innovate expertise in digital humanities, coding and encoding skills.

Each of the five different programmes has specific potential and problems. The bachelor programme Communication Studies is the most popular and largest one in numerical terms. Its finances are

mostly based on tuition fees and therefore it brings in a notable amount of money. It is a well designed programme that provides theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills. The bachelor degree programme in information management is 79% funded by the national budget. The number of graduates from the programme is about 15-16 (an exceptional year was 2018 - 40 students). An average 16,2% of students drop out before completing their studies. One of the main reasons for quitting is students who believe that the content of the programme is not in line with their expectations. Concurrently the study programme is well designed, the learning outcomes cover basic competencies of contemporary information managers.

The Master programme Librarian Science and Information has the smallest number of students, although it is unique in Latvia and the competences have increasing potential in an information-saturated society. FSS has started several initiatives in order to encourage high school students to learn about the programme content and meet the faculty members. The number of staff is very small, the programme relies quite a lot on library experts and teachers from other departments.

The master programme in Communication aims to provide in-depth knowledge in communication theories, methodology, research ethics and train critical thinking and analysis. Close reading of the content of the courses as well as the volume of compulsory literature raises questions if the actual acquisition is broad rather than in-depth knowledge. Especially as the students of the master programme actually have jobs and their temporal resources are limited. The pedagogical challenge of the master programme of Communication Studies is therefore notable. Experts recommend in the future not to calculate the reading amount not in units, but pages of literature, and when including books, indicate specific chapters that the students must read during the study course.

The doctoral degree programme in Communication Science was licensed in 2006 and accredited in 2008. It is the oldest doctoral study program in Latvia in Communication Science. Compared to other study programmes in the ICS study field, the doctoral study programme has a distinct role and it could be even said, a mission - it provides opportunities for preparing new faculty members and new researchers in Communication Science and Library Science which are very much needed for the study field to develop, especially in the Library Sciences. However, during the previous accreditation period, this mission has not been fulfilled. The number of students matriculated in this study programme has dropped by 50% during the previous accreditation period, and for the last three years (2016-2019) there have been no graduates. From the doctoral thesis currently being developed, only one seems to be written in Library Sciences.

The main weakness of the study field is related to the lack of financial resources and overly strong focus on the academic work in the staff remuneration model which limits the opportunities for the staff members to be involved in science and publishing. The actual research work at the ICS study field is not compliant with the ambitious achievement goals set, there is not enough support and time for faculty members to involve meaningfully in international research networks and prepare new project proposals with international partners. Another critical aspect is that programme directors have neither the financial autonomy and responsibility for developing programmes, nor the autonomy and responsibility to create a sustainable business model for ICS.

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

### **Analysis**

The aims of the study field "Information and Communication Sciences" (ICS) are clearly defined but are attainable only conditionally. The developmental goals of the ICS study field are:

- 1) to become one of the leading centres for information and communication studies in the Baltic States in offering in-depth specialization in library science, communication theory and other media subsectors;
- 2) To become a leading information and communication science and interdisciplinary research

centre in the Nordic region, specialising in information management, library science, book publishing, the media, the diversity and ecology of the media, interactions between information and communication technologies and people, digital communication, culture communication, business communication, sports communication, gender communication and collective memory communication.

( Report, p. 31, 32)

The experts' group has come to the conclusion that the goals are obtainable conditionally due to the following reasons:

To become one of the leading centres for information and communication studies in the Baltic States would be attainable if the ICS study field has established a wide and continuous international network and holds a leading position in some sub-disciplines in communication research. The report provides overview on ICS staff participation in several international projects but in none of these projects ICS is in the leading position.

Although the first goal defines the three approaches (library science, communication theory and different media subsectors) where ICS at UL claims its strength and uniqueness, the experts' group points out that the second goal would be more attainable if the presumption - internationalization (that is also one of the main goals of UL, p. 29) - had been achieved to a great extent.

Both goals would be attainable only if most of the staff members had international visibility and acknowledgement in communication research and expertise.

The self-evaluation report (Table 14) provides 14 achievement indicators of the first goal ("To become one of the leading information and communication centres in the Baltic States) and 6 indicators of the second goal ("To become the leading information, communication science and interdisciplinary research centre in the Northern Europe region). The indicators are divided between 5 missions. While taking into consideration the usefulness of all these activities, the experts' group admits that the report provides little evidence on how these goals are actually implemented. For example, mission 1.3 outlines ("Things to be done") internationalization: maximum use of mobility programmes of students (ERASMUS inc.), preparation courses in English, involvement of foreign instructors. The report provides an overview on incoming mobility (p. 86). There is also a statement that "foreign faculty members are brought in to teach courses in areas where local resources are limited, as well as in areas in which it is necessary to learn as quickly as possible about the latest ideas and research methodologies."(p. 85). Although the indicator of the mission is just the "number of foreign instructors" (Table 14), the experts' group points out that purposeful search for foreign instructors would be efficient.

The submitted report outlines that the ICS study field and the relevant study programmes mostly comply with the main directions of the strategic development of the UL and the needs and the development trends of the society. One of the research priorities for Latvia is strategic communication and crisis communication (p.31). Although a new course on strategic communication has been created for the Communication Studies MA programme (p. 199) these approaches might need more support from research. It is advisable for the study field to analyse how the actual results support the achievement of the ambitious goals, and it is advisable in the next accreditation period to set some mid-term goals that would help to measure the actual results and the progress towards achievement of the goals.

The structure of the management of the ICS study field is oriented towards the development of the study field, especially on the level of study programmes. ICS has established strong cooperation with all stakeholders. The programme directors are in constant dialogue with the students, colleagues, practitioners and employers.

Decision-taking on the grass-root level (development of content courses and curriculum) is efficient. As the UL study field "information and communication science" operates in a saturated and intensive field of competition, it is important to point out that ICS of the UL has defined its unique approach by offering integrated content studies in all areas of communication sciences as well as

synthesis of academic and practical studies. The bachelor's degree programme in information management and the master's degree programme in library and information science are not offered at other universities in Latvia. This appears to be a carefully thought out decision.

However, the experts' group did not find evidence that strategic decision-taking on the Faculty and University level supports the main goals of ICS. The applied business model primarily supports economic efficiency, there is a lack of carefully designed career model(s) which contribute to the main developmental goals of ICS. The experts' group admits that the Faculty has created some support for research (some amount of the workload is dedicated to research, translation and conference support), however the onsite visit interviews revealed that there is no system that actually supports the transformation of ICS study field from local-market oriented teaching to the highly competitive international research organization.

The directors of study programmes have no financial autonomy and responsibility to develop their human resources and study programmes. The self evaluation report as well as the onsite visit did not reveal that the UL, Faculty or programme directors have a strategic plan for increasing the income of the study field. The experts' group got an impression that the autonomy of the Faculty as well as the Departments to find the best business model for ICS study field is limited.

ICS has good technical support: staff at the IT department as well as in library and studios are devoted to offer the best quality service. Students have very good access to the necessary resources.

The UL has established a system and implemented clear procedures for the admission of students, the recognition of the study period, professional experience, and the previously acquired formal and non-formal education, as well as for the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students. These procedures are logical and efficient. The admission process is governed by the Admission Rules (Table 11) and subordinate orders that determine the procedures for the given academic year. The competition for study places is based on the results of centralized exams or comparable education abroad. Enrolment in master's degree programmes is decentralized, admission to doctoral studies takes place centrally in UL. The procedure for the recognition of study courses is stipulated in the legal act "Credit Transfer Procedure at the University of Latvia". On the basis of student's application, it is possible to recognize study courses acquired at another Latvian higher education institution, higher education institution abroad or during the previous study period at the University of Latvia.

The UL has set certain academic integrity principles and mechanisms, and it uses appropriate plagiarism detection tools which are effective and contribute to the development of the internal culture of the UL and the stakeholders are aware of such tools and mechanisms. The UL has developed the Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System. All papers in the ICS study programmes are compared in this system. The papers are examined in an automatic regime (Report, p. 44)

Generally the information published on the website of the UL, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Information and Library Studies and the Department of Communication Studies regarding the study approaches complies with the information available in the official registers. It would be helpful if the link to the departments and study programmes would be found from the main menu of the Faculty page.

It would be also helpful if a more detailed description of study programmes as well as links to the staff would be presented at the page "Degrees and departments" (The problems were detected in the English language version of the webpage).

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The aims of the study field focus on achievement of the leading competency position in information and communication sciences in the Baltic as well as in Nordic area. The experts' group has come to

the conclusion that these goals are achievable only conditionally, while most of these pre-conditions are unexecuted. Concurrently, the study field has a good position in Latvia. The dedicated staff members have established good relations and cooperation with different stakeholders: colleagues, students, graduates, employers. The UL has set certain academic integrity principles and mechanisms, and it uses appropriate plagiarism detection tools

Most important information is published on the website of UL, FSC and the Department of Information and Library Studies as well as on the webpage of the department of Communication studies.

Strengths:

1. ICS study field programmes have a good position in the local market.
2. ICS staff has established strong cooperation with all stakeholders.
3. Staff is dedicated and highly motivated to continue their study field development.
4. During the onsite interviews the staff and the students explained their deep understanding of academic integrity.

Weaknesses:

1. The goals of the study field are attainable conditionally, concurrently most of the pre-conditions are unexecuted, especially the international visibility, networking and competitiveness of the staff.
2. Programme directors have no financial autonomy and responsibility for developing programmes, neither autonomy and responsibility to create a sustainable business model for ICS.
3. ICS does not have an efficient research support system.
4. Analytical self-analysis of human resources and possible strategies as well as data based analysis of the risks and opportunities of the existing business model is insufficient.

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

### **Analysis**

UL quality management system has been introduced and implemented since 2010 and quality assurance policy since 2012 (Report, p. 15). The self evaluation report includes references to several documents and decisions. The functioning of the system of internal quality assurance of the study fields of the University of Latvia is determined by the "Procedure for the preparation of annual reports of the study fields of the University of Latvia (Report, p. 26)

The UL Quality Assurance Policy is closely related to UL Human Resources Policy (Report, Figure 5, p. 19). However, the self- evaluation report included very little analysis on evaluation of academic staff, although development of human resources, research capacity and competitiveness were the strategic objectives of UL in 2016-2020, (Report, p. 10) . The self- evaluation report did not include any reference to the analysis of teachers' portfolio or self analysis concerning his/her professional values, motivation, personal development, workload (the regulation of workload is well described (Report, p. 71, but not explained how it is applied on individual level), field of main research competency, metrics of academic credit, possible conflict of duties etc.

Absence of this analysis raises doubts regarding data-based analysis on human resources. However, the data on academic metrics one can find from CVs, list of courses the person is responsible for and the list of publications, but there is no aggregated whole. The latter seems to be a problem as a number of staff members should fulfill various tasks: administrative, teaching, research and leading. The experts' group spotlights that disproportionately a high workload in teaching and administrative tasks would not leave time and energy for research, professional development and fund-raising activities.

The experts' group can not draw on declarative statements, e.g. "There are many different activities

related to the ongoing analysis and updating of study programmes, as well as the need to improve the study process. ... The basis for quality assurance is active international co-operation with analogous study programmes abroad, the involvement of employers and social partners in preparing study content, participation in evaluating the achievements of students throughout the study process, preparation of theses and dissertations, ensuring practical research.” (Report, p. 47) This kind of description provides overview on activities which are regarded as most important for the authors of the self-evaluation report, however, in order to assess the efficiency of these activities, the experts' group lacks data-based analysis.

The self-analysis report reveals that the FSS council prepares study programmes review reports each year; the students praise the quality of the courses and the organization of the study process; representatives of the employers take part in final exam commissions and help to prepare new programmes and courses; department directors submit a department development review to the dean and the dean presents faculty development reviews to the rector.” (Report, p. 48). The experts' group points out that absence of the analysis disables assessment concerning the question if the quality assurance system ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes.

The document analysis releases that the dominant method for data collection is a survey. During the meeting of the onsite visit the ICS students said fulfilling survey at the end of each semester is obligatory and therefore a big burden. The experts' group points out that mandatory feedback survey decreases the data validity. According to the self- evaluation report (p. 56) the focus of the data collection via surveys is the satisfaction of students, graduates and employers. In case of Study Course Evaluation Surveys this focus does not necessarily support an approach where a student is responsible for learning while the lecturers are responsible for facilitating the learning. Concurrently the self-evaluation report did not include analysis on students' accountability on their learning: motivation, autonomy-responsibility balance, achievements. The report included remarks that data on student achievement is collected at LUIS (p. 26) and the staff analyse student achievement (p. 42). During the onsite visit the university management representatives mentioned that the methodology of the surveys will be developed.

Concurrently, the students as well as the staff pointed out that open communication between the programme director and students enable programme directors to solve the problems immediately. This kind of feedback system is efficient.

According to the self-evaluation report the UL governance is responsible for the functioning of the study quality management system, the management of results, process monitoring and audits. Responsibility of the quality of the study field lies with the study field director and the dean and study programme directors. Each lecturer is responsible for the quality of the content and implementation of the course, research activities and professional development. The coordinators of UL study fields in cooperation with the directors of study programmes prepare study field self-assessment reports each academic year.

The self evaluation report provides a list of actors and actions that provide input for the quality assurance system: “academic personnel are evaluated on the results of research and study work, the effectiveness of their work, the development of their competence and the improvement of their quality. /.../ group discussions as well as surveys of employers and social partners, student surveys (first year students survey; surveys on study sources, last year students survey, survey for students who have decided to discontinue their studies) about the quality of study courses and the way in which the study process is organized, questionnaires for graduates and students about the quality of study programmes, monitoring of the careers of graduates.”(p.47). ICS quality assurance system includes a list of indicators related to achieving the goals and missions of the ICS study field (Table 14). These indicators reflect that ICS's quality vision foresees programme innovations, optimization of the content of the courses, cooperation with other UL faculties, harmonization of the content of C course with other study field programmes; international cooperation, successful fundraising for

research, involvement of foreign instructors in study programmes, maximum use of mobility programmes of students, English -language courses preparation, further improvements and expansions of study course opportunities in E-environment etc. In the list there are some key actions that would help the ICS study field to improve its international visibility and research potential. For example, 2.1.3. (Table 14) pinpoints grant applications for financing at least 2-3 projects from the departments of the direction in each LSC (Latvian Council of Science) funding competition. The experts' group does not have access to the data of how many applications have been submitted each year, nor about the success rate. The experts' group notes that the goals of the study field also require EU and international funding applications. Action 2.1.4. prescribes the establishment and monitoring of individual publication plans (a specific number of publications each year). The experts' group points out that the actual number and type of publications does not prove that the system is efficient.

In sum, the experts' group can conclude that the quality assurance system partly ensures continuous improvement, development of the ICS study field and the relevant study programmes.

According to Table 15 the University of Latvia has defined in all 10 sections of ESG quality assurance actions that university is doing for improving all quality aspects. During the onsite visit the experts' group made sure that internal as well as external stakeholders wish to take full responsibility for the quality culture.

Point 1.3 (Table 15) outlines student-centred learning, teaching and evaluation as one important standard: "The academic staff updates the descriptions of study courses, paying particular attention to the formulation of learning outcomes, so that they can be understood by students, thereby promoting student participation and co-responsibility in the study process, as well as evaluating student achievements in line with the approach of student -centred higher education". In the self-evaluation report UL has also identified that "Special attention is paid to establishing student-centered teaching principles in the implementation of all study programs. The immediate challenges include improving information management and regular cyclical external quality assurance".

Since 2013, the ICS study field 343 courses taken by students elsewhere have been recognised. This large number of recognized courses provide evidence that the needs of the students on curriculum level is taken into account.

