

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Riga Higher Institute of Religious Sciences  
affiliated to the Pontifical Lateran University

Study field: Religion and Theology

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

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BSP – bachelor’s study programme  
FTPLU – Faculty of Theology at Pontifical Lateran University  
LQF – Latvian Qualifications Framework  
MSP – master’s study programme  
PLU – Pontifical Lateran University  
RARZI – Riga Higher Institute of Religious Sciences  
RTI – Riga Institute of Theology  
SAR – Self-assessment report  
WoS – Web of Science

The study field “Religion and Theology” at the Riga Higher Institute of Religious Sciences (hereinafter – RARZI) affiliated with the Pontifical Lateran University (hereinafter – PLU) has well-defined aims. The main aim is to foster a dialogue between the Church and society, which underpins the study field goals. The study programmes are interconnected, offering a bachelor’s degree in humanities and a professional master’s degree, both in religion and theology, both implemented in a part-time in-person format. RARZI has analysed its SWOT and has a clear management structure. Admissions, evaluation and academic integrity systems are established.

RARZI has a transparent quality policy that is based on international and national standards and is well-defined. Although its efficacy is debatable as it also has an unclear quality assurance and monitoring system. The presence of inefficiency is also evident within the realm of study programme planning and analysis, as there is ambiguity surrounding the amount to which stakeholder feedback contributes to this process, although the collaboration is significant. The impact of various stakeholders' feedback on the advancement of the study field remains confusing, despite the availability of diverse statistical data. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the process by which students are able to submit their arguments and suggestions exhibits a commendable level of quality and appears to be highly efficacious. The website of RARZI adequately fulfils the minimum requirements and offers useful data for both potential and present students.

There is a clear and comprehensive budget plan that allocates regular 2–4% funding for library development. The infrastructure has recently been improved by a move, however, it is not accessible to people with physical disabilities. The material and technical support needed for the study field has been analysed and RARZI provides the necessary resources for the full implementation of the study process. There is an established procedure for the acquisition of new methodological and information resources for the library based on the analysis of the study course descriptions, the recommendations of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, and the needs of the students for their theses. The information and communication technology solutions have been weak so far but are part of an ongoing study field development plan to be fully implemented in the upcoming years. The teaching staff is supported in their didactic and professional development opportunities and their study course delivery is regularly evaluated. Support for students is available in several directions – psycho-emotional, administrative, infrastructural, and financial (although this may need improvement).

RARZI's scientific research path is partially aligned with the institute's strategy and the study field itself. For launching larger scientific projects, there is a lack of stronger connections with international cooperation networks. In addition, there is a lack of clear strategic planning, in accordance with which the responsibilities for the implementation of individual goals would be divided, as well as annual reports that would monitor the execution of these goals during the period for which the Self-assessment report (hereinafter – SAR) is applicable. This has been partially

addressed by the new strategic plan (2023–2027), which experts hope will be accompanied by regular implementation reports. The link between scientific research and the teaching process is also only partially apparent, and there is insufficient evidence to support this link. This is particularly evident when it comes to the scientific works of students and teachers, as such works appear to be lacking. There is also a great deal of remaining potential when it comes to international cooperation, even though all the prerequisites are present. Innovations that could have a positive impact on the study procedure also have room for enhancement.

RARZI's affiliation with PLU has a positive effect on internationalisation and gives an opportunity to integrate the experience of other countries into study programmes. The cooperation of RARZI with other higher education institutions in Latvia, especially the Riga Institute of Theology (hereinafter – RTI) and the Luther Academy, is well established and closely linked to the study programmes. Cooperation in the form of internships works very well with all the main employers' organisations in Latvia, as well as with foreign institutions in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. Collaborative research is implemented through cooperation in applied research projects between RARZI and RTI, but cooperation in developing the research process is mainly of individual character. The cooperation projects in research would be needed to enhance the academic level of the research and study programmes in RARZI. The cooperation with the media in order to popularise Christian theology to a wider audience is successful. The cooperation with NGOs contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field. The teaching staff mobility is well implemented, and the number of guest lecturers has increased over the last study year. Student mobility is modest, and there are several obstacles to it. However, the motivation of students to benefit from Erasmus+ possibilities is high enough. The incoming students' mobility is not provided by RARZI. The institution has acknowledged the need to develop incoming students' mobility, but no clearly defined strategy has been established for achieving this goal.

Both study programmes are compliant with the rules and regulations of higher education in Latvia as well as complying with their basis in the Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Latvia.