During the onsite visit experts' group was convinced that the programme directors and the staff are listening to the students' learning needs concerning the development of study programmes and courses. During the onsite visit the experts' group tried to find out how the e-learning environment is used for assisting the learning process and got the answer that this has been rapidly improving.

Another aspect that is important in a student-centred learning approach is: what choices the students have within a study course and how the students assess their own learning. The structure of the course descriptions of different study programmes (Appendixes 39 A,B,C, D; E) include following aspects: study course abstract; course plan and division between lectures and seminars; characterization of students' independent work organizations and tasks; learning outcomes, requirements for awarding credits; criteria for evaluating learning outcomes; course content; compulsory reading list; further reading list. This structure provides a good frame for providing overview on possibilities on students' possibilities to modify their learning process and assess their own learning. The close reading of course descriptions revealed few descriptions on options to choose the focus or ways how certain learning outcomes can be achieved.

The experts' group draws attention to point 1.5: "The role of academic staff is essential in ensuring the unity of studies and research and a student-centred study process, and thus the UL offers opportunities and encourages academic staff to enhance their professionalism, promote scientific activity, thereby strengthening the link between studies and scientific research, promoting innovation in teaching methods and use of new technologies in the study process." During the onsite meeting the academic staff mentioned that the research part is their personal initiative that is supported by university but led and initiated by themselves, also this part is not included in

workload.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The quality assurance system is established and there is a system of annual reporting. The structure of the quality assurance system corresponds to the general legal requirements of international as well as national level. Concurrently, the human resources part of the quality assurance system lacks multifaceted data collection and analysis, although the human resources is closely related to UL Human Resources Policy. The main quality propelling factor is the commitment of the staff and good relations between the staff, students, graduates and other stakeholders. Student-centered learning is very well implemented via a feedback system and dialogic communication, while the descriptions of the courses do not provide information about the choices students have concerning their learning process. The different quality assurance indicators lack integrated whole.

Strengths:

1. The quality assurance system is established, reporting is annual.
2. The students' point of view is taken into consideration and is being analyzed during study course improvements.
3. The programme directors are open to take into consideration the needs of the students.
4. Staff lecturers as well as guest lecturers have good relations with different stakeholders.
4. Staff members are enthusiastic and dedicated to develop their subjects and programmes.

Weaknesses:

1. The methodology of the student feedback needs to be improved because mandatory surveys are not the best way to collect students' feedback, while mostly UL is collecting feedback via surveys.
2. A quality assurance system concerning human resources lacks data based analysis.
3. The list of indicators of quality assurance is established, but there is no evidence that data on key indicators are collected and analysed, the results of analysis are used for improving the performance of the study field.
4. The description of the quality assurance system reveals that different quality indicators (economic and human resources, infrastructure, students' feedback) are not synthesized into an integrated whole.

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

### **Analysis**

"The financial resources for the study programmes in the information and communication science study field mostly come from national budget subsidy as well as from tuition revenues. ... The bachelor's degree programme in communication study programme is the largest one in numerical terms and its finances mostly are based on tuition fees, with the national budget subsidy representing only 11% of the budget." (Report, p. 58) Master programmes are mostly financed by the national budget (91%) same as a doctoral programme is financed only by the national budget. The cost per student in the "Information Management" bachelor's study programme is EUR 1,953 per year. The costs for the "Communication Science" BA programme per student is EUR 1,881, for the "Library Science and Information" MA programme it is EUR 2,795 per student, for the "Communications Science" MA programme it is EUR 2,555, and for the "Communications Science" doctoral programme it is EUR 5,233 (Appendix 38).

In 2018 the budget of the faculty was 2 088 799 EUR, 66% of which came from financing for the study process. The self-evaluation report does not provide information how this budget is divided between different study fields. However by taking into account that the ICS itself has 5 study

programmes the budget is very limited. The self-evaluation report does not provide any comparative data on financing higher education programmes in Latvia and financing of communication studies in the Baltic states (where the living costs are comparable to Latvia). However, according to the general knowledge of some of the members of the experts' group the budget is not sustainable for attracting highly skilled teaching staff (for the study field and the relevant study programmes).

The structure of the budget also means that there is an urgent need to find opportunities to get more funding for research. However, as it was mentioned in the chapter on quality assurance system the experts' group did not find evidence that career models and salary + workload system actually motivates staff to build up an efficient fund-raising system for academic as well as applied research. The experts' group admits that a resultant fund-raising needs highly qualified researchers as well as well experienced and highly qualified support team (grant centre) and it takes several years of investment before the system starts to recover the investments. Therefore the experts' group suggests to design a fund-raising system as fast as possible.

The self-evaluation report (Appendix 38) points out the risks of financing study programmes that are related to the decreasing number of students as well as the profitability calculations. The profitability calculations show that profitability of Information Management (BA) is minus 15 057 per year but the communication science BA programme earned revenues of EUR 528,137, with a profit of EUR 14,627 (Appendix 38). The MA programmes (Library Science and Information and Communication Science) profitability is only minus few hundred euros. The cost per student is different - in the communication science bachelor's degree programme is EUR 1,881 per year; while for the doctoral programme in communication sciences it is EUR 5,233 (Appendix 38).

The ICS study field has premises of very good quality - auditoriums, computer classrooms, studios. The new House of Letters will offer a modern study environment for the ICS study field. During the onsite visit the experts' group was told that planning the new House of Letters is based on the best experience UL has acquired from previous buildings.

The ICS study field has excellent library resources. The opening hours of the UL sectoral libraries are adapted to students' needs, the staff and students have very good access to all services provided by the library. The number of copies in the library is sufficient (p. 64), the collection of books in social science ethics affirms that focus on ethics is a recurrent value for the ICS study field. During the onsite visit the experts' group made sure that the collection of books and journals was excellent. The experts group appreciates the practice of students' organization to allocate a substantial amount of money for buying books.

Services (workstations, electronic ordering, night subscription, pre-booking, counselling etc.) are designed very well. During the onsite visit the experts' group recognised that the librarians are committed professionals who are aware of the needs of different users.

The experts' group highlights the excellent access to 34 e-resource platforms and various databases.

The studio for audiovisual media production is carefully and well designed and efficiently used. The experts' group points out that the staff has carefully thought out the needs of the teaching process and the way how to use the equipment with care.

The experts' group has come to the conclusion that UL has developed procedures to get the academic positions fulfilled by setting the minimum requirements for academic positions (p.68). The self evaluation report did not explain how UL and ICS study field attract highly skilled (and competent) teaching staff. Neither the self-evaluation report includes data about competition for the academic positions.

During the onsite visit the experts' group was convinced that access to the students as possible employees, interest in the teaching process and other personal motives as well as good relations with previous teachers motivate highly skilled practitioners to become visiting teachers or hourly-paid staff.

During the online visit the experts' group has come to the conclusion that the workload is biased

towards academic teaching and only few staff members use enough time for research in order to become internationally visible researchers. ICS study field academic staff's workload does not include the research process. UL teaching staff informed experts that the research part sometimes is individual choice and not part of university work tasks.

The FSS provides financial support for participating at conferences and language editing. The staff has also the opportunity to improve their English-language skills. Young academics and doctoral students can participate in the programme "Promoting the colleague experience exchange of academic staff". The experts' group can therefore conclude that UL and FSS provides a professional improvement system for the academic personnel and the faculty members have been using various improvement opportunities. The ESF project "Restoration of Academic Personnel and Improvement of Competencies at the University of Latvia" allowed staff members to go on internship at Tilde (p. 70). Education programme "Methodology for the formulation and evaluation of the learning outcomes" helps academic staff to update their study courses and learning outcomes. However, there were some missing points - e.g. during the meeting with ICS doctoral programme students, experts were informed that doctoral degree students are not paid for their academic work with students.

Self-evaluation report provides information about a pedagogical educational centre (PEC) that is organising educational events and supports teaching and academic staff. Impact of this centre potentially can play an important role in academic staff's professional development, and experts are recommending to use all advantages that are provided by PEC.

According to the self-evaluation report "A key factor in increasing qualifications occurs when faculty members spend time at foreign universities to exchange experiences, deliver guest lectures and take part in conferences and seminars. The outgoing mobility of faculty members and the increasing number of times that they do so help to reach the study field goal of becoming one of the leading information and communication sciences study centres in the Baltic States". (p. 71). The experts' group agrees that mobility is one of the important factors that supports internationalization and also professional network building. However, mobility alone would not help the staff to raise the competitiveness concerning international research and becoming the centre of excellence. As it was mentioned before, the career model, financial resources, support system, motivation system etc. should be carefully designed for achieving the goal of becoming a leading information and communication science centre in the Baltic region. The analysis of the Appendix 40 carried out by the experts' group members, raised some doubts about the implementation possibilities of the compulsory mobility plan "which states that each faculty member from the information and communication science direction must participate in outgoing mobility programmes at least once during their elected term". Namely, the experts' group came to the conclusion that some members of the academic staff are responsible for so many courses that it would be very difficult for them to leave the country. Especially, as team-teaching is not usual practice. The self evaluation report also did not provide overview on financial resources of mobility except ERASMUS exchange programmes and support for going to the conferences.

According to the self-evaluation report the composition of the Faculty has been rejuvenated during the reporting period and the process of replacing generations has begun and will continue in future years (p. 71). According to the report 67% of people who have been elected to academic posts in the information and communication science study field at Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), UL hold a doctorate (p. 71). On page 121, it is said that 56% of the average 25 number of faculty members had a doctoral degree while 44% had a master's degree. The experts' group understands that these differences result from who are defined as "faculty members", still the data presentation indicates that better methodology for the human resources analysis would be helpful for the ICS study field.

The researchers involved in the scientific projects, and producing most of the scientific results (publications, book chapters) are very enthusiastic and seem to have extremely high capacities for doing/managing scientific work, but at the same time they are the ones who are also intensively

involved in the implementation of the study programmes. It raises the question about the sustainability of such an approach and concerns about the overload of the academic staff and high risks of burnout among the key staff members.

The students of UL have access to academic support, career development and psychological support (p.72). The self-evaluation report provides a list of structural units and staff who's key responsibilities is to provide support for students. The list of specific services provides proof that students' support system is sufficient. The infrastructure accessibility for persons with disabilities will be further improved when ICS study field will move to the new building.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The infrastructure, material and technical resources for the ICS study field are excellent. Concurrently the financial resources are not sufficient, there is no well-functioning system for fund-raising. During the onsite visit the experts' group got impression that the extreme financial efficiency of ICS study field is based on three pillars: highly skilled professionals (who earn their living outside of academia) work for very small pay; doctoral students teach for getting pedagogical experience; the income of academic position holders is small enough to hold the competition for academic jobs rather low. The experts' group states that this extreme efficiency in combination with missing competition between the members of the staff is currently a weakness, mainly because this prevents fund-raising activeness.

Strengths:

1. The library provides excellent support for teachers and students, the access to the databases is very good.
2. Multimedia studio is well equipped and provides very good support for journalism and audio-visual learning.
3. Highly skilled professionals are motivated to become guest teachers.
4. The staff is developing the curriculum as efficiently as possible, their devotion to communication education is high.
5. Good interpersonal relations and missing competition between the staff members provide good presumptions for collaboration and teamwork.
6. The elected staff members are self-motivated and enthusiastic about their work.

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient financial resources.
2. The business model is not sustainable as the main income is tuition fees (insufficient for 4 study programmes out of five) and state budget (insufficient).
3. The workload of the staff is slanting towards teaching, there is no strong motivation to do research.
4. Missing competition between the staff members might leave people into their zone of comfort, diminish their need to initiate changes and fund-raising activeness.

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

### **Analysis**

The direction of the scientific research seems to comply with the direction of the study programmes taught in this study field and the research programme for social and law sciences (Table 23). Among the examples of artistic creation are the curation of exhibitions and production of documentary films and other activities. However, the analysis on various aspects of compliance is weak, and the attainment of different goals is not always clear. It is due to the fact that there is a lack of

measurable indicators (except for the amount of funding attracted through research projects - EUR 600 000 in the Latvian version versus EUR 900 000 in the English version) that could help to analyse deeper how/whether the goals are achieved. For some goals (e.g., the Goal 1.1. To increase the scientific operations competitiveness of the social science group in Europe) it is said that the analysis of the publication quotability index is being carried out. It is not clear why such analysis could not be done at the end of the accreditation period and the conclusions presented. Taking such an approach would also help the study field to prepare for the next accreditation period.

Also, the research goal set in the report is to become one of the leading research centres in the Nordic region (Report, p.76) currently seems not attainable without additional effort and resources from the faculty and the University's management. The current approach to the management of the scientific research at the ICS study field can be significantly improved.

The potential of the doctoral programme and the doctoral students is not currently fully exploited, as there are few examples where students are involved in research projects together with the faculty members and there are only few co-authored publications with doctoral students.

The relation between scientific research (Appendix 46) in the study field and the study process has been defined and ensured. The research results are integrated in the study course content on bachelor and master level (report, p.76). The report mentions two study courses where the scientific results have been integrated ("Collective memory and communication" and "Media ecosystem"). Students from all study levels have been involved in the research projects and have developed their final thesis on topics that are related to the research projects implemented at the ICS study field. Such approach ensures that the outcomes of scientific research are integrated in the study process.

The study field has created a notable international network: since 2006 faculty members and doctoral students from the department of Communication have been involved in European Communication Research and education Association (ECREA); staff members have also been active partners of the regional Baltic Media research Association (BMRA); the department of Communication Studies is an institutional member of the European Public relations education and research Association (EUPRERA) as well as in the European Communication Research and Education Association's Central and East European (CEE) Network. Faculty members from the Department of Information and Library Studies take part in the unified Nordic and Baltic Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science's (NORSLIS) doctoral programme. Since 2015, the FSS has run an UNESCO media and information literacy office. Senior academic staff has been involved in research networks organized by foreign universities and other institutions. Summer schools have been an important format in order to innovate expertise in digital humanities, coding and encoding skills.

The faculty members have taken part in three international projects (report, p.77 and also Table 24). Otherwise, the research projects that the staff members from ICS study field have implemented, in most cases, are nationally/locally oriented. For the next accreditation period, it would be crucial to analyse and define the key areas of expertise for achieving higher visibility on the international arena. From the report and the interviews, the experts' group did not get information about a specific research area that the ICS study field is having an internationally leading expertise currently.

The list of scientific publications of the academic staff is provided in the Appendix 37, however, it contradicts the statement in the report (p.80) that the academic staff from the ICS study field have published approx. 450 scholarly papers and chapters. In reality, the list provided in the Appendix 37 is heavily dominated by publications of scientists from fields such as pedagogy, political science, linguistics, sociology and others. The list does not reflect the actual situation on the study field level which does not help neither the experts to assess the current situation, nor the study field to see in which direction and how well they are doing in publishing. The suggestion would be to analyse the publishing statistics on the level of the study field, and highlight the publications that are, for example, interdisciplinary, written together with foreign authors, involve doctoral students etc.

The involvement of the academic staff members in research is organized through a joint Advanced

Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI) (report, p.79). There are five subtopics defined that the faculty members from the ICS study field are focusing on (report, p.80). The report says that it is fundamentally necessary to include other topics in the ASPRI's primary research areas such as global communication and the developments of information society. The expert's group agrees that the list of topics that the communication and library science researchers can work on should be expanded. However, an in-depth analysis is very much needed to evaluate the current model for the involvement of the staff members in scientific work and involvement in the ASPRI' activities. Despite the conclusion made in the accreditation report (p.80) that the research work must be seen as successful, from the staff interviews, the experts learned that not always the case that the academic staff members are informed about and are not receiving the help necessary for preparing new project applications. As it was described by one of the staff members, developing new projects is a "hobby-type" activity that the staff members are not paid for. Several times throughout the interviews the term "unpaid workload", "unpaid working hours" was used referring to the scientific endeavour at the ICS study field. The conclusion by the expert group is that there is a mechanism created for the involvement of the teaching staff in research, however, currently, it is not functioning well and there is a need for considerable modifications.