## **I - Assessment of the Study Field**

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#### **1.1 Management of the Study Field**

##### **Analysis**

1.1.1. The overall aims of the study field are well defined. The educational philosophy at RARZI is deeply rooted in the tradition of philosophical and theological anthropology. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of both the individual and society, unveiling fundamental values that unlock the potential of human nature. The curriculum spans various humanities disciplines, including theology, philosophy, ethics, psychology, pedagogy, social studies, and the culture and history of religions, all serving the overarching anthropological idea.

The primary objective is to foster a dialogue between the Church and culture, thereby enhancing the equilibrium of ethical and cultural values within society. This strategic approach forms the foundation for the specific goals of the Religion and Theology study field. RARZI aims to implement this study field to confer bachelor's and professional master's degrees rooted in Catholic tradition and theology. This educational approach incorporates an ecumenical perspective, responsiveness to public needs, and the cultivation of professional specialists capable of meeting the requirements of both the Church and society. Aligned with the 2023–2027 Strategy of the Riga Higher Institute of Religious Sciences affiliated with the Pontifical Lateran University, the goals include providing a solid education in religion and theology, fostering an open ecumenical dialogue, and addressing specific social needs. This is apparent from both the SAR [p. 13] and the meeting with the employers.

Consequently, the study field and the relevant study programmes comply with the main directions of the higher education institution and meet the needs and the development trends of the society and national economy.

The study process prioritises students, encouraging active engagement of both students and academic personnel in scientific research. This involvement encompasses the study, interpretation, and translation of Catholic teaching, the Church's role in society, and the history of the Church. This aligns with the strategic goal of efficient cooperation and participation in strengthening research in religion and theology, applying research findings to enhance the content of study programmes.

The interconnection of the study programmes included in the study field is shown in RARZI's study field not only offering the opportunity for academic achievement with a bachelor's degree in religion but also facilitates the continuation of studies in a master's study programme, leading to a Professional master's degree in religion and theology and a qualification as a pastoral counsellor. Graduates equipped with this qualification are prepared for diverse roles within the Church, including chaplaincy services in hospitals, retirement houses, rehabilitation institutions, prisons, and armed forces. This multifaceted approach supports RARZI's goal of active participation in shaping public opinion and promoting well-being, as outlined in its development plan.

1.1.2. The self-assessment report provides an in-depth analysis of internal factors influencing RARZI, a small higher education institution in Latvia. The focus is on RARZI's unique role in Latvia's education landscape, its mission, strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for improvement.

According to SAR, RARZI has a special role: As an affiliate of the PLU, it plays a pivotal role in Latvia's education sector. It synthesises academic standards from the PLU, which adds prestige but also imposes the challenge of dual accreditation in Latvia and at the international level. RARZI also holds a special mission in the cooperation between Latvia and the Holy See, contributing to spiritual well-being and forming the spiritual climate in Latvia. It introduced the pastoral counsellor profession, addressing emerging societal needs. Even if the demand for these specialists so far has been low, it is gradually gaining recognition due to current political and economic challenges [SAR, p. 15].

Regarding the study programmes, RARZI is the sole institution offering studies in religious sciences based on the Catholic tradition. Graduates receive dual diplomas, enhancing their global recognition [SAR, p. 14]. The institution is ecumenically open, fostering diversity among its students and teaching staff.

However, RARZI faces financial constraints as it relies solely on tuition fees. To address this, the institution plans to develop a robust public relations policy, attract students, and merge with the RTI to consolidate resources.

RARZI students are motivated, mature individuals pursuing professions with societal impact. However, the low number of students is influenced by the prestige and remuneration associated with these roles. RARZI aims to ease financial burdens, internationalise its environment, and expand research opportunities to attract a broader student base [SAR, p. 16].

The teaching staff, many of whom are unique specialists in Latvia, face challenges related to low teaching loads and underfunded research [SAR, p. 17]. Consequently, the teaching staff need to find additional employment. The planned merger with RTI aims to strengthen the teaching staff, increase research opportunities, and foster collaboration with international institutions.

Lack of state funding results in financial instability for RARZI. The merger with RTI is expected to consolidate resources, overcome administrative challenges, and modernise infrastructure. Long-term financing plans and attracting international investors are part of the strategy.

RARZI identifies threats such as a declining demographic trend and economic challenges. Mitigation strategies include expanding the target audience, enriching educational offerings, introducing distance learning, and intensifying collaboration with sponsors and international foundations.

In summary, RARZI faces internal challenges but has outlined comprehensive strategies for

improvement, emphasising collaboration, consolidation, and adaptability to external factors. The report underscores the institution's commitment to its unique mission and its resilience in addressing challenges for sustained growth and impact in Latvia's education sector.