There is a mechanism in place to promote the involvement of the students in scientific research work. Various opportunities for students are provided to involve in the research activities (report, p.81). There are also different study courses on all study levels that provide students with knowledge and skills necessary for scientific work. In the scientific projects that are implemented at the ICS study field, the doctoral students are involved, but as volunteers. The report says (p.80) that several doctoral students are also involved in the study work, helping their supervisors to lead seminars and serve as supervisors for bachelor students' annual papers and bachelor and master thesis. The experts find such situation as being unfavorable to the doctoral students, and also during the interviews critical remarks were received from the students themselves about the pressure to involve in the ICS study field's academic and research processes without a pay, which means that the students are forced to work outside of the university during their study period to sustain themselves. Also the bachelor students can involve in the research on a voluntary basis to gather data, and they are given lists of topics related to the research interests and directions of the academic staff to develop their annual papers or their bachelor papers. The master students (p.81) are also encouraged to choose topics related to research projects implemented at the ICS study field, and present their findings at the projects' conferences and other dissemination events.

Section 4.6. in the report provides information about the innovative solutions in the study process. The description of the various innovations (product, process, marketing, organizational) show that the most emphasis during the previous accreditation period has been on improving the study content, study process planning and management, and developing opportunities for students to produce media content. During the visit, the experts' group found that implementation of these innovations can be attributed to increased student satisfaction with their studies and thus can be assessed as useful. One example is also given in the report about the development of a research innovation - development of methodology for researching disinformation practices.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The direction of the scientific research and also the artistic creation complies with the direction of the study programmes taught in this study field and the research programme for social and law sciences. However, the analysis on various aspects of compliance is weak, and the attainment of different goals is not always clear. The research goal set in the report is to become one of the leading research centres in the Nordic region currently seems not attainable without additional effort and resources. The potential of the doctoral programme and the doctoral students is not currently fully exploited, as there are only few examples where students are involved in research projects

together with the faculty members and there are only few co-authored publications with doctoral students. The relation between scientific research and/or artistic creation in the study field and the study process has been defined and ensured, and it is efficient. Scientific research and/or artistic creation and the outcomes thereof are integrated in the study process in the study programmes of all levels. t-oriented manner. The study field has created a notable international network and staff members are participating in the major scientific associations in the field. However, the research projects that the staff members from ICS study field have implemented, in most cases, are nationally/locally oriented. The list of academic publications does not reflect the actual situation on the ICS study field level and does not help neither the experts to assess the current situation, nor the study field to see in which direction and how well they are doing in publishing. The suggestion would be to analyse the publishing statistics on the level of the study field, and highlight the publications that are, for example, interdisciplinary, written together with foreign authors, involve doctoral students etc. There is a mechanism created for the involvement of the teaching staff in research, mainly, through the interdisciplinary ASPRI institute, however, currently, the mechanism is not functioning well and there is a need for considerable modifications. There is also a mechanism in place to promote the involvement of the students in scientific research work. However, it relies on voluntary involvement of students and this was not evaluated positively by the doctoral students during the visit - the current mechanism was described as a pressure to involve in the ICS study field's academic and research processes without a pay. Finally, the description of the various innovations (product, process, marketing, organizational) show that the most emphasis during the previous accreditation period has been on improving the study content, study process planning and management, and developing opportunities for students to produce media content. During the visit, the experts' group found that implementation of these innovations can be attributed to increased student satisfaction with their studies and thus can be assessed as useful.

#### Strengths:

1. Good links between scientific work of the faculty members and the study content.
2. Timely and useful innovations related to study content, study process and management.

#### Weaknesses:

1. Lack of systematic and sustainable model for the staff members to involve in scientific work and support for scientific work.
2. Gap between the ambitious development goals and a thorough analysis about how the goals could and are achieved.
3. High risks of burnout among the key staff members that are involved both in research, administrative and academic work.
4. The number of publications from the Communication field in English is low.
5. The potential of the doctoral programme is not fully exploited.

## **5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

The UL ICS has a broad, well-developed cooperation network that includes private and public-sector institutions; employers, non-governmental institutions. That creates a well-functioning and self-fulfilling cycle: the students that get highly appreciated internship places in both private and public-sector institutions, afterwards, after graduation, becoming accepted as employees at those institutions and then providing new job vacancies for next UL students and graduates as employers. The well-established cooperation network also helps the university to attract the professionals of the communication & information management field as the teaching staff most often as guest lecturers; thus, providing the students with the much-needed insight of the latest communication trends and

developments, as well as the practical skills and competencies that are appreciated and demanded at the job market.

As found out by the experts' group the graduates of the UL ICS study field are well appreciated and demanded at the job market, as well as the graduates feel adequately prepared for future professional careers.

Nevertheless, the experts' group's attention drew the fact that most lecturers-students-graduates-employers network is formed by the former UL students of ICS study field. Although it proves the loyalty and ties that are formed during the studies, the Experts' Group suggests to form a broader network, by including also the graduates (employers) of other higher education institutions. That could open new cooperation possibilities, for example, wider internship and other self-development possibilities for the students, UL ICS study field teaching staff representation in the communication and information management industry events as experts, strengthened the UL graduates presence not only in Riga, but also in various regions of Latvia, etc.

In overall, according to the experts' group's evaluation the above-mentioned cooperation contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field, as well as included study programs.

Although there exists a system and procedures for the attraction of the teaching staff and students from abroad, as well as there is an ongoing mobility both among teachers and students, the experts' group's main concern is whether the current mobility level and scope is enough for the UL and the ICS study field to reach the ambitious goals: become the leading information and communication study centre's in the Baltic countries; as well as become the leading information and communication science research centre in the Nordic region.

Among the strategic development goals is mentioned the mobility of the students, as well as the mobility of the teaching staff.

The foreign cooperation network is quite vast and the UL Communication study field has in total 31 international cooperation agreements. But the expert's group's evaluation is that the existing international cooperation network could be applied more effectively.

The mobility of the academic staff is quite low and it has decreased in the last 3 academic years. Besides the incoming teaching staff mobility has been 0 (zero) in the academic years: 2016/2017; 2017/2018 respectively. There was no incoming mobility under the Erasmus programme in academic years 2016/2017 and the 2017/2018, but foreign lecturers gave lectures under other programmes and exchange visits. Information can be found in the Section 4.2 of the self-Assessment report of the bachelor's programme "Information Management".

In the self-assessment report as the main reason for the low incoming academic staff mobility is mentioned the lack of financial resources to cover the remuneration costs, as well as the travel and accommodation costs. And there is a hope expressed that with the additional financial resources through the European Social Fund project there will be possibility to involve more international teaching staff.

It is important to note that both students and graduates admitted the high appreciation for lectures and courses provided by the guest lecturers or international teaching staff, as well expressed the wish to have more of an international approach during studies and more courses provided by the international teaching staff.

The mobility rate of the students both incoming and outgoing is higher than the teachers' mobility, but the trend of the number of outgoing students remains the same throughout the academic years, while the number of incoming students seems to be slightly decreased in the last three academic years.

One of the possible reasons why there is a low number of incoming students from abroad is the lack of information about UL ICS study field in English on UL and Faculty websites.

The mobility of students and teaching staff is only one aspect of internationalization, the other is the level of internationalization of the research process, which also could be more developed according

to the Experts' Group's opinion.

It is mentioned in the self-assessment report that during the reporting period the teaching staff of the Information and Communication Study programme specifically in the fields of Communication and Library sciences has prepared in altogether 42 scientific research papers or separate units in collective monographs. The experts' group discovered that only one of them has been published in 2019, thus is a bit of cause of concern whether there is a positive development trend in the international cooperation process in the research.

Also, during the Assessment visit the experts' group found out that the current PhD level students, as well as postdoctoral students have very limited support from the teaching staff and UL in becoming more exposed to the international research network. Mostly they are provided with information about possibilities to participate in international conferences or apply for scholarships, but only in a few cases (which are highly appreciated by the students) the teaching staff actively takes part in introducing them to the international network.

One of the reasons for this underdeveloped international research network could be the teaching staff interest in research topics that mainly are locally focused, can be done independently and does not require the extension of the research network.

There is an elaborated system for the organisation and provision of traineeships for the students of ICS study field. Also, as found out by the experts' group the students as interns are highly appreciated in their potential workplaces and there is a long-term cooperation between the study field and different organisations regarding internships.

There are currently no joint study programmes, although it is indicated in the Self-Assessment Report that the UL Social Science Faculty is planning to be involved in partnership with the National Library of Latvia in order to create a professional Master's degree programme in memory institution and heritage studies.

Also, during the Assessment visit the experts' group found out that the current PhD level students, as well as postdoctoral students have very limited support from the teaching staff and UL in becoming more exposed to the international research network. Mostly they are provided with information about possibilities to participate in international conferences or apply for scholarships, but only in a few cases (which are highly appreciated) the teaching staff actively takes part in introducing them to the international network.

One of the reasons for this underdeveloped international research network could be the teaching staff interest in research topics that mainly are locally focused, can be done independently and does not require the extension of the research network.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

The UL ICS study field has developed a really broad and well-developed network of institutions in Latvia within the study field. That allows to get the best and most appreciated internship places for the students during their study years, as well as afterwards get job offers within the study field. Also, the students and graduates of the UL ICS are highly appreciated among the employers as potential employees.

Although there is developed a system and procedures in a way how to attract the teaching staff and students from abroad, the exchange number of students and lecturers are not high and in some study years there have been no incoming teaching staff from abroad.

The traineeship system is well-elaborated and helps to achieve the study goals for the students.

There is currently no joint study programme, but there are plans to make a partnership with the National Library of Latvia to create a joint professional Master's degree programme in memory institution and heritage studies..

Strengths:

1. The University of Latvia has well organized and loyal partners and developed networks from local government and public fields.
2. There is a well elaborated traineeship system and procedures.
3. The students and graduates of the UL ICS are well-respected and demanded as a workforce in both public and private organisations within the study field.

Weaknesses:

1. ICS does not use to its fullest their research potential and cooperation possibilities with partner universities.
2. Teaching staff mobility programme is not actively taking place and does not support ICS in strategic goal achievement: becoming the leading information and communication science research centre in the Nordic region.

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

### **Analysis**

During the previous accreditation procedure, the experts have given five recommendations:

- to draft a risk management plan for risks related to study plan;
- to increase the support for academic personnel to reduce every day workloads;
- to increase the number of study courses taught in English;
- to coordinate the development of new study programmes with other higher education institutions in Latvia in the field of communication sciences;
- provide English language support to academic personnel.

In the Appendix 8 of the report information is provided about the ways how the recommendations have been implemented. The risk plan has been drafted and it is noted that its effectiveness and results are regularly evaluated at department meetings and by the Communication Science Study Council.

The Appendix 8 says that the recommendation about reducing the everyday workloads of the academic staff has been partly implemented. However, it is the experts' opinion that the problem with the staff overload is a very serious problem still now, and not addressing it soon will put under a notable risk the sustainability and future development of the study field.

Coordination of the development of new study programmes with other higher education institutions in Latvia has not been implemented, but it is mentioned that there is a plan to establish a new interdisciplinary and inter-university professional master's degree programme under the leadership of the Latvian National Library. The Appendix does not say, what is the timeframe for opening the study programme.

About the increased amount of courses taught in English, it is mentioned that in all study programmes, there are courses taught in English worth 4-8 credits, so the recommendation can be counted as formally implemented.

Three of the staff members have improved their English language skills. It is not analysed whether it is sufficient, but formally the recommendation can be counted as implemented. In the Appendix 8 it is said that other faculty members also plan to improve their English language skills, however, more precise information on the number of the staff members or the time frame is missing.

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

The recommendations have been implemented partially. It is explained that some recommendations are difficult if not impossible to implement without larger changes on the national or UL-level (e.g., the overload of the staff members). Tough competition between universities teaching

communication does not seem as a valid excuse for not having developed a new joint study programme as it was planned, knowing that UL is the only University in Latvia which offers studies in library and information science. A formal approach in some cases has been followed in fulfilling the recommendations (e.g., about increased amount of credits taught in English and the English language training for staff members). A deeper analysis and reflection would be useful on how such changes are beneficial and whether the changes are enough in the context of the ambitious development goals of the study field.

Weaknesses:

1. A formal approach in some cases has been followed in fulfilling the recommendations (e.g., about increased amount of credits taught in English and the English language training for staff members).

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Regulations provide sufficient frame for implementing the internal quality assurance system but the system has several shortcomings indicated in the sub-requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The policy documents and procedures are appropriate

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The mechanism for the internal approval of the ICS study programmes is appropriate. Supervision of the performance has been partly developed. Data-based analysis of the development of human resources is weak and needs improvement.

The documents are presented. There is no evidence that the documents are fully applied

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

The criteria, conditions and procedures for the evaluation of students results are appropriate and are described in publicly available documents.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the work quality are mostly appropriate. There is currently a gap between the goals of the ICS study field and the criteria for measuring the competitiveness of the research capabilities of

the staff.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The documents are presented.

The collection of information and analysis is uneven. The data is collected, but the analysis is missing (except the feedback from the students which seems to be the central indicator for study quality).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The quality assurance system is implemented unevenly. Development and modernization of the curriculum has been successful. The financial efficiency is notable, while there is no available resources for qualitative development in research, fund-raising and internationalization.

- 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

The ICS study field has outstanding co-operation with the Latvian national Library, different employers. The ICS study field has cooperation with different foreign experts and international organizations.

The aims of the study field are more ambitious than the current contacts actually support. However, the potential of the cooperation is appropriate, but currently not fully exploited.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The results of scientific research and artistic creation are not fully compliant with the development goals of the study field. The active international networking through various scholarly associations does not lead to intensive involvement in international scientific projects. There are high risks of burnout among the key academic staff members who are also the ones leading most of the scientific work. The current support system for the academic staff members to involve in research work is not sufficiently motivational.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The recommendations have been implemented, but not fully, and in some points also a formal approach has been followed.

## 8. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

Define goals that could be achievable and measurable during the reporting period
In -depth analysis on financial risks to recruit high quality human resources would be helpful for defining achievable goals
Create methodology for the analysis of the state-of-art and developmental possibilities for human resources for ICS study field
Design a career model that motivates majority of staff members to become internationally recognized researchers and highly qualified supervisors for a doctoral program
Introduce efficient format of self analysis for the staff that could be used as an input for HR analysis
Revisit the methodology of collecting feedback from students by taking into consideration the methods that are efficient.
Do analysis on the English language level of the staff members and draft a plan and time frame for improving the language skills accordingly
Revisit the student-centered learning approach implementation at the level of courses' descriptions.
To inform the students about the remuneration system in the faculty

### **Long-term recommendations**

Create a balanced business-model where cooperation and competition are balanced, instead of increasing efficiency
Create a model for efficient fund-raising from local as well as international funds.
Mitigate the risks related to low number of staff members involved in research and therefore risks of successful involvement in the activities of ASPRI institute and the new joint doctoral program.
For the next accreditation period, it would be crucial to analyse and define the key areas of expertise for achieving higher visibility on the international arena.
Supplement the university academic staff workload with time and a clear motivation system for research tasks.
It would be necessary to diminish the workload of the doctoral degree students, it is also important to ensure they get paid for their teaching time.
Develop further the academic career models, accreditation system and self-evaluation formats of the staff members.
Introduce staff development programmes in order to further develop capabilities and skills.
Develop motivational incentives for staff to engage in internationally recognised research, continue to develop the content and didactics of the courses.
Introduce initiatives that could help evaluate co-operation, openness and good relations with industry partners, international research institutions etc.

Continue the work on the plan about the joint study programme in library and information sciences, and consider the possibility to develop a joint programme with international partners.

Increase the number of students in library and information sciences on all three levels of education.

In the future not to calculate the reading amount not in units, but pages of literature, and when including books, indicate specific chapters that the students must read during the study course.

## **II. "Communications Studies" ASSESSMENT**

### **II. "Communications Studies" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

The name of the bachelor's degree study programme "Communication science", the aim of the study programme "to gain knowledge, skills and competence in media analysis and production, journalism, corporative communication, public relations and advertising, providing general theoretical and practical knowledge about the role of communication in present-day society, as well as competence in researching and analysing communication phenomena and developing the ability to work creatively in various areas and industries in the field of communication" and the goals of the study programme is clearly defined.

The goal and the aims of the study programme complies with the learning outcomes, as well as the admission requirements are appropriate.

However, this is an academic bachelor study programme, therefore the degree has to comply with Cabinet Regulations No 322 "Regulations on the Latvian Education Classification", annex 2. According to these regulations the degree should be "Bachelor of Social Science in Journalism and Communication".

The study aims and goals highlights the areas and different directions within the communication industry (media analysis & media production; journalism; corporate communication; PR & advertising) that the students can learn in-depth during the study programme.

The study programme is thoughtfully created and balanced, in order to give to the students the insight of the basics in within the communication theory, sociology, communication psychology, etc., as well as to give to the basic skills to fit in the labour market, as well as the competences for future studies and self-development.

The minor question raised by the experts' group is why the corporate communication has been pointed out separately from the public relations (in the study goal), as usually these are two very closely-knit fields within the communication field, besides are not specifically addressed in the study programme objectives or skills.

The experts' group has noticed the incompatibility of the Communication study programs in Latvian and English and therefore we suggest that an explanation is given in the future and reasoning for such decision. From the experts' side there is no requirement to re-consider the translation of the study program titles.

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

The name of the study programme, the degree to be obtained, the aims, the objectives, the learning outcomes and admission requirements are fully interrelated, except the fact that the degree obtained does not fully correspond with the Latvian Education Classification.

Strengths:

1. The study programme's aim, goals, objectives, learning objectives and admission requirements are fully interrelated.
2. The study programme is thoughtfully created and balanced.

Weaknesses:

1. The degree obtained as a result of the study programme does not fully correspond with the Latvian Education Classification.

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

### **Analysis**

The study programme consists of 120 credits (180 ECTS). The content and description of the study courses is relevant, regularly updated, it fully complies with the goals of the study programme, as well as ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Also, the content of the study programme is regularly updated to meet the needs of the labour market, as well to cover the latest trends in the communication industry.

The expert's group highly appreciates the regular update of the programme that takes into account the rapid technology changes both within the society and specifically in the communication industry. The study program's latest courses "Social media and digital culture", "Media literacy", "Digital photography" and "Opinion leaders and influencers" are valuable additions to the existing courses covering the basics of the communication field.

The regular consultations with the employers' give valuable insight and therefore thoughtful additions to the existing courses.

The expert's group also appreciates the whole design of the study programme where the main goal is to gradually introduce the student into the learning process, give introduction to the basics of the field, and then expand the topics during the 2nd and 3rd study years.

The study methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and study programme in overall.

There are various study methods used during the teaching process, not only focusing on acquiring the theoretical basis of the communication field, but also to develop the skills and competences necessary in the labour market for the communication specialists.

The study programme emphasizes the student-centered learning and teaching principles and the experts' group found out that the student needs and opinions are taken into account when designing the study programme and study courses, as well as when updating study courses for the next study years.

The expert's group appreciates the focus of the study programme on developing the practical skills of the students by giving the practical tasks to solve the real-life based communication problems, as well as giving them opportunity to polish the skills of journalism in the student multimedia centre Kivi TV as well as students portal mansmedijs

The outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students, employers and graduates are used to constantly improve the quality of the studies.

The surveys are conducted regularly and the outcomes are used to change the content of the study programme, to add or remove the study courses, to change the teaching staff (if there is long-term, continuous negative feedback from the students) thus in overall improving the quality of the studies.

During the onsite visit the experts' group found out that the study programme directors regularly use not only formal surveys among students, but also informal conversations with students, graduates, employers and teaching staff as the basis to improve the quality of the study programme. Both the students and graduates acknowledged that their opinion and wishes have

been taken into account and there are constant improvements in the study process based on students' needs and opinions.

There are incoming and outgoing mobility opportunities for the students. In total 79 students during the reporting period have used the opportunity for Erasmus or other mobility programme studies abroad. Nevertheless, the incoming number of students have significantly decreased since the study year 2017/2018 and the self-assessment report does not mention the reasons for that.

The experts' group found out that there is very little information available about the study programme in English language and that could be one of the reasons why the number of incoming students is decreasing. Also there are no KPI's mentioned in the self-assessment report in regards to what are the numbers in incoming/outgoing mobility the study programme management would like to achieve.

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

The descriptions of the study courses, the traineeship and the final thesis are of good quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. The study methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and the learning outcomes. The content of the study programme is regularly updated and the latest trends of the study field and communication industry are taken into account when updating the content of the study courses.

The study programme applies the student-centred learning principles, and the students', as well as graduates' and employees' opinion is taken into account when updating the study programme.

There is a good balance between the theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are developed during the study programme, and there are good opportunities for the students to improve their practical skills when taking part in students' multimedia centre or news portal.

Strengths:

1. The content of the study programme is regularly updated and improved in order to cover the latest topics in the rapidly changing field of communication, as well as to meet the changing needs of the labour market.
2. Student centered learning is priority and the needs, wishes and ideas of the students are regularly surveyed both formally and informally and the study programme is changed to the needs of the students.
3. The teaching methods combine both the ways how to acquire theoretical knowledge, and also how to develop practical skills needed for the communication specialists both in media or corporate communication/PR.

Weaknesses:

1. There is outgoing and incoming student mobility, but the number of incoming students has significantly decreased in the last three academic years.

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

#### **Analysis**

The study provision regarding the informative resources (especially the library), as well as the technical provision (students' multimedia centre and broadcast Kivi TV) is of very good quality and is sufficient to ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, the experts' group found out during the study visit that the financial model, especially the financial remuneration system for the teaching staff raises concerns among the experts' group whether it will be possible to maintain and develop the high-quality study process in the future, as some of the teaching staff demonstrated the first signs of the burnout syndrome, as well as

admitted the huge workload and not enough time for the research process.

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

Generally the material and technical support of the programme is provided on a high-quality level. There were concerns among the Experts' Group whether the current financial provision can sustain the programme's teaching staff highly motivated on a long-term basis.

Strengths:

1. The premises, informative and technical resources (especially library, multimedia studio and broadcast Kivi TV) that ensures the achievement of the learning outcome.

Weaknesses:

2. Financial remuneration system of the teaching staff that creates the burnout effects and in the long-term endangers the quality of the studies, as well as does not allow to attract the international teaching staff.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

The study programme has undergone generation change in teaching staff, but it has successfully dealt with the possible negative effects. There are five new assistant professors, as well as three new lecturers elected in the reporting period.

The positive is the way the study programme management has found the way to attract to the programme also the teaching staff from the top industry professionals. Their practical, on hand experience in the communication industry gives to the students the insight of the industry and the possibility to solve the real-life problems during the practical tasks of the study program.

The qualification of the teaching staff members complies with the requirements of the study programme and set forth in the regulatory enactments.

The successful model of involving the practitioners of the field during the study courses allows to design the content not only relevant to the theoretical basis, but also to the latest developments in the communication professions.

The academic staff is involved in scientific research both at national and international level, including "Horizon 2020" and others. The obtained information is used in the study process.

There exists a mechanism for mutual cooperation between teaching staff. As found out by the experts' group during the onsite visit, there is great teamwork among the teaching staff, both while designing the study programme in general, and also when developing the separate courses. Teaching staff closely collaborate in order not to duplicate the topics in closely related communication fields, but also tries to give to the students the overall perspective of the field in order to create the understanding of how courses and topics are interrelated in the wider communication theory and professional industry.

Currently the cooperation process is mostly informal and initiated by the teaching staff, but there are plans for the next reporting period to introduce more formal cooperation mechanisms, in order to exchange more information about the research interests among the teaching staff.

As pointed out by some of the teaching staff during the onsite visit, what could be improved is the process, how one course is transferred from one lecturer to another. As sometimes, there is just course description and no other study or lecture materials left, that could help for the new lecturer to better prepare the course.

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

The study programme has successfully undergone generational change among the teaching staff and new assistant professors have been elected, as well as new lecturers have joined during the reporting period. The qualification of the teaching staff complies with the requirements set in the regulatory enactments. The composition of the staff is diverse, combining both the academic staff, as well as the well-known industry professionals as guest lecturers thus giving great insight to the students of the actual latest trends in the communication industry. There exists good cooperation and collaboration mechanisms between the teaching staff which allows to align the study content between different courses. Nevertheless, there are no appropriate procedures developed in how to ensure the sustainability of the courses and the previous content when the change of the teaching staff happens.

Strengths:

1. Successful generational change has taken place in the study programme, there are newly new elected teaching staff: assistant professors and lecturers.
2. There is a balanced combination between the academic teaching staff and well-respected industry professionals.
3. There is a great collaboration and good teamwork between the teaching staff in order to align the content of the study courses.

Weaknesses:

1. The sustainability of the teaching courses when the teaching staff has been replaced.

## **5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Communications Studies"**

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma attached in the Appendix 33 of Study programme complies with the regulation Nr.202. established by the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers.

Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in journalism and communication. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

Agreements about possibilities to continue the education in University of Latvia Bachelor Study programme "Information management" or "Sociology". Appendix 11.B

- 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

Attestation provided in the Appendix 10.4.

- 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

CV of the teaching staff and statement by the rector provides the confirmation of proficiency of the official language.

- 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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 10.2B - Confirmation of Study programme director that this requirement is accomplished.

- 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

Study agreement is provided in Appendix 36.B.

- 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

Appendix 39.B.- The descriptions of the study courses include the requirements for the commencement of the acquisition of the study course; the aims for the implementation of the study course and the planned learning outcomes; the content of the study; the study course calendar, mandatory and supplementary literature, other sources of information; the organisation and tasks for the independent work of students; the evaluation criteria of learning

outcomes.

Course descriptions are prepared in Latvian as this is the only language in which the programme is implemented. Translations of the descriptions in English have been provided to the expert group.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Decision is provided in Appendix 34.B

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 19. The compliance of the bachelor's degree programme "Communication science" to the national education standard.

Degrees awarded to programme graduates have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in journalism and communication. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

According to Appendix 37 and study programme description section 4 this criteria is fulfilled.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to

attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in journalism and communication. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

### **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

Based on the information provided in the documentation and obtained during the visit, the relevant conditions for implementing the study programme are met.

- 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

Based on the information provided in the documentation and obtained during the site visit, the qualification of the academic staff is appropriate for the study programme and compliant with requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

The requirements for the study programme are almost fully met. Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in journalism and communication. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

Emphasis should be put on extroversy of the Department by engaging in international activities and further developing research. There are no identified deficiencies, which cannot be eliminated within the two-year accreditation term.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Communications Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Communications Studies"**

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

Provide more information in English language on the internet resources (Faculty website, University website, etc.) to attract more potential incoming mobility students.

Create a system on how to ensure the sustainability of the study courses when the teaching staff is being replaced.

### **Long-term recommendations**

Create a system, including marketing materials, on how to attract more of incoming mobility students from abroad.

Re-evaluate the current remuneration system for the teaching staff and re-think their current workload in order to prevent burnout of the teaching staff in the long-term, as well as to maintain the industry professionals as guest lecturers.

## **II. "Information Management" ASSESSMENT**

### **II. "Information Management" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

The name of the Bachelor's Study Programme "Information Management", the degree to be acquired (social science bachelor's degree in information and library science), the aims (ensuring that students acquire knowledge and skills that would enable them to act as future information services professionals as well as preparing them for continuing their studies at the master's degree level), objectives (developing skills and competencies in information management or resources, institutions, services and technologies), learning outcomes (acquiring an understanding of information sources, information users' behaviour, technology and services that are developed to serve the information needs of the public), as well as the admission requirements are interrelated. However, this is an academic bachelor study programme, therefore the degree has to comply with Cabinet Regulations No 322 "Regulations on the Latvian Education Classification", annex 2. According to these regulations the degree should be "Bachelor of Social Science in Library, Information and Archive Science".

The goal of the study programme is clear and points out four main competency areas this programme is focused on: management of information resources, management of information institutions, management of information services and management of information technologies. However, one point that should be addressed is that the programme lists in its goals "...libraries, information services or centres, archives, museums, other state and private institutions and companies...", p. 98) and modules and focus of museums are underrepresented in the programme. The results of the study programme are presented in three (3) categories: knowledge, skills and competencies and are adequately explained and adhere to academic programmes' requirements at international level.

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

This is a well defined programme with clear aims, goals and objectives that, to its majority, complies and addresses current trends and developments in the Library and Information Science field.

Strengths:

1. Well defined programme, clear aims, goals (please see the weakness below) and objectives.
2. The programme's description adheres and aims to address current trends and developments in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS).

Weaknesses:

1. The goal of ensuring the development of knowledge and skills of students to be applied in various service organisations and specifically to museums is somehow not fully met as courses specific to museums are under represented in the curriculum.
2. The degree awarded does not fully comply with the Latvian Education Classification

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

### **Analysis**

The bachelor study programme "Information Management" comprises three (3) parts: Part A (general educational content, mandatory courses), Part B (limited electives) and Part C (electives). Those parts comprise courses of general educational content as well as field courses and related fields from the broad area of social sciences. The courses are relevant, comply with the aims of the programme and ensure that the graduates acquire the skills, competences and knowledge required in the services market. Further to this staff ensure that they incorporate into the curriculum the suggestions and comments made by students and employers (this is adequately documented in Table 26. Improvement of the study programme during the reporting period and in line with the sector's developmental trends, as well as recommendations from professionals and students). This is a well balanced curriculum. There are no overlaps in the content of the courses. However, scholarly communication and publication appears to be missing from the taught courses. "Electronic Publishing" should be brought up to date and include scholarly publishing aspects. A suggestion would be for collaboration with the University Press. Also, the course "Methods of Social Network Analysis" could be further developed including citizen science.

The user-centered approach to the implementation of the programme is well received by the students and this was expressed also during the meetings with the student and graduates' representatives. The diversity of the methods used in the teaching process is noted as well as the efforts from some of the teaching staff to further develop their skills, particularly those that refer to the use of ICT.

The evaluations of the students, graduates and employers' representatives are taken into consideration and those are represented also in the improvement of the study programme (Tables 26 "Improvement of the study programme during the reporting period and in line with the sector's developmental trends, as well as recommendations from professionals and students" and 31 "Recommendations from graduates on improvements and notes on implementation"). Specific examples, as these are documented in the above mentioned tables include: internships incorporation to the programme, options in the elective courses, reorganisation of courses content to optimise it (e.g. specific to records management). Internships are a well integrated feature in the programme.