1.1.3. The SAR and the visit show the intricate structure of RARZI in managing its singular study field of Religion and Theology. With a focus on academic and professional study programmes, the SAR outlines the decision-making bodies, collaborative efforts, and the role of students, employers, and administrative personnel in ensuring the quality and efficiency of the study field [SAR, p. 18].

RARZI specialises in one study field, Religion and Theology, offering an academic bachelor's study programme (hereinafter – BSP) and a professional master's study programme (hereinafter – MSP). The BSP awards a humanities degree in religion and theology, while the MSP additionally grants a qualification in pastoral counselling.

Decision-making bodies of RARZI have a collective responsibility for managing the study field. The highest management level involves the Grand Chancellor of the PLU, the Rector of the PLU, and the Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the PLU (hereinafter – FTPLU) [SAR, p. 19]. Their authority is exercised through the Moderator, who is also the representative of the Bishops' Conference of Latvia.

The Moderator, also serving as the Chair of the Council of RARZI, oversees the quality of studies. The Director of the Study Field, the Directors of Study Programmes, and the Head of the Study Department collaborate to ensure the quality of the study field and study programmes. Regular meetings facilitate coordination, and the Head of the Study Department submits an annual report on study programmes for review and approval by the Council of RARZI.

Teaching staff members are individually responsible for the quality of their study courses, research, and professional development. Collaboration with the Council of the Directorate helps maintain the daily quality of studies [SAR, p. 19].

Student self-government plays a significant role in monitoring study quality. Student representatives actively participate in the Council of RARZI, providing suggestions and analyses. The input of students is considered in decision-making processes.

Employers play a vital role in supervising the quality of the study field. RARZI gathers and analyses employer feedback, incorporating it into the improvement process. Employers are represented on the Board of RARZI, contributing to project implementation.

Administrative personnel, including a project manager, a librarian, and office staff, contribute significantly to the high-quality implementation of the study field. Their roles range from managing projects to ensuring the availability of research materials and facilitating communication [SAR, p. 19].

The efficiency of the study field management is evaluated through student surveys conducted annually. The uniform approach, document samples, and accessible information contribute to the satisfaction of students with the management of the study field.

RARZI's management of the study field demonstrates a comprehensive and collaborative approach. From decision-making bodies to students, employers, and administrative personnel, each entity plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality and efficiency of the Religion and Theology study field [SAR, p. 20]. The commitment to ongoing improvement is evident in the structured processes and regular evaluations.

1.1.4. The SAR provides an overview of the admission requirements and procedures at RARZI. The institution follows a structured framework outlined in the Rules on Admission, aligning with national regulations and international standards.

RARZI's admission procedures adhere to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Cabinet of Ministers Regulations, Vatican's Instruction on Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences, and its Regulations. The Admission Commission, operating under the Regulations on the Admission

Commission of RARZI, oversees the process, ensuring transparency and fairness [SAR, p. 20].

The admission process is comprehensive, with special criteria outlined for each study programme. Additionally, the possibility to recognize prior education aligns with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on Recognition of Competences Acquired Outside Formal Education. This flexibility allows for the acknowledgement of learning outcomes from prior education, professional experience, and non-formal education, in line with national regulations [SAR, p. 21].

Applicants are required to submit documents in person or electronically with a secure electronic signature. Documents in a foreign language must be legalised and accompanied by a notarized translation. Recognition of foreign educational documents involves coordination with the Academic Information Centre, ensuring equivalency with the education standards of Latvia [SAR, p. 21].

A registration fee is applicable for document processing. The deadline for registration is set by the Director of RARZI and communicated by the Admission Commission, ensuring a streamlined process. RARZI's admission competition takes the form of an admission interview, emphasising a personalised and in-depth evaluation of applicants. The interview format allows for a comprehensive assessment, and the competition is considered complete after the results are announced [SAR, p. 21].

Eligibility for the BSP requires secondary education, with admission competition based on final centralised examination grades. MSP eligibility includes various pathways, such as holding a compatible bachelor's degree or completing an introductory course in Catholic theology for applicants from non-Catholic institutions [SAR, p. 21].

RARZI allows recognition of prior education or professional experience, subject to approval by the Recognition Commission. The process involves submitting documents attesting to learning outcomes, with fees applicable as per the institution's service pricelist.

Recognition of courses studied at other institutions, both in Latvia and abroad, is considered on a case-by-case basis. The Recognition Commission, comprising key personnel, assesses the volume and content of the courses for recognition, offering a flexible pathway for students.

RARZI's admission procedures reflect a commitment to regulatory compliance, transparency, and flexibility. The institution's alignment with national and international standards ensures a rigorous yet accessible process for prospective students, emphasising the recognition of prior education and diverse pathways to higher learning. The continual recognition of education for transferring students showcases RARZI's dedication to facilitating smooth transitions and supporting academic mobility [SAR, p. 22].

1.1.5. The evaluation process at RARZI is governed by a comprehensive set of regulations, including the Rules for Evaluation of Student Achievements at the Riga Higher Institute of Religious Sciences, affiliated with the Pontifical Lateran University. These regulations encompass the evaluation of various academic components, such as final examinations, study courses, tests, term papers, and internships [SAR, p. 22].

Aligned with national standards, the evaluation principles emphasise openness, re-evaluation possibilities, mandatory evaluation, evaluation diversity, and appropriateness. The university establishes clear requirements for study outcomes, ensuring that evaluations reflect the objectives of the study programme and individual courses. The use of different evaluation types, such as written and oral tests, allows for a comprehensive assessment of student learning [SAR, p. 23]. Study course descriptions provided at the outset of studies outline the outcomes to be achieved, chosen tests, and evaluation criteria. Mid-term tests, encompassing various formats, are conducted during the semester, while final examinations evaluate students at the end of each study course. The 10-grade evaluation system, consistent with national standards, defines levels of achievement, from outstanding to extremely weak.

To maintain academic integrity, final theses undergo a plagiarism check. The evaluation of final theses involves a defence process, overseen by a commission, assessing content, relevance,

uniformity, proper use of references, formatting, presentation skills, and the ability to engage in discussions with appropriate terminology. A preliminary defence is mandatory for master's theses, ensuring quality before the final defence [SAR, p. 24].

Evaluation outcomes are regularly analysed to assess their alignment with study programme goals and student needs. The teaching staff reviews the success rates and mastery of the study programme, making adjustments as necessary to enhance learning outcomes. If needed, modifications to the evaluation procedure or study course content are implemented.

In conclusion, RARZI's evaluation system is thorough and transparent, incorporating a 10-grade scale, diverse evaluation methods, and continuous analysis for improvement. RARZI's commitment to academic integrity and alignment with national standards ensures a rigorous and fair evaluation process for students.

1.1.6. The adherence to academic integrity principles at RARZI is established through an internal "Academic Code of Ethics", encompassing general principles applicable to teaching staff, students, and employees. The code outlines the standards for academic conduct and provides a framework for addressing violations [SAR, p. 25].

Paragraph 11 of Part III of the Academic Code emphasises that teaching staff must maintain academic integrity, explicitly denouncing plagiarism, lifting, and other forms of dishonest use of intellectual property. Paragraph 17 of Part IV outlines the principles of academic integrity for students, including prohibitions on prohibited aids, plagiarism, falsification of data, and cheating during studies and research. Part VI of the Academic Code details the procedure for handling code violations. The process includes an Ethics Commission, comprised of the Director, Head of the Study Department, and a representative of lecturers, responsible for assessing submissions and complaints related to academic ethics violations [SAR, p. 25].

To reinforce academic integrity, students, when submitting their theses, sign a Declaration of Academic Integrity. This document attests to the independent creation of the thesis, adherence to ethical principles, proper referencing, and compliance with data protection requirements. To strengthen anti-plagiarism measures, RARZI is actively pursuing an agreement for a uniform digital anti-plagiarism system. Theses, both in electronic and hard copy formats, are publicly available at the library, promoting transparency [SAR, p. 25].

RARZI collaborates with the FTPLU to ensure the quality and integrity of the theses. Master's theses are shared with the PLU for review a month before the defence and evaluation process.

Violation of academic integrity, particularly plagiarism, is treated seriously. If suspicions arise, the Ethics Commission conducts a thorough analysis, and if plagiarism is confirmed, the student is not allowed to defend their thesis and is subsequently exmatriculated [SAR, p. 26].

In conclusion, RARZI's commitment to academic integrity is evident through a robust framework, including the Academic Code of Ethics, the Declaration of Academic Integrity, and collaborations with external entities. The institution's proactive approach to plagiarism prevention and the stringent consequences for violations underscore the importance placed on upholding academic standards.

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

The overall aims of the study field are well-defined. The main objective is to foster a dialogue between the Church and society, which forms the basis of the goals of this study field. The interconnection of the study programmes included in the study field is shown in RARZI's study field not only offering the opportunity for academic achievement with a bachelor's degree in religion and theology but also facilitating the continuation of studies in an MSP, leading to a master's degree in religion and theology and a qualification as a pastoral counsellor. RARZI has identified and analysed its strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. The management structure is clear.