Mobility of students and staff during the report period: There is no documentation for outgoing mobility of staff specifically by each study programme except for those data recorded in Appendix 5. Summary of the statistical data on the incoming and outgoing mobility of the teaching staff over the reporting period and the data in Appendix 5 refer to the whole of ICT direction and there is no breakdown by study programme. There was no incoming mobility under the Erasmus programme in academic years 2016/2017 and the 2017/2018, but foreign lecturers gave lectures under other programmes and exchange visits. Information can be found in the Section 4.2 of the self-Assessment report of the bachelor's program "Information Management".

Statistical data on the teaching staff and the students from abroad). Regarding students, there are 20 students reported to have participated in the ERASMUS programme. Only one person is registered as an incoming student in the last year (2019-2020, Appendix 8. Statistical data on the mobility of students (by specifying the study programmes). This is obviously an outcome of the lack of offered courses in English but also of the Department's under representation in international activities.

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

There is a well balanced curriculum, the staff are attentive to the feedback of students and employers. There is a need to update the content of some of the courses and to improve extroversy of the Department.

Strengths:

1. Well balanced curriculum.
2. Attentiveness to the feedback of all involved parties. Demonstration of an organic relationship of the Department with all actors in the LIS field in Latvia (incorporation of comments and suggestions by students, graduates, employers' representatives).

Weaknesses:

1. "Methods of Social Network Analysis" course could expand the focus to include citizen science so that is further relevant.
2. "Electronic Publishing" should be brought up-to-date and include scholarly publishing and scholarly communication aspects. An additional suggestion could be to explore collaborating with the University Press.
3. Need to improve extroversy of the Department and cultivate a culture of mobility and international collaborations.

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

#### **Analysis**

Information and Communication Sciences provide with very good infrastructure and specifically excellent Library Services with both physical and digital resources that extend not only onsite but also to the provision of out of hours services to support the information needs of the users, those being both faculty staff and students. ( Report, Tables 40 and 41 and pp. 56-67). This was evident also during the onsite visit via the Library staff.

In summary, the infrastructure supports the implementation of the study programme.

The number of elected staff members of the study programme is very small, this puts the sustainability of the study program at risk and reduces the opportunities to develop research and publishing. The infrastructure is very good however, the financial resources are not sufficient.

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

The traineeship system is well-elaborated and helps to achieve the study goals for the students. The infrastructure and specifically the excellent Library Services supports the study implementation.

Strengths:

1. Excellent library services;
2. Well established connections with external partners and guest lecturers.

Weaknesses:

1. Questionable sustainability business model due to the low number of students;
2. Full time staff number is low.

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

##### **Analysis**

On average twenty five (25) faculty members were involved in the study programme ( Report, p.129). Of those only six (6), three Professors and three Associate Professors are involved in the implementation of the Bachelor study programme. Other faculty and teaching staff comprise members of various Departments of the University plus specialists/professionals from the field. According to the self-evaluation report a 56% of above mentioned staff hold a doctoral degree and 80% of the full time 6 Departmental staff involved in the Bachelor programme hold a Ph.D in Philology.

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. This is documented adequately in pages 120-122 of the report and clearly listing the strong ties that the Department has with the National Library of Latvia, the National Archives of Latvia and local municipal libraries. Involvement in the delivery of lectures, site visits, internships, supervision of students, etc. ensures the effective delivery of the programme. The strong network connections with professionals from libraries, archives and information centres are evident in the delivery of the programme and was further highlighted during the onsite visit.

The staff members are publishing mainly in Latvian language. The international research activity is low. ERASMUS opportunities for guest teaching staff should be further explored and improved.

There are mechanisms for staff in the programme to work together. Those include joined field trips and lectures. There is a good ratio of students per faculty member (1 faculty staff member per 15.6 students, p. 124 of the report). Attendance of faculty staff to students was highlighted by students and graduates also during the onsite visit/interviews.

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

Strengths:

1. Very strong national network, ties with the labour (services in this case) market.
2. Interviews with the employers' representatives denoted respect and endorsement of the programme adherable to the needs of the services market.
3. There is a great collaboration and good teamwork between the teaching staff in order to align the content of the study courses.
4. An almost (please see weaknesses point 3 below) exemplary interdisciplinary course implementation (Lecturers/Professors from other Departments complementing to ensure a broad academic programme that enables students to well rounded foundational knowledge of the field).

Weaknesses:

1. Lack of specialised research focus in Library and Information Science (LIS) due to the small number of full time Departmental staff.
2. Limited options for attracting specialised LIS staff (Ph.D programme graduates).
3. There is a course that despite being obligatory by law (Environment and Sustainable Development Basics) does not seem to fit any of the aims, goals, objectives of the course in the LIS field.

## 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Information Management"

### 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

Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

Agreements about possibilities to continue the education in University of Latvia Bachelor Study programme "Communication science" or "Sociology". Appendix 11.A

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

Attestation provided in the Appendix 10.4.

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

CV of the teaching staff provides the proficiency of the official language.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 10.2A - Confirmation of Study programme director that this requirement is accomplished.

- 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

Study agreement is provided in Appendix 36.A.

- 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

Appendix 39.A.- The descriptions of the study courses include the requirements for the commencement of the acquisition of the study course; the aims for the implementation of the study course and the planned learning outcomes; the content of the study; the study course calendar, mandatory and supplementary literature, other sources of information; the organisation and tasks for the independent work of students; the evaluation criteria of learning outcomes.

Course descriptions are prepared in Latvian as this is the only language in which the programme is implemented. The translation of the course descriptions in English has also been provided to the expert group.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Decision is provided in Appendix 34.A

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 15. The compliance of the bachelor's study programme "Information Management" to the national education standard.

Degrees awarded to programme graduates have been amended in accordance with "The

procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education” (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and “Regulations on Latvia's education classifications” (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

According to Appendix 37 and study programme description section 4 this criteria is fulfilled.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with “The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education” (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and “Regulations on Latvia's education classifications” (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021

## Requirements (R6-R8)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The infrastructure and the Library Services are excellent. The financial provision is insufficient.

- 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

During the reporting period 56% of the average 25 faculty members had a doctoral degree.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

## Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a bachelor's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

Emphasis should be put on extroversion of the Department by engaging in international activities and further developing research. There are no identified deficiencies, which cannot be eliminated within the two-year accreditation term.

## Evaluation of the study programme "Information Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## 6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Information Management"

### Short-term recommendations

It would be important to increase the number of students.

Team-teaching approach would be helpful in order to handle better the recurrent issues as well as for hedging the teaching overload of the staff members.

Consider joining social sciences and humanities (SSH) infrastructures such as OPERAS, DARIAH, etc. in Europe in order to broaden the Department's network of potential research associates.

Consider joining relevant EU networking research activities (e.g. COST actions, etc.).

Increase staff outgoing mobility by exploring opportunities provided via the ERASMUS programme.

### Long-term recommendations

A strategic plan concerning the possible research direction would be necessary.

The study field needs a strategic plan for fund-raising.

## II. "Communications Studies" ASSESSMENT

### II. "Communications Studies" ASSESSMENT

#### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

The name of the Master's study programme "Communication Studies", the admission requirements, the degree and professional qualification to be acquired are entirely interrelated. The aims, objectives and learning outcomes are mostly interrelated. However, this is an academic master study programme, therefore the degree has to comply with Cabinet Regulations No 322

"Regulations on the Latvian Education Classification", annex 2. According to these regulations the degree should be "Master of Social Science in Journalism and Communication".

The aims of the study includes a small problem concerning interrelation with study objectives and learning outcomes. Namely, the aims of the study programme provide a list of practical applications in the area of communication (journalism, media work, advertising, corporate communication, communication management, strategic communication, audio-visual communication, digital communication and research into communication processes" (Report, p. 192). Except "the research" none of these areas are reflected in the objectives or learning outcomes. Point 5 of the objectives of the study programme is verbalized generally: "To encourage the use of knowledge and skills in various areas of communication to deal with specific problems and create innovations". The lack of the coherency between the verbalization of the aims, objectives and learning outcomes indicates a recurrent tension of this study programme: theoretical in-depth knowledge gaining versus acquisition of practical skills in very different and wide spectrum of communication areas.

The experts group also points out some inconsistency in verbalization of objectives of the study programme (Report, p. 193). Some of the objectives are well focused, e.g. "To facilitate in depth learning about modern communication science theories and methodologies, placing these into the context of social sciences and social development". This objective of the study programme is related to the learning outcome number one and also to the list of aims of the study programme. Concurrently some other objectives are verbalized in a diffusive way, e.g. "To develop the skills, competence and leadership of students in terms of information and communication technologies, database usage, data processing and analysis, presentations, pedagogic work and expert and leader skills". The list of skills provided in the last example (database use etc.) as well as pedagogic work are not connected to learning outcomes.

The experts group points out also some inconsistency in learning outcomes (Report, p. 194). For example, rather than gaining knowledge about critical and creative thinking, it is a skill that should be trained. The understanding of critical thinking that is at the root of these skills. The study course "Critical Thinking in Higher and Further Education" is devoted to it, and creative thinking interweaves courses such as "Communication and Culture," "The Culture of Journalism," "Organization Culture and Communication," "Management of Culture and Communication.

The "Results of the study programme" are divided according to "knowledge", "skills" and "competences". The LQF level descriptors are based on learning outcomes that are expressed in three dimensions: Knowledge (knowledge and comprehension); Skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication, general skills); Competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment) (<http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/par-lki>). In the Report several learning outcomes that are defined as "skills" could be rather described as "competencies". For example, "Taking on responsibility for personnel group work results, engaging in entrepreneurship and creating innovations in the field of communication " is rather described as a synthesis, hence, a competency. Clear distinction of "skills" might be useful as this helps to clarify the actual level of skill required to get certain credits.

In sum, the experts' group suggests to use terminology (knowledge, skills and competency) more deliberately. It would be also better to provide one focus per objective and redefine the "the aim" of the study programme so that it sums up the core aim of the study programme.

The experts' group has noticed the incompatibility of the Communication study programs in Latvian and English and therefore we suggest that an explanation is given in the future and reasoning for such decision. From the experts' side there is no requirement to re-consider the translation of the study program titles.

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

In comparison to other programmes of the ICS study field the objectives and results of the present

study programme are less coherent and more diffusive.

Strengths:

1. The name of the study programme "Communication Studies", the admission requirements for both the 60 credits and the 80 credits program, the degree and professional qualification to be acquired are entirely interrelated.
2. Objectives and learning outcomes concerning communication theories, communication research methodologies, critical and creative thinking, professional ethics are interrelated.

Weaknesses:

1. The aims of the study programme are partly interrelated to the objectives and learning outcomes: the practical applications of communication sciences (journalism, media work, advertising, corporate communication, communication management, strategic communication, audio-visual communication, digital communication are not specified in the objectives and/or learning outcomes.
2. Descriptions of "skills" and "competencies" are sometimes blurring.
3. In some points the difference between "objectives" and "learning outcomes" is not clear enough (e.g., why the "skill of using databases, data processing and analysis" is objective not the learning outcomes"?)
4. The title of the degree does not fully comply with the Latvian Education Classification

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

### **Analysis**

The study programme includes a mandatory section (A, 10 courses) and an elective section (B, 3 modules: "Business communication ; "Media Studies"; "Theoretical study courses in communication science"; and additional courses in civil and environmental protection) plus four different individual courses that support research. The experts' group agrees that "Mapping of the courses show that the content of the programme is of an interdisciplinary nature and (..) the courses sources demonstrate links between communication science and other sectors in the social sciences - sociology, political science, economics and entrepreneurship, library science and education science, as well as humanities (theatre and cinema science, history, cultural studies, linguistics)." (Report, p.203).

The descriptions of the study courses reflect good quality and include all the required information: course aims, credits, learning outcomes, course content, contact hours (seminars and lectures), independent working hours, compulsory and recommended literature; assignments (the latter is named differently: students's independent work, requirements for awarding credits etc).

Having said this, the experts' group points out a few shortcomings. The description of assignments is sometimes too general. For example, the description of students' independent work at the course "Digital Humanities and Social Sciences" provides a list of assignments: "Students' independent work includes literary studies, work on computer programs, developing three papers and preparing for the exam." (Appendix 39 D, p. 33). What means "literary studies" or "work on computer programs" remains unclear.

The course descriptions include two-dimensional tables of assessment and learning outcomes, that provide a very good overview on how different learning outcomes are assessed. Evaluation methods are diverse. The types of assessment are following (Appendix 39 D): "written report", "presentation", "oral exam", "written exam", "task/assignment", "Interim/mid-term/final exam/examination" "academic independent work" "individual project", "(active) participation in seminars", "mid-term test", "essay", "analytical synopsis", "seminar", "defense in examination commission meeting", "1st, 2nd ect. task", "workshop(s)", "analysis of ....", "case study", "Workshop", "research", "practical assignment 1,, 2...", "successful presentation of the final report",

“academic paper”, “individual training tasks”. However, it remains unclear what “successful presentation” means, or what are elements of a case study or written report etc. that are evaluated. As the assessment methodology is reported briefly the experts' group can not conclude to what extent the formative and summative assessment is used in the study programme. There are few courses where a description of a learning outcome implies self-reflection (e.g. The Culture of Journalism, learning outcome no 6 “The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme.”).

The content of the courses in mandatory section A provides extended knowledge on methodological and theoretical approaches in communication and social studies. Courses on methodology and a course on research and academic writing support the research and writing of master thesis. Ethics is a recurrent topic of different courses. Hence, section A fully complies with the aims of the study programme.

The experts' group points out two problems that have impact on implementation of study methods. First, the list of topics in each course covers especially wide areas. Although the experts' group understands that broad theoretical approach is unique to the study programme, the long list of wide theoretical approaches (e.g. “Time orientations in culture”, “body in culture” etc.) and voluminous reading list (e.g. entire books, not certain chapters combined with review articles) of all compulsory courses raises some doubts about students' ability to delve into subject matter and acquire in-depth knowledge about communication science.” (Report, p. 200). In the self- assessment report it is pointed out that: “most of the courses are aimed at “in-depth and expanded knowledge about communication science theories.” (Report, p. 203). The experts' group could not find evidence how this bidirectional and ambiguous aim is actually reached. There is no evidence that the number of pages the students should read per semester is calculated. Experts recommend in the future not to calculate the reading amount not in units, but pages of literature, and when including books, indicate specific chapters that the students must read during the study courses.

The experts' group considers the ambition to provide in-depth and at the same expanded theoretical knowledge on communication science to the students whose' learning time is limited, a didactical challenge that is worth to be analysed and presented.

Secondly, one of the assignments of the course “Research and Academic Writing” includes the reviewing process of 4-5 course papers on BA communication science programme (Appendix 39 D, p. 42). The learning outcomes do not include the skill of providing academic feedback and acquiring basic knowledge on peer-reviewing ethics. The skill of providing feedback and feed-forward as well as ethics of peer-reviewing is an increasingly important issue in scientific communication, ethics and international publishing practice. Therefore, the experts group points out this discrepancy between the content of the course and the learning outcomes.

However, changes implemented in the mandatory section (Report, p.199) are justified, the content of the mandatory courses contribute to the achievement of the main outcomes of the study programme.

The content of the courses in elective section B includes three modules and additional courses on civil protection and environmental protection. The latest changes in section B (different study modules have been merged) are reasonable, especially as the number of students has been decreasing.

The content of the courses in the “Business Communication” module is primarily focused on theory and knowledge acquisition, learning outcomes and assessment put emphasis on analytical skills. The experts' group points out a small shortage: the description of courses do not include an explanation how the students learn to apply the theories for creating analytical tools.