Admissions, evaluation and academic integrity systems are in place.

Strengths:

1. The study field and study programmes comply with the main directions and aims of RARZI.
2. The study process prioritises students, encouraging active engagement in research and collaboration between the student body and academic staff.
3. RARZI rapidly involves itself in addressing emerging societal needs.
4. Graduates receive dual diplomas, enhancing global recognition.
5. A planned merger with RTI will strengthen all fields of development, consolidating resources.
6. Employers are actively involved in quality assurance activities.
7. Study course descriptions are elaborate and well-prepared.

Weaknesses:

1. The demand and understanding for pastoral counselling as a profession is developing slowly.
2. Reliance on tuition fees and the low number of students is challenging the sustainability of the institution.
3. Low teaching loads for academic staff, making them seek out other opportunities.

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

### **Analysis**

1.2.1. RARZI has its quality policy defined according to national and international standards. It is based on the standards set by the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See, ESG standards, as well as the documents governing the quality of higher education in the Republic of Latvia. It is publicly available on their homepage [www.rarzi.lv](http://www.rarzi.lv).

In general, the significance of quality assurance is recognised, but the question of the system's efficiency persists if it continues to exist in its current form. The Director of RARZI is responsible for quality management; specifically, the Director guarantees the management of the institute, the functionality of the quality assurance system for studies, and the regular participation of RARZI's stakeholders in quality improvement activities. The FTPLU receives a comprehensive report from RARZI at the end of each academic year. The Director of the Institute submits a comprehensive report on the Institute's activities to the Moderator once every five years, followed by the Dean of the FTPLU, and then the Dicastery for Culture and Education [SAR, p. 26]. From this, it is evident that RARZI has an internal management and decision-making level when it comes to internal quality assurance, but the advisory and supervisory levels and the executive level within the institution are questionable.

Evaluations are conducted by collecting and analysing data during weekly meetings of the Directorate, each semester in working groups of teachers, and meetings of the Head of the Study Department with students from each study year [SAR, p. 26]. Internal regulations are improved, the content of study programmes is reviewed annually (students, graduates, and employers' opinions are allegedly considered), and study course descriptions and study methodology are updated and expanded. During the period of accreditation, substantial improvements were made in several areas based on opinions garnered and an analysis of the current situation [SAR, p. 27]. Being aware that the availability of theological and philosophical literature, as well as documents on the teaching of the Catholic Church in Latvian, has an impact on the quality of the study process, RARZI nurtures translation activity [SAR, p. 27-28]. Also, RARZI is aware of the importance of didactic training for teachers, and the activities conducted for didactic training for teachers are commendable; it would be highly desirable to continue these efforts in the future. Cooperation with Riga Stradiņš University can serve as an example of good practices. To enhance the didactic skills of teachers, RARZI and Riga Stradiņš University collaborated to organise a course focused on didactics in institutions of

higher education. Undoubtedly, recognising the significance of enhancing didactic competencies is crucial, as it aids in the accomplishment of learning outcomes [SAR, p. 27; on-site visit].

Also, it is evident that RARZI monitors labour market developments and modifies study programmes accordingly, and it will be crucial to continue working on this in the future. An example of this can be the fact that, because of the secondary education content reform initiated in 2016 (School 2030), RARZI ceased admitting students to the professional MSP in religion, which formerly provided qualification for a teacher of religious education and philosophy in Latvia, because there were no longer employment opportunities in this field. Instead, RARZI invested in strengthening the MSP that gives qualification as a pastoral counsellor and directed the restoration of the national professional standard for pastoral counsellors [SAR, p. 27].

RARZI manages internships for students and coordinates student seminars on the subject. From the meeting with employers, it is evident that internship programmes exist, and this is something that should continue to be worked on and developed [on-site visit]. Additionally, it is imperative to consider future initiatives aimed at fostering lifelong learning. Upon the expert team's request, RARZI presented the minutes of the council meeting, wherein the discussion revolved around the development and subsequent implementation of three distinct lifelong learning programmes. Nevertheless, a comprehensive examination of the progression and execution of these initiatives is absent, leaving the current status and potential introduction of new study programmes uncertain [Annex provided after the visit, 1. Lifelong\_Learning].

The intention to merge institutes (RARZI and RTI) is logical, and the efforts towards a closer relationship with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia are commendable not only for ecumenical reasons but also for purely practical reasons because the Faculty of Theology also records a lack of students. The merger of RARZI with RTI will increase the number of students, but given the situation in Europe, the number of students may continue to decline, so it is essential to consider joint studies and the cooperation of theological institutions. During one of the meetings, it was stated that Latvia had a notable history of successful ecumenical cooperation. This phenomenon can be attributed to the significant impact exerted by the Soviet regime, which effectively brought together diverse religious groups as a means of ensuring their own continued existence [on-site visit]. Concerning the merger of two institutes, however, it is important to note that not all legal assertions have been made to merge RARZI and RTI into a single institution. So, both institutes should work on this urgently and join forces [on-site visit].

1.2.2. Deming's continuous improvement cycle is the foundation for RARZI's quality management and quality assurance implementation mechanisms, as well as the development and review of relevant study programmes [SAR, p. 29-30]. Articles 15.-16. of RARZI's Management Regulations of the Study Field and Study programme (information available only in Latvian) outline the procedure for developing a new study programme [Rules of Study Direction and Study Program Management, available on homepage]. The elaboration of the study programme includes the decision to develop a new study programme, the phases of elaboration, and coordination involving all parties involved. The procedures for the development and evaluation of relevant study programmes in the study field, as well as the feedback mechanisms, have been outlined. During the meeting with the students, it was evident that the surveys had comprehensive questions and provided much room for student observations and comments, which is important. RARZI conducts three types of surveys: surveys of students on study courses and the performance of teaching staff; surveys of graduates; and surveys of employers. The survey on study courses and the performance of teaching staff is anonymous; it is taken by all students once a year since the academic year 2013/2014. It contains evaluations in nine areas (general level of satisfaction with studies at RARZI, content of a study course, different levels of satisfaction with delivery of a study course, examination processes during the study year, accessibility to information resources, study environment/remote studies, organisation of studies, extracurricular activities, one's activity and diligence in the study process). When evaluating, a scale

of 1 to 5 was used by students to evaluate the content and delivery of a course, while a scale of 1-10 was used to evaluate all other aspects. It is evident that RARZI also conducts serious survey analyses, so they note that ratings given by students of the BSP have been consistently stable and high. The only aspect that shows a decreasing trend in rating is that of the study environment. The survey of MSP students has been conducted regularly for the past six years, and it is evident that the institute has managed to improve in all aspects. The survey of graduates has also been carried out regularly for the past seven years, while the survey of employers started only this year. It is not clear why surveys of employers were not conducted before [Annex 8, Results of the Surveys of Students, Graduates and Employers; on-site visit]. At the request of the expert team, concrete evidence of the achievement of these criteria was also submitted, where there are visible examples of changes that took place based on surveys, for instance, in the context of adjustments to the study courses themselves within the curriculum [Annex provided after the on-site visit, 2. Records of study programme changes based on analyses and surveys]. The analysis revealed and emphasised the presence of a tracking procedure for study programme development. While this procedure is effective and logical, it fails to consistently engage all relevant stakeholders. The start of employer surveys in 2023 lacks clarity regarding the extent to which this criterion has been effectively fulfilled.

1.2.3. The procedure for submitting student complaints and initiatives is outlined in the document Rules for Evaluation of Student Achievements at the Riga Higher Institute of Religious Sciences affiliated with the Pontifical Lateran University. RARZI ensures that students have the right not only to submit complaints and initiatives but also to request a re-evaluation of the grade received in a test if the student believes that errors or significant procedural violations have been committed during the test or the evaluation of the test. In this situation, the student's application is reviewed by the Appeal Commission, which consists of at least two neutral faculty members. It is possible to appeal the decision of the Appeal Commission to the Board of RARZI [Rules for Evaluating Student Achievements, available on the homepage]. Student initiatives and complaints received during the cyclical monitoring of observance of internal control mechanisms, complaint submission, and decision-making procedures, as well as students' rights and interests, are collected and reviewed annually by the Council of RARZI, which evaluates the overall trends of complaints and initiatives and the need to improve institutional and study quality [SAR, p. 31]. At the meetings with the students, it was clear that they were familiar with the procedure, and it is evident from the examples in the report that the procedure is being followed [on-site visit; SAR, p. 31-32].