Courses in the “Media Studies” module “offer in-depth theoretical and practical knowledge and skills, as well as research work skills that are used by mass media directors, managers, editors and journalists in terms of examining and analysing media content, ethics, effects, audiences, etc.”

(Report, p. 201). The experts' group notes that - according to the descriptions of courses - the content of the four courses is predominantly theory-oriented, skills are related to data processing and text analysis, except the course "Multimedia Practice". For example, the course "Gender Equality Communication and practices" has six learning outcomes, two of these focus on skills. Concurrently the scope of the of the sixth learning outcome - "Students are able to integrate feminist theory and gender research into organization work and communication." (Appendix 39D, p. 92) - is very ambitious. It would be achievable if the course would have prerequisites on practical analysis of organization's policy. In order to clarify that the study courses also provide practical skills, in the future, make sure that the information about tools, platforms and software are included in the course descriptions.

Having said that, the experts' group highlights the high quality of the content of the courses. Wide spectrum of topics contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Grades given to communication science master's thesis are mostly very good, good and excellent (Report, p.209).

As the courses put emphasis on in-depth knowledge of different theories and methodological-analytical competency, the students acquire primarily transferable skills, hence the study programme meets the needs of the relevant industry and the scientific trends in a long-run perspective.

The student-centred learning and teaching principles are taken into account. The student-centrality is well reflected in five principles: 1. to develop cooperation between faculty members and students; 2. to ensure flexible forms of teaching and learning; 3. to respect the diverse needs of the students (Report, p.204); 4. to encourage students' co-responsibility for their studies; 5. to nurture self-evaluation skills (Report, p.206). The staff is ready to take into account the different needs of the students by providing possibilities to prepare an individual study plan for those who need it. One sentence in the report - "E-mail is extensively used for consultations..." (Report, p.206) induced experts' group to ask - would there be a risk that in some cases the student-centred approach is a bit overused? On the level of courses descriptions the principles of student-centered learning is not so well described: the possibilities to choose the focus and way of learning as well as self assessment methodology is described in randomly and only in few course descriptions.

The outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students (representative results have been obtained since 2016) and graduates (since 2016) have been used to improve the quality of studies. The self-evaluation report points out that students and graduates are satisfied with academic and practical courses, involvement of guest lectures. If the course evaluation has been between 4-5 (on a 7-point scale) students and staff members try to find out the reason(s) of this problem and find a solution. Students would prefer a broader range of elective courses and possibility to gain more practical knowledge and skills that "can immediately be put to use at work" (Report, p. 209). The experts' group acknowledges all improvements the staff has been introducing, especially in the context of very limited financial resources. During the onsite visit the students described open and good relations with the teaching staff, the experts' group came to the conclusion that current dialogue between teachers and students has a determining role in programme improvement. Recommendation: In the future, when including information about the course evaluations, if various systems have been used, it shall be explained, about which period the information is provided and which system has been used during this time period.

ERASMUS is one of the most important mobility resources, "during the reporting period 13 MA students have been enrolled in foreign universities, while UL has hosted 17 master's degree students in communication sciences" (Report, p.212). On the one hand the content of the study programme is mostly oriented to the needs of Latvian students, few courses are in English or "the languages of instructions are Latvian and English" (e.g. Semiotics, Scientific report: Academic Practice, Civil Protection, Environmental protection, Network Theories, Critical Thinking in Higher and

Further Education). In this context the number of hosted students is very good. On the other hand the self-evaluation report does not include analysis of how many and what courses have been taken by the study programme students at foreign universities. Therefore the experts' group is unable to conclude if the outcoming mobility has been successful in terms of providing complementary education.

There seems to be a pressure to increase mobility, while there seems to be no resources for developing more specific courses that would attract notably a lot of international students.

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

The descriptions of the study courses reveal that the MA programme "Communication Studies" is a well designed programme that provides a broad rather than in-depth knowledge on communication theories. The study implementation methods are diverse, although the course descriptions do not provide information how the assessment supports the learning process, it is not easy to distinguish the formative and summative assessment on the basis of course descriptions. There is no calculation of the volume of compulsory reading material per semester, neither descriptions of possible choices the students can make within one course. This lack of information raises some doubts concerning the planning of students' actual workload.

Strengths:

1. The descriptions of the study courses reflect good quality and include all the required information: course aims, credits, learning outcomes, course content, contact hours (seminars and lectures), independent working hours, compulsory and recommended literature; assignments (the latter is named differently: students' independent work, requirements for awarding credits etc).
2. The student-centrality is implemented as the staff is open to accept the needs of the students.
3. The study programme has a clear focus on expanded knowledge and understanding about communication science theories that contributes to the analytical competency of students.

Weaknesses:

1. The assessment systems are described so briefly that it is not possible to conclude if and in which cases the formative assessment is used, neither is it possible to understand the levels of achievements described.
2. The close reading of the aims of the study programme and learning outcomes of the courses reflect tension between theoretical, analytical and practical skills.
3. One by one a course syllabi that provides overview on tens of theoretical approaches and a long reading list of books seems to fulfil one aim of the programme - provide expanded theoretical knowledge and analytical skills. However, the volume of the content of the whole study programme raises some doubts about how students actually can delve into different concepts and acquire in-depth knowledge.

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

### **Analysis**

The library and access to databases is excellent. Although journal articles are accessible via library provided access to EBSCO databases, few courses rely on articles published in international peer-reviewed journals. However, the book- based approach enables students to provide an integral approach to one or another theory.

The experts' group did not get data to what extent Moodle and other e-learning environments are used.

According to the report the master's students have every access to become involved in the scientific life of the faculty (Report, p 202). Students are encouraged to participate at conferences and present their research. According to the Appendix 38 the financial resources for teaching are minimal. According to the calculation the teaching costs per year are 32 729 EUR. If this number is right the study programme could afford either one professor or two lecturers (with low salaries). The experts' group understands that the business model of UL is based on intensive cross-usage of the staff. This is very efficient for improving interdisciplinary programme content. Still, the problem that can not be disclaimed is that the lack of financial resources impoverish the potential of human resources in future prospects.

Within cooperation with other study fields of the Faculty of Social Sciences the study field provides the best scientific support that is possible.

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

While the infrastructure of the programme is very good, the lack of financial resources creates the main risk for sustainability to the programme. As the aim of the master programme of Communication sciences is focused on research it is important to support this programme from research money and expertise more than this is done by now. In comparison to bachelor programme on communication the gap between teaching and research here entails a risk for sustainability of the programme.

Strengths:

1. Very good library, access to database;
2. Teachers are committed and accessible for the students;
3. Cooperation with other study fields provides support for ICS.

Weaknesses:

1. The scientific/research support for the Communication sciences is weak as the composition of the department is rather teaching oriented that research oriented;
2. Financial resources for teaching are insufficient.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme "Communication Studies" complies with the requirements for the implementation of the academic study programmes and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments: 3 professors, 2 associate professors, 6 assistant professors, 2 lectors (Ph.D + 5 lectors MG.soc.sc) and 1 leading researcher are responsible for the content of the study programme.

There has been a replacement of generations during the reporting period.

The academic international publishing activity of the teaching staff is low (Appendix 32). The leader of the study programme V. Zelče has three Scopus and WoS indexed publications (one in 2013, other two in 2018). Currently Zelče has many administrative tasks and responsibilities, high teaching load.

During the reporting period the staff has been involved in several national and international research projects. According to the report "the knowledge that is created and tested during research projects are included in the study programme by establishing new courses and updating the content of others" "The national Identity" research programme's project ... had results that were integrated into the course "Collective Memory and Communication" ... and "Communication Theory in the Context of Social Sciences. ... The project "Children Born of War - Past, present, Future, 2014 yielded

knowledge about the oral history method and relevant ethical issues for the course “Qualitative Methods in Communication” ... National research project “Latvia's media Ecology: Analysis of Changes Caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution” had results for the course “Media Ecosystem.”” (Report, p. 216). The list provides evidence that the staff is oriented to use project results for improving the study programme.

The staff is generally more active in publishing in Latvian language. Unfortunately there was no aggregate publication metrics included in the report. Still, the experts' group highlights the need to be visible and contribute to the Latvian communication discourse.

The mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members which contributes to the improvement of the study courses is based on good relations and lack of competition.

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

The study programme uses teachers from various disciplines, although not for interdisciplinary team-teaching. The main risk for the study programme is related to the low international publishing activity and lack of senior staff (professors with long publishing experience and international relations). Few professors are overloaded.

Strengths:

1. Efficient use of Faculty staff and the interdisciplinary approach

Weaknesses:

1. Low international publishing activity
2. Insufficient financial resources

## **5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Communications Studies"**

### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of diploma is included in Appendix 33. Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with “The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education” (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and “Regulations on Latvia's education classifications” (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a master's degree of social sciences in journalism and communication. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021

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

The document 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 is included in Appendix 11D

- 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

There is a proof included in the documentation that the HEI guarantees to the students compensations for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked. Appendix 10.4.

- 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

CV of the teaching staff provides the proficiency of the official language.

- 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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 10.2.D - confirmation sign by Study programme director Prof. V.Zelče.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement. Appendix 36.D.

- 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

Appendix 39.D.- The descriptions of the study courses include the requirements for the commencement of the acquisition of the study course; the aims for the implementation of the study course and the planned learning outcomes; the content of the study; the study course calendar, mandatory and supplementary literature, other sources of information; the

organisation and tasks for the independent work of students; the evaluation criteria of learning outcomes.

The study course descriptions are prepared in Latvian as the only language in which the study programme is implemented. Translation of the descriptions has been provided to the expert group.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The conclusion issued by the Council of Higher Education (letter added to the accreditation report, dated Dec 5, 2019)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 27. - The compliance of the master's degree programme "Communication Science" to the national education standard.

Degrees awarded to programme graduates have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a master's degree of social sciences in journalism and communication. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Formally the criterion has been fulfilled, each academic staff members has at least one scientific publication or artistic creation during the accreditation period

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Most of the legal requirements are met. Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with “The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education” (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and “Regulations on Latvia's education classifications” (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a master's degree of social sciences in journalism and communication. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

**Requirements (R6-R8)**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The infrastructure, library service, access to database, multimedia studios are excellent. The financial provision is insufficient

- 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

During the reporting period 56% of the average 25 faculty members had a doctoral degree

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The research activity of the teaching staff is low, although the obligatory and suggested literature is updated

**Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

The master's Study Programme “Communication Studies” is unique among other communication programmes in Latvia, as it aims to provide broad and in-depth knowledge on communication theory, research methodology and train critical thinking.

The content of the course includes very broad “mapping” of different theoretical approaches as well as good methodological training. Ethical issues are handled as a recurrent topic. The students and teachers have good relations and the students are approached as partners, hence the study programme evaluates student-centrality

There is a gap between the very ambiguous aim of the study programme, the available financial and human resources, especially the actual research activity of the teaching staff.

The staff is committed and there is a potential to increase the research activity.

In sum: the requirements for the study programme have been met partially. There are no deficiencies which cannot be eliminated within the two-year accreditation term.

**Evaluation of the study programme "Communications Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

## 6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Communications Studies"

### Short-term recommendations

The objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme needs revisiting

It would be helpful for the students if the whole volume of compulsory reading is calculated per semester, the students could set their focus of the learning content in most of the courses.

It would be helpful for the students if the formative assessment methods are clearly introduced and described in syllabi.

Part of the content of the courses could rely more on the research the teachers are actively taking part of.

In order to even the workload between staff members it might be useful to introduce a more team-teaching approach that is used currently.

In order to diminish the teaching work-load of teachers it would be helpful to record some of the lectures and use the contact-time for seminars mostly.

The teachers need a strong motivation to devote themselves to research activities.

### Long-term recommendations

The study programme needs a good fund-raising system

The sustainability of the programme depends on research money, as the number of students is rather small and the ambiguous content needs scientific input

As the study programme is research and theory oriented the composition of the staff should be biased towards researchers

In order to clarify that the study courses also provide practical skills, in the future, make sure that the information about tools, platforms and software are included in the course descriptions.

In the future, when including information about the course evaluations, if various systems have been used, it shall be explained, about which period the information is provided and which system has been used during this time period.

In the future not to calculate the reading amount not in units, but pages of literature, and when including books, indicate specific chapters that the students must read during the study courses.

## II. "Librarian Science and Information" ASSESSMENT

### II. "Librarian Science and Information" ASSESSMENT

#### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

The name of the Master's study programme, the degree to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes as well as admission requirements are interrelated. The goal of the study programme is clear and points out four main competency areas this programme is focused for:

management of information resources, information services, information technologies and scholarly research. However, this is an academic master study programme, therefore the degree has to comply with Cabinet Regulations No 322 "Regulations on the Latvian Education Classification", annex 2. According to these regulations the degree should be "Master of Social Science in Library, Information and Archive Science".

The tasks of the programme highlight the central pedagogical values (student centred approach and course contemporaneity); as well as the main abilities students should achieve (critical analysis of theories and research skills).

Results of the study programme are divided into knowledge skills and competences categories. This division generally provides clear understanding about the balance between theoretical acquisition of knowledge and training of various skills. The learning result number 6 is confusing: why "the use of critical thinking and a scientific approach!" is labelled a knowledge but not a skill?

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

The main objectives and learning outcome of the study programme are clear and well focused. The programme is focused on library sciences, the approach concerning memory institutions needs further elaboration.

#### Strengths

1. Clear overview on main aims, knowledge and skills that the students can acquire

#### Weaknesses

2. Learning result number six is labelled as knowledge but is verbalized rather as a skill.

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

### **Analysis**

The master study programme "Library Science and Information" consists of a mandatory module (10 courses, part A); Part B (3 courses) and two "direction" modules: "Management of Information Institutions and Services" and "Management of Information Resources", plus 2 additional courses in civil and environmental protection. The descriptions of the study courses and modules, as well as the final thesis are of high quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. The planned renewal of the content of the study programme (Report, Table 38) is reasoned as the changes rest upon different cultural and information policy decisions in Latvia. The planned changes reflect a necessary turn towards network and data society. The experts' group esteems a new module "Digital Humanities and Social Sciences". The list of planned changes certify the profound curriculum development process behind this study programme. It seems that Modul "Management for Information Resources" already partly describes the course for the next accreditation period.

Having said that the content is relevant and complementary and the curriculum development is well designed, the experts' group points out few problems concerning recurrent topics and transferable skills that are spread between different courses. For example the topic of ethics is addressed at least in three courses and at the course "Normative Basis of Libraries and Information". Cross-analysis of the whole curriculum revealed that there is no basic training of moral thinking on information ethics that would help students to acquire the somewhat specific discourse of moral reasoning. The same applies to transferable skill "critical thinking" or "critical analysis". The skill is mentioned in learning outcomes of some courses (e.g. Library science, Bibliographic and Information Terminology; Communication Theory in the Context of Social Sciences, Information Systems Management etc), but how this skill is acquired systematically (it is one of the main aims of the study programme) is

not explained. The experts' group points out that this small lack of connectivity between different courses should not be taken as a serious criticism of the curriculum. Rather the experts' group would like to point out that further conceptualization of recurrent topics and training of transferable skills might help to aggregate the curriculum.

However, the descriptions of the study courses in some cases include explanations on how the different courses are related. For example the aim of the courses "Theories of Information and Library Science" and "Personnel Management" (Annex 39 C) labels the introductory function of these courses unambiguously. At the same time it remains a bit unclear how the course "Library science, Bibliographic and Information Terminology" is related to the introductory courses.

In sum, the content is relevant and complementary, and it complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the relevant industry and the scientific trends. During the onsite visit employers pointed out that the study programme should include a module or courses related to memory institutions. The experts' group agrees that this study programme is actually the one which could assemble expertise and learning possibilities concerning the different memory institutions in Latvia. Having said so, the experts' group also highlights the need for political and financial support from the state, that would be the pre-requisite for the curriculum development that takes into consideration the educational needs of memory institutions.

The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. The study programme courses include lectures, seminars, practical activities, field trips, independent work, discussions, group work etc. However, although one topic is usually implemented via a lecture and a seminar, cross-analysis of all the courses in the study programme reveal that lectures are slightly dominating forms of learning. The self-evaluation report points out that the "proportion of lectures is tending to decline, because the E-course environment can contain teaching materials for independent studies" (Report, p.,229). Taking also into consideration the long list of compulsory literature the experts' group have some doubts about the efficient usage of contact learning hours. Especially, as according to the self-evaluation report, "seminars are one of the most creative and research independent forms of study and are used for in-depth discussions about theoretical issues and debatable forms" (Report, p. 229).

The experts' group can draw few conclusions on how the assessment methods contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes. The self-evaluation report provides an overview on the grading system and sufficient description of feedback the students get while preparing their master thesis. The course descriptions provide overview on the format of assessment (e.g. written exam, practical work, seminar etc.) and how certain assignment or control format is related to one or another learning outcome. There is no information on minimum- average- good- very good and excellent level of knowledge and skills that should be demonstrated and in which way. The experts' group amidst that absence of this information is related to the pre-given course format. However, the study implementation quality depends also on assessment methodology (components that are assessed, description of attainable levels, the style of feedback and feed-forward given to the students - all this constitutes the core idea of formative assessment).

Student-centred learning and teaching principles are rather declared than explained in the self-evaluation report. During the onsite visit the experts' group acknowledged close contact and partnership between the teachers and the students, this might be the reason why student-centrality is self-evident and needs no special analysis.

The outcomes of the surveys conducted among the students, employers, and graduates are used to improve the quality of studies. Students evaluate the courses positively (average rating is 6.1- 6.53). The positive and critical remarks affirm the main strengths and weaknesses of the study programme that were pointed out above. The faculty has discussed the content of the study by using the focus group interview in 2017. The experts' group appreciated that in the self-evaluation report also the

critical curriculum development possibilities were reported. This assures the openness of the staff to make grounded choices concerning further development of the curriculum.

The study programme has an opportunity to use the results of a bachelor thesis on further careers of the graduates of the Master Degree Programme in Library Science and Information. The results of the survey show that most of the graduates work in the library and information management sector and they are satisfied with their education. The Department of Information and Library studies used a Delphi method in 2016 and focus group discussions in 2017 in order to map the main competences needed for the sector. The reported results show that the list of required skills and competencies is so long that the department faced a challenge to make reasonable choices - in the context of very limited financial and human resources. The list of new courses provides evidence that the Department did this job very well.

According to the self-evaluation report nearly all students in the master's programme have full time jobs and this limits their possibilities to go abroad. During the reporting period two students spent a semester abroad. Taking into consideration that the number of students of this study programme is very small the experts' group came to the conclusion that mobility is not the first developmental priority of this study programme.

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

The curriculum of the study programme is innovative and well designed as it takes into consideration the urgent needs of data society. The weaknesses are mainly related to course descriptions. Close reading of the syllabi did not enable the reader to recognize formative assessment; in some syllabi instructions and descriptions of how certain skills will be acquired, could be better explained. These explanations would help students to plan their learning process.

Strengths:

1. The curriculum of the study programme is well-designed, the aims and learning outcomes are interrelated and well focused.
2. The curriculum development takes into consideration the needs of data society
3. The curriculum development takes into consideration research results on needed competencies.

Weaknesses:

1. Teaching methodologies of recurrent topics (e.g. ethics, critical approach) and related transferable skills (e.g. moral reasoning, critical thinking and argumentation etc.) could be better conceptualised and shared between different courses.
2. The assessment methodology and skills training methodology could be better explained.
3. The reading list in some courses might be too long and in some cases could be better focused.

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

#### **Analysis**

The Faculty of Social Sciences has two computer classes with 75 workstations, a very good (presented at the onsite visit) and big collection of books ( Report, Table 40 and 41), access to databases. The collection is supplemented each year.

The Study programme also gets support from the Latvian National Library, part of the classes as well as pre-defence of master thesis take place at the Library.

In sum, the infrastructure supports the implementation of the study programme.

Financially, the situation is not good. The annual teaching cost is 20 045 EUR (Appendix 38). This number reveals that a lot of teaching expertise should come from other resources (e.g from Latvian national library) and from other Departments of the faculty as well as from other faculties of UL. The

risks of financing this study programme are related to the small number of students. During the onsite visit the staff of the Department of Information and Library Studies as well as students admitted that the profession of a librarian is not very popular and people might not realize very well the nature of contemporary library and information sciences.

In addition, the study programme has so little financial resources that it is difficult to convince highly qualified professionals to become guest lecturers.

The staff of the study programme is very small and there is no considerable scientific support for the study programme.

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

The infrastructure is very good, the financial resources are not sufficient. The staff is very little and the number of students is very small. The co-operation with the Latvian national library is a key factor for keeping this programme sustainable.

Strengths:

1. The study field can use resources provided by the Latvian National library.
2. Workstations, library, and access to databases are very good.

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient money for increasing the number of highly qualified staff members.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

The study programme has brought together about 16 teachers, among eight are full time employees of the UL. Nine of the teachers hold doctoral degrees, one is a doctoral student and other five are professionals from the sector with a master's degree (Report, p. 237). The teaching staff includes 2 professors, three associate professors, one assistant professor, two lecturers and eight guest lecturers.

The self-evaluation report also reveals the main risks concerning the rejuvenation of the staff: low job security, low salaries.

Currently the Faculty members are active members of professional associations, organizations and working groups.

The staff members are publishing mainly in Latvian language. The international research activity is low.

The academic staff has been involved in some research projects. European Social Fund project "Innovative Diagnostic Instruments for regional development" in 2014, 2015; ESF education research projects, national research programme "national Identity from 2010- 2014". The results and experience of these projects have been implemented in the study programme. The experts' group points out that lack of human resources for this study programme creates working overload, which in turn leaves little time for research and international collaboration and network-building.

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

The composition of the staff is interdisciplinary. It is a challenge for this kind of team to develop a curriculum where the different courses and topics are related. The risk of the programme is related to the missing research staff that qualifies for applying for different international research projects. The opportunity of the study programme is related to the committed experts representing libraries and memory institutions (e.g. museums)

Strengths:

1. Efficient use of highly qualified professionals;

2. Efficient use of highly committed staff members of the Department of Library and Information Sciences.

Weaknesses:

1. Weak business model;
2. Underfinanced study programme;
3. No internationally visible scientific research.

## 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Librarian Science and Information"

### 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

Diploma is provided in Appendix 33.C and fulfills all requirements Nr.202. of Latvian Cabinet of Ministers.

Degrees awarded to programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a master's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

Agreements about possibilities to continue the education in University of Latvia Master degree Study programme "Communication science" or "Sociology". Appendix 11.C

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

Attestation provided in the Appendix 10.4.

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

CV of the teaching staff provides the proficiency of the official language.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 10.2C - Confirmation of Study programme director that this requirement is accomplished.

- 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

Study agreement is provided in Appendix 36.C.

- 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

Appendix 39.C.- The descriptions of the study courses include the requirements for the commencement of the acquisition of the study course; the aims for the implementation of the study course and the planned learning outcomes; the content of the study; the study course calendar, mandatory and supplementary literature, other sources of information; the organisation and tasks for the independent work of students; the evaluation criteria of learning outcomes.

The study course descriptions are prepared in Latvian as this is the only language in which the programme is implemented. Translation of the descriptions in English has been provided to the expert group.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Decision is provided in Appendix 34.C

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Appendix 23. The compliance of the master's degree programme in library science and information to the national education standard. Degrees awarded to the programme graduates have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state- recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a master's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

According to Appendix 37 the criteria is fulfilled.

- 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Most of the legal requirements are met. Degrees awarded to the programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with "The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education" (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and "Regulations on Latvia's education classifications" (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme grads will receive a master's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Infrastructure is excellent, scientific support is average, financial support is not sufficient but the business model is very clever

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff fulfils the requirements

- 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

Information sciences (with the focus on library sciences) is rapidly changing and interdisciplinary area that focuses on new approaches and problems in data collection and archiving, data protection and privacy, users literacy etc. The study program has put much effort on what currently seems to be most important issues to learn and to adopt to the rapidly changing situation concerning databases and digital information processing.

**Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

The related requirements of the study programme have been met in most important aspects. Degrees awarded to the programme graduates and standards for the diploma and its appendix have been amended in accordance with “The procedure for issuing state-recognised documents to attest to a higher education” (Cabinet of Ministers Reg No 202, 16 April 2013), and “Regulations on Latvia's education classifications” (Cabinet Reg No 322, 13 June 2017). Programme graduates will receive a master's degree of social sciences in library, information and archive studies. This decision has been taken by the Senate, UL on January 25, 2021. The content of the curriculum corresponds to the contemporary needs of library sciences.

The main risk of this programme is related to the missing staff that would be capable of getting international research money. Information sciences is a rapidly developing area and although the study programme is using the best potential of the Latvian experts the involvement of international academic research would be also helpful for Latvian library and memory experts.

Hence it is difficult to evaluate the study programme. The approach and the main idea behind the curriculum are excellent. The use of available resources is very efficient. However, the study programme is focused on teaching and using the available competence. The staff is doing the best to bring in international knowledge and new methods, but there are risks concerning the sustainability of people’s commitment.

**Evaluation of the study programme "Librarian Science and Information"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

**6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Librarian Science and Information"**

**Short-term recommendations**

It would be important to increase the number of students, especially it would be helpful if the candidates will apply for foreign scholarships

Team-teaching approach would be helpful in order to handle better the recurrent issues as well as for hedging the teaching overload of the staff members

Transparency of the assessment methods, especially the formative assessment could be improved.

The course descriptions would benefit if the learning methods would be explained in detail ( reading instructions incl.)

## Long-term recommendations

A strategic plan concerning the possible research direction would be necessary as the library sciences is rapidly changing. It would be helpful if the staff and the partners would define the main competency clusters of the targeted research field

It would be important to conceptualise the memory institutions approach: will it be integrated into the curriculum, if the museums and memory research would be one research cluster

The study field needs a strategic plan for fund-raising

## II. "Communications Studies" ASSESSMENT

### II. "Communications Studies" ASSESSMENT

#### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

The name of the doctoral study programme, the degree to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes as well as admission requirements are interrelated. The goal of the study programme is to allow students to gain internationally recognized academic higher education and scientific qualifications on the basis of individual scholarly work (report, p.127). The tasks defined and the results of the study programme support the achievement of the goal. 10 learning outcomes are defined and the mapping is carried out to compare the content of the study programme with the learning outcomes.

The admission requirements are defined - the applicants need to have a master's degree in social sciences or humanities. A doctoral thesis proposal is compulsory for applicants, and they have to pass an entrance examination, an interview. The foreign language level of the applicants is assessed. In order to complete the study program, the doctoral degree candidates defend their doctoral thesis which is either a monograph or a collection of scientific publications. The graduates of the study programme are awarded a PhD degree (till August 2018, it was Dr.sc.comm).

However, in the program's objectives and learning outcomes, the link between the ambitious achievement goal of the ICS study field could be more clearly marked to stress the compliance between the study field's achievement goal and the goals of the study programme could be improved. From the potential applicant point of view, it can be pointed out that currently it seems that the study programme aims to reach only local market: information about the study programme on the faculty's webpage (<https://www.szf.lu.lv/>) is only in Latvian, which prevents potential foreign students from considering to apply for the studies at ICS study field. The same applies for potentially interested foreign professors who might be seeking, for example, opportunities for Fulbright or Erasmus + exchange opportunities in Latvia.

#### Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The name of the program, the goal, the results, admission criteria and the requirements for graduating from the programme are aligned. However, it must be said that the parameters do not sufficiently demonstrate links to the ambitious achievement goal of the ICS study field.

##### Strengths:

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

Weaknesses:

2. No particular weaknesses have been found in relation to the interrelatedness of all the parameters, however, in the future, the openness to international audiences (both students and scholars) should be considered also on the parameters' level to comply with the ambitious achievement goal of the ICS study direction.

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

### **Analysis**

The total amount of the study programme is 144 credits (216 ECTS). The mandatory part of the programme (part A) consists of 124 credits which include the scholarly work and doctoral thesis (92 credits), the doctoral exams and theoretical courses (14 credits), a doctoral school or comparable experience (6 credits). The rest is general skills' module and mandatory section B.

The descriptions of the study courses are detailed and outline the goals, the content, the plan of the course, defines the amount of students' independent work, the compulsory and recommended literature. The development of the final thesis is split between several courses and several semesters, and such an approach ensures that the thesis development happens in a gradual step-by-step manner. The content of most study courses is relevant and complementary. The expert's group suggests to re-consider the amount (8 credits in total) that is devoted to supervision of bachelor and master students' papers as well as preparation and delivery of study courses on master and bachelor level. From the interviews with the students and the graduates, the experts learned that there is high emphasis on the involvement of the doctoral students in the implementation of the master and bachelor programs on a voluntary basis, and therefore the students lack time to work on their own thesis. It is despite the fact that the amount of the credits allocated for delivering study courses and assisting in teaching has been reduced during the accreditation period (report, p.141). In the future, a different model for the doctoral student involvement in the delivery of bachelor and master programs should be sought for where the students get paid for their involvement. One positive aspect is the recent changes in the study programme that encourage the students to publish more in high level international academic journals instead of comparatively low-level journals. One weak aspect is the lack of systematic internationalization in the study programme - the courses are taught mainly in Latvian, no permanent foreign staff members are involved, and students' involvement in international mobility is quite fragmented and lacks systematic approach. There is no data provided on incoming or outgoing mobility for the doctoral study programme (Annex 42). The report (p.147) highlights the problem that students need to attract their own funding for completing important parts of the curricula related to international mobility such as summer school and conference attendance, and as a problematic aspect this was highlighted by the doctoral students also during the visit.

The study programme has attracted mainly students that are interested in communication theory, and not in library science. Only one dissertation has been defended in the area of library science during the previous accreditation period, and only one dissertation is currently being developed (Table 49). This leads to the question how the programme can better serve as the resource to the ICS study field and especially its study programmes in information and library sciences, where the number of core staff members with doctoral degrees is small.

One advisable addition to the content of the study programme is competences of preparation of scientific grant proposals knowing how much the researchers nowadays must rely on external funding and their own abilities to find resources to finance their work.

The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are taken into account considering that the doctoral studies generally are organized based on the annual work plan that each student develops

at the beginning of each academic year. The evaluation methods are diverse and include oral and written forms of examination. The experts' group wants to point out however, that the students must actively participate in the implementation of the master's and bachelor's programme which decrease the time resources that they spend on working on their thesis. The report (p.147) indicated this as a problem - it is said that nearly all doctoral students admit that it is not possible to defend their thesis during the anticipated period of 3 or 4 years. The experts' group suggests to consider this part of the doctoral study program, and especially in the context that in three consecutive years there have been no thesis defences in the doctoral program.

The conclusion from the student surveys have been used to improve the content of the study program. Also other information sources such as informal discussions with students provide the programme director with the feed-back from the students.