1.2.4. Statistical data is collected by handling the administration of surveys, conducting private consultations, and organising general meetings. The identified target groups encompass individuals who fall under the categories of applicants, students, personnel, graduates, and employers. A variety of methodologies are employed to obtain diverse forms of data. A student satisfaction survey about the study environment and study process is administered at the end of each academic year. Annually, scheduled meetings are conducted with students from each academic year to collectively identify challenges and issues encountered in the study process. The primary objective of these meetings is to motivate and inspire students to adhere to deadlines for the completion and submission of their thesis. Every student can schedule a personal appointment to discuss matters about their academic pursuits. Data regarding the academic progress and achievement of individual students is systematically gathered during each semester. This includes information on the successful completion of the prescribed curriculum, as well as the fulfilment of the learning objectives established for each study course part within the study programme. The statistics are subjected to analysis and deliberation during the Directorate's extended sessions. Upon the end of each academic term, an examination is conducted to analyse the data about the advancement of writing research papers, as well as the supervision of term papers, bachelor's theses, and master's

theses [SAR, p. 32; Annex 8, Results of the Surveys of Students, Graduates and Employers].

Gaining insight into the perspectives of graduates is of utmost importance for RARZI. Consequently, a survey is administered among individuals who have completed their studies in the corresponding academic year, to implement a survey for those who have graduated in the preceding year. The surveys aim to determine the degree of satisfaction among graduates, their perceptions of the study programme's quality, their assessments of the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired at RARZI, and their evaluations of the market value associated with the RARZI diploma [SAR, p. 33-34; Annex 8, Results of the Surveys of Students, Graduates and Employers].

RARZI has developed a strong partnership with employers [on-site visit]. Employer feedback plays a crucial role in assessing the degree of employer satisfaction with the knowledge, abilities, and competencies attained by RARZI graduates, as well as their adherence to workplace expectations [evidence of cooperation with employers and graduates can be found here: 3. Evidence that representatives of alumni or graduates and external stakeholders who participate in social and humanitarian work.docx]. The fact that employer feedback was first requested in 2023 is a little out of the ordinary. At the end of each academic year, a report is compiled by the Director of the Study Field and the Head of the Study Department, detailing the study field and its associated study programmes for the specified academic year. The data that has been gathered is utilised to conduct assessments and advance the knowledge within the respective subject of study. The aforementioned information is both conveyed to the RARZI Council and given to the FTPLU [SAR, p. 34].

1.2.5. Mostly through the website, RARZI often offers thorough access to information. The primary objective of this platform is to facilitate effective communication with many stakeholders, including potential and current students, staff members of RARZI, collaborative partners, and the wider society. It serves as a comprehensive source of information regarding RARZI's mission, activities, available study courses, and notable achievements. The website offers content in both the Latvian and English languages. The webpage comprises the fundamental components that should be included on the website of an institution of higher education [SAR, p. 34-35]. Meetings with stakeholders and reports indicate that RARZI does not have a clear public information policy and makes inadequate use of other communication channels made possible by modern technology. During the meeting with the management, it emerged that RARZI uses radio technology (Radio Marija) and has its own Facebook page, but that word-of-mouth and former students from the institute are the main ways in which the institute spreads information. The utilisation of various modes of information dissemination, including promotion and marketing, is essential and beneficial. However, higher education institutions must have a well-defined information policy and effectively use all accessible communication channels in the digital era, which are also used by potential students. It has been repeatedly highlighted that prospective students of RARZI encompass not just people of the Catholic faith, but also individuals belonging to several other religious denominations. The efficacy of word-of-mouth as the primary means of disseminating information regarding RARZI raises concerns over the accessibility of such information to individuals who are not affiliated with Catholic parishes [on-site visit]. The information published on the website of the higher education institution [<http://www.rarzi.lv>] about the study programmes of the study field corresponds to the information available in the official registers.

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

RARZI has a transparent quality policy that is based on international and national standards and is well-defined. Although its efficacy is debatable, it also has an unclear quality assurance and monitoring system. It is obvious from the SAR that stakeholder feedback contributes to the study process, and the impact of stakeholders' feedback on the advancement of the study field is clear,

but it's unclear why employers are not officially surveyed more often. It is certainly a procedural error because it is clear from meetings with employers that RARZI considers employers' opinions at numerous meetings. The process by which students can submit their arguments and suggestions exhibits a commendable level of quality. The website of RARZI adequately fulfils the minimum requirements and offers useful data for both potential and present students.

Strengths:

1. Quality policy consistent with European requirements (standards set by the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See and ESG standards).
2. Willingness to modify and alter the study programme to fit the labour market.
3. Quality relationship with employers.
4. A clearly defined procedure for student complaints and proposal submission.

Weaknesses:

1. The effectiveness of the monitoring and quality assurance mechanism is questionable because the system lacks all the components that a monitoring and quality assurance system at a higher education institution should have.
2. Unclear status, development and implementation of lifelong learning.
3. No information dissemination policy has been defined.
4. Irregular employer surveys (began in 2023).