There is no data provided on incoming or outgoing mobility for the doctoral study programme (Annex 42). However, the report (pp.147- 148) provides an overview about the summer schools, doctoral schools abroad in which the students have participated. The participation has been fully recognized. As the problematic aspect is mentioned the fact that the students need to finance the participation in international mobility by themselves. The report highlights also the problem that for doctoral students it is almost impossible to participate in the Erasmus+ programme due to the fact that they are working and can not leave their jobs. During the visit, experts learned that students are informed about reforms in Latvian higher education that will transform the doctoral studies to a form of part time employment at the university, unfortunately, it is yet unknown when this reform will come into force. Studying in such a format could considerably change the opportunities for doctoral students to involve in international mobility and networking outside Latvia.

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

The programme consists of 144 credits (216 ECTS). The descriptions of the study courses are detailed and outline the goals, the content, the plan of the course, defines the amount of students' independent work, the compulsory and recommended literature. The development of the final thesis is split between several courses and several semesters, and such an approach ensures that the thesis development happens in a gradual step-by-step manner. The content of most study courses is relevant and complementary. The expert's group suggests to re-consider the amount (8 credits in total) that is devoted to supervision of bachelor and master students' papers as well as preparation and delivery of study courses on master and bachelor level. In the future, a different model for the doctoral student involvement in the delivery of bachelor and master programs should be sought for where the doctoral students get paid for their involvement. And the students should be better informed about the remuneration system in the faculty. One important and currently weak aspect is the lack of systematic internationalization in the study programme - the courses are taught mainly in Latvian, no permanent foreign staff members are involved, and students' involvement in international mobility is quite fragmented and lacks funding and systematic approach. This study program currently is the weakest part of the whole study direction. Another problematic aspect is that the study programme has attracted mainly students that are interested in communication theory, and not in library science, and therefore the study program is unable to fulfill the task - to develop a new corp of academics who could involve in the development of the field of information and library sciences in Latvia.

The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are taken into account considering that the doctoral studies generally are organized based on the annual work plan that each student develops at the beginning of each academic year. The conclusion from the student surveys have been used to improve the content of the study program. Also other information sources such as informal

discussions with students provide the programme director with the feed-back from the students. There is no data provided on incoming or outgoing mobility for the doctoral study programme, but there is an overview about the summer schools, doctoral schools abroad in which the students have participated. The participation has been fully recognized.

#### Strengths:

1. The descriptions of study courses are of good quality, however, the literature list for each course is so big that it raises questions whether students really do read it fully. More advisable would be specifying chapters in the books as the compulsory reading or inclusion of cover articles in the reading list. Experts recommend in the future not to calculate the reading amount not in units, but pages of literature, and when including books, indicate specific chapters that the students must read during the study course
2. The development of the final thesis is split between several courses and several semesters which should ensure that the thesis is developed in a gradual manner and in the anticipated time frame, however, there are various hindrances that prevent it.
3. Having said that, the experts' group also acknowledges that during the visit, the doctoral students and the graduates also praised the knowledge and skills that they have gained while serving as course tutors and supervisors of bachelor's and master's students' research papers.

#### Weaknesses:

1. The plan of the study programme needs to be revisited since there is currently high emphasis on the involvement of the doctoral students in the implementation of the bachelor and master students which reduces the amount of time and energy that the students could spend on doing their own research and writing dissertation.
2. Students must finance their international experience which is a compulsory part of the study program, no financial support is available except for a few cases when some grants have been attracted.
3. Students have little opportunities to be involved in Erasmus+ mobility.
4. Students should be encouraged to do publication-based dissertations which would automatically give them advantage in job-seeking on international level after graduation.
5. The study programme does not produce enough young scholars in Library science - some innovative mechanisms also on the study content and study organization level could be sought for to attract more students to defend their thesis in Library science.
6. No permanent foreign staff members are involved in the delivery of the study program.

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

#### **Analysis**

The study provision, material and technical provision as well as the information resources are excellent (see more about the resources on the level of the study field). The experts' group did not get data to what extent Moodle and other e-learning environments are used.

There is a lack of provision of financial support for the students to complete the obligatory parts of the study programme related to international mobility such as attending international conferences, summer schools and other events. Students are also used as a voluntary workforce for delivery of bachelor and master study programs, which in the current financial situation is a clever solution, however, hinders the development of the doctoral thesis in a timely manner. The financial resources for teaching are minimal also for the academic staff members which makes the involvement in the implementation of the doctoral programme not very motivational. The experts' group understands that the business model of UL is based on intensive cross-usage of the staff. This is very efficient for improving interdisciplinary programme content. Still, there is a risk that constant lack of financial

resources might impoverish the potential of human resources in future prospects.

Speaking about cooperation with other study fields of the Faculty of Social Sciences, the main activity is organized through the ASPRI institute established at the Faculty of Social sciences (report, p.149). However, in the accreditation report (p.150) the student involvement in the activities of ASPRI has been described as brief and occasional, which does not convince about a well functioning cooperation that creates prerequisites for the achievement of learning and research outcomes set for the study program. To ensure a high-quality study process in the future, the cooperation with ASPRI as the coordinating body for the scientific work should be carefully reconsidered.

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

Except for financial provision, other resources on the ICS study field are excellent. The cooperation between the ICS study field and the ASPRI institute must be improved to provide better opportunities for the doctoral students to be involved in scientific projects.

Strengths:

1. The study provision, material and technical provision as well as the information resources are excellent.
2. The resources (especially library resources) are renewed regularly and according to the needs of the study program.

Weaknesses:

1. The provision of financial resources is insufficient for proper staff remuneration.
2. Involvement of the doctoral students in the projects implemented at ASPRI institute is low - this could be intensified thus providing students with opportunities to earn and also more students to gain experience in working in scientific projects.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

The team of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme is interdisciplinary and represents fields such as Communication, Sociology, Political science, Pedagogy and others, many of them are active in international cooperation and have developed networks and published extensively on international level in their fields of science. Two new assistant professors have been attracted during the previous accreditation period with the degrees in Communication science (Report, p.150). The qualification of the teaching staff members enables the achievement of the aims and partly the learning outcomes of the study programme and the study courses. The weak point is the international networking of the teaching staff which has not led to high international visibility specifically in the field of communication science and thus there are limited opportunities of the teaching staff to involve students in international cooperation or to create possibilities to work in international research projects with the focus specifically on the field of communication. As said previously, the current situation with the limited financial resources available for staff remuneration and overly high focus on academic work (course delivery) instead of a more balanced model that evenly stresses also the scientific work and research creates high risks for the achievement of the ambitious development goals of the ICS study field. The current financial situation also does not allow to attract any permanent staff members from abroad.

11 staff members are involved in the implementation of the doctoral study programme (Appendix 40). The number of staff members with doctoral degrees complies with the national requirements. However, in the report (p.151) it is mentioned that three of the staff members have the expert status of Latvian Science Council. The name of one of the experts mentioned in the report, Gustavs

Strenga, can not be found anywhere in the accreditation documents (the Course descriptions, the list of the thesis supervised by the staff members, also in the Appendix 40), therefore it is not clear why this person is counted as the staff member of the ICS study field. It raises the question whether the study field fulfils this compulsory requirement about the number of LSC experts involved in the implementation of the doctoral study program.

Taken together, the staff members have been publishing extensively, however, it is already mentioned earlier, that specifically in the field of communication science, the number of publications is low (compared to the number of publications produced in such fields as pedagogy, sociology, political science and others), and the publications in Latvian language are dominant.

The staff members involved in the implementation of the doctoral study program, taken together, have been involved in various scientific projects both nationally and internationally, but again, only few of the projects have been implemented in the field of communication science. There are no international projects in the ICS study field where UL has been the prime contractor or lead partner.

The cooperation between staff members can be assessed as good, both on the study field level, and the faculty level, there are several courses which are co-taught by several staff members, bringing together their expertise (e.g, study courses on library and information science theories, communication theories, research methodology in social sciences etc.).

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

The team of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme is interdisciplinary and represents fields such as Communication, Sociology, Political science, Pedagogy and others, many of them are active in international cooperation and have developed networks and published extensively on international level in their fields of science. Two new assistant professors have been attracted during the previous accreditation period with the degrees in Communication science. The qualification of the teaching staff members enables the achievement of the aims and partly the learning outcomes of the study programme and the study courses. The weak point is the international networking of the teaching staff which has not led to high international visibility specifically in the field of communication science and thus there are limited opportunities of the teaching staff to involve students in international cooperation or to create possibilities to work in international research projects with the focus specifically on the field of communication. As said previously, the current situation with the limited financial resources available for staff remuneration and overly high focus on academic work (course delivery) instead of a more balanced model that evenly stresses also the scientific work and research creates high risks for the achievement of the ambitious development goals of the ICS study field. The issue with the staff members with the expert status at Latvian Science Council should be clarified.

#### Strengths:

1. An interdisciplinary team of scholars is involved in the implementation of the study program.
2. New staff members have joined in during the previous accreditation period thus ensuring the regeneration of the personnel.
3. Overall, the scientific work and the number of publications of the faculty members, involved in the implementation of the study program, is quite impressive, but the number of publications specifically by the staff members representing ICS study field, is low and there are mostly publications in Latvian.

#### Weaknesses:

1. There is insufficient funding for staff members, and lack of resources to attract foreign professors.
2. Low international visibility of the ICS study field, only few international research projects and no international projects in Communication or Library science, where UL has been the prime contractor

or the lead partner.

## 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Communications Studies"

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of diploma is provided in the attachment and complies with the regulations

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

Annex 11E confirms the possibility to continue studies in UL doctoral study programme "Sociology"

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

Annex 10.4 confirms the possibility of compensation

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

Annex 10.1 confirms the proficiency of the official language by all staff members involved in programme delivery.

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

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:** Partially compliant

The number of the experts approved by the Latvian Science Council should be clarified by LU as the experts found contradicting information and currently cannot judge this requirement as compliant. The assessment might change after receiving additional information.

- 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

Annex 10.2.E confirms the compliance with requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement is attached in annex 36.E and complies with the requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The descriptions of the study courses have been prepared according to the requirements. All descriptions are prepared in Latvian as this is the only language in which the programme is implemented. Translations of the descriptions in English were provided to the expert group.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The annex 34.E confirms compliance with this requirement.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Annex 31 confirms compliance with this requirement.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

According to Appendix 37 and study programme description section 4 this criteria is formally fulfilled.

15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Most of the legal requirements are met. The sample of diploma is provided in the attachment and complies with the regulations.

**Requirements (R6-R8)**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Provision for information resources, technical, material resources is fully compliant. Not compliant is financial resources and scientific support.

- 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

Fully compliant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The descriptions of the study courses are of good quality and up to date, however, there is insufficient compliance to the criterion from the perspective of the number of publications of the academic staff members specifically in the fields of Communication and Library sciences.

**Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

The doctoral study programme "Communication Studies" is the oldest such programme in Latvia. The study programme meets fully most of the formal requirements that are set for it. In the implementation of the study program, an interdisciplinary approach has been taken in planning the content of the study programme and attracting the teaching staff that ensures the course delivery. The study programme currently seems to be strongly oriented towards the national market. It would be advisable to rethink the positioning of the study programme and establish a realistic plan for opening the study programme to international markets, both for foreign students and also foreign academic staff members. Having said that, the experts' group acknowledges that it will require notable additional resources and support from the management of the Faculty, and also UL. The involvement of the doctoral students in the research projects implemented on the Faculty level and particularly in the ICS study direction must be more active to provide students with opportunities to get paid for their scientific effort. It is not a sustainable approach to look at the doctoral students largely as a free resource that compensates the lack of funding. The overall remuneration system to the academic staff members should be revisited to establish a system that values and promotes

involvement in scientific research. Currently, the existing system causes exhaustion and high risks of burnout among the key staff members that have a huge workload in delivering study courses, supervising final thesis not only on doctoral level, but also on bachelor and master level. These deficiencies are of such scale that they might not be eliminated within two-years accreditation period.

Strengths:

1. An interdisciplinary and scientifically strong and competent team of scholars are involved in the implementation of the study program, however, the main strength comes from the other scientific fields (pedagogy, sociology, linguistics, political science etc.)
2. The material, technical and information resources for the implementation of the study programme are excellent.
3. Overall, the scientific work and the number of publications of the faculty members, involved in the implementation of the study program, is quite impressive, but the number of publications specifically by the staff members representing ICS study field, is low and there are mostly publications in Latvian.

Weaknesses:

1. The study programme is orientated towards the national market which prevents attraction of foreign students and also foreign professors. There is a lack of systematic internationalization in the study programme - the courses are taught mainly in Latvian, no permanent foreign staff members are involved, and students' involvement in international mobility is quite fragmented and lacks funding and systematic approach. In case, this is a strategic decision, it must be stated in the future when updating the development plan of the ICS study field.
2. The provision of the financial resources is insufficient.
3. The current cooperation with the ASPRI institute does not provide sufficient opportunities for the doctoral students to involve in the scientific projects implemented at the Faculty of Social Sciences.
4. Actually, related to the previous point - there are not enough research projects for all (or most) of the doctoral students to be involved in the scientific activities at the Faculty or the ICS study field.
5. This study program currently is the weakest part of the whole study direction.

**Evaluation of the study programme "Communications Studies"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

**6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Communications Studies"**

**Short-term recommendations**

Review the compulsory reading lists in the course descriptions and make them more compact and realistic.

Encourage the students to do more publication-based dissertations.

Decrease the proportion of credits given to students for supervising bachelor and master students' papers and delivering study courses to free more time for the doctoral students to work on their own research.

Include in the programme topics about grant proposal writing and teach the students how to seek for research funding and how to manage research projects.

Revisit the current cooperation model with the ASPRI institute in order to create more (paid) opportunities for the doctoral students to involve in the scientific work carried out at the Faculty.

The students should be better informed about the remuneration system in the faculty

### Long-term recommendations

Improve the financial situation of the study programme and create possibilities (time, administrative support, accessibility of information etc.) for the academic staff members to involve more in attracting project money and implementing projects, especially in Communication and Library sciences.

Do an analysis about the opportunities to fund the international mobility of the students and create a programme that supports the mobility.

Support the engagement of the academic staff from ICS study direction in international research, aiming for projects where the UL is the prime contractor or the lead partner.

Consider the opportunities for the internationalization of the study program, opening it up for foreign students and foreign academics.

In the future not to calculate the reading amount not in units, but pages of literature, and when including books, indicate specific chapters that the students must read during the study course.

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

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

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

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:		Partially compliant	Regulations provide sufficient frame for implementing the internal quality assurance system but the system has several shortcomings indicated in the sub-requirements.

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Requirement Evaluation</b>		<b>Comment</b>
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		The ICS study field has outstanding co-operation with the Latvian national Library, different employers. The ICS study field has cooperation with different foreign experts and international organizations. The aims of the study field are more ambitious than the current contacts actually support. However, the potential of the cooperation is appropriate, but currently not fully exploited.
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).		Partially compliant	The results of scientific research and artistic creation are not fully compliant with the development goals of the study field. The active international networking through various scholarly associations does not lead to intensive involvement in international scientific projects. There are high risks of burnout among the key academic staff members who are also the ones leading most of the scientific work. The current support system for the academic staff members to involve in research work is not sufficiently motivational.
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.		Partially compliant	The recommendations have been implemented, but not fully, and in some points also a formal approach has been followed.

### **Assessment of the Requirements for the Relevant Study Programmes of the Study Field**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Study programme</b>	<b>R5</b>	<b>R6</b>	<b>R7</b>	<b>R8</b>	<b>Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)</b>
1	Communications Studies (43321)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
2	Information Management (43322)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
3	Communications Studies (45321)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Average
4	Librarian Science and Information (45322)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
5	Communications Studies (51321)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Average

### **The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts**

There are no divergent opinions of experts.