### Assessment of the requirement [1]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

RARZI has partly managed to establish a quality assurance system that fulfils all its functions towards students and their satisfaction according to the quality assurance policy. It is questionable how effective the system formed by RARZI is [see analysis of criteria 1.2.1.]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The quality policy is clearly defined and available here:

<https://www.rarzi.lv/augstskola/kvalit%C4%81tes-politika-quality-policy>. RARZI's familiarity with the quality assurance procedure is apparent [SAR, p. 26-30]; however, knowledge in isolation does not provide a comprehensive guarantee of consistent and precise quality monitoring. This challenge becomes particularly arduous when the HEI lacks a well-defined system for monitoring and ensuring quality, wherein the roles and duties of different entities are clearly delineated.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The steps of the Deming cycle, as well as the clear procedure for the elaboration of a new study programme [Rules of Study Direction and Study Program Management, available on the homepage], provide a stable mechanism that enables the development of study programmes, the monitoring of their quality, and the review of their effectiveness [SAR, p. 28-30; Annex

provided after the on-site visit, 2. Records of study programme changes based on analyses and surveys].

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI has established criteria that it follows for the evaluation of students' results according to Cabinet Regulations Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 512 of 12.09.2014 on the National Standards for the Second Level Professional Higher Education [SAR, p. 23–24] Information related to learning outcomes, including assessment, is contained in study course descriptions, the preparation and updating of which, as well as the rules for their publication, are stipulated in the RARZI study course development and updating procedure [Annex 24, Descriptions of Study Courses].

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

According to SAR p. 30, internal procedures and mechanisms are in place to ensure the qualifications and work quality of academic staff. RARZI has established a uniform procedure for the evaluation of the qualification and work quality of academic staff. This procedure is also contained in the Regulations of RARZI [SAR, p. 41–42].

- 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

There are different types of mechanisms implemented for the purpose of monitoring and gathering the data and analysing them. One of the most important indicators of quality is the survey results of the students and their feedback provided by the study courses. There are also other types of surveys in place such as employer surveys, but it is unclear why they started only in 2023 [more detailed information outlined in Annex 8, Results of the Surveys of Students, Graduates and Employers].

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The lack of a well-defined structure in the quality assurance system raises concerns about its potential effectiveness in influencing the study field.

### 1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

#### Analysis

1.3.1. The Board of the Foundation decides how to spend the funding for the study field. It makes a yearly budget that covers all the costs of the study field, such as paying the academic staff (for teaching hours, consultations, exams, new study courses, supervising and reviewing theses, arranging and overseeing internships, doing research, training themselves, making new teaching

materials), running the studies (paying the administrative staff, taxes, supplies, IT support), and buying or updating things like books, tools, and devices. The Board of the Foundation always sets aside 2-4% of the money for the development of the library [SAR, p. 36-37]. As such, a system for determining and redistributing finances for the study field exists.

The budget calculations do not account for the costs of infrastructure maintenance and development, as these are fully funded by the Catholic Church of Latvia [SAR, p. 37]. This is a notable benefit as the costs of infrastructure upkeep can be steep.

Scientific activities and research are funded from external sources, mainly from project funds, as well as from funds raised individually by academic staff through their professional activities. The project funds come from German Catholic foundations, namely Renovabis, Bonifatius Werk, and Kirche in Not. These foundations provide consistent and regular support for planned scientific activities and research, for example, Renovabis has provided more than 43,000 EUR for research funding over the last seven years, while Bonifatius Werk has another 45,000 EUR [SAR, p. 37]. There is, however, no established formal system for research funding attraction or distribution, as the institution does not currently focus on scientific development [on-site visit].

1.3.2. RARZI has identified and found the necessary infrastructure resources and has made significant investments in this area. In the accreditation period, it has relocated to a bigger and more suitable place for learning. The new location is easier to access and offers room for growth, making it easier to merge with RTI in terms of infrastructure [SAR, p. 6, 28, 31, 45, 66]. The new premises offer several classrooms (with and without computers), a large library with independent study spaces (and laptops available to borrow), an event hall, a student lounge (with a kitchenette to give students a chance to prepare/heat their meals in the evening) and a chapel [SAR p. 38-39; on-site visit]. The institute allocates funds for the renovation of existing facilities and considers the needs of all parties involved (staff and students) in this procedure. During the period of accreditation, significant enhancements were made to the study environment, including the repair and renovation of the roof, the modernization and restoration of equipment, lighting, and furniture in study rooms, and the creation of another student lounge. The RARZI Development Plan for the Study field "Religion and Theology" also includes the construction of a spacious conference room equipped with a state-of-the-art audio-visual system. The project is expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2024.

Material and technical support needed for the study field has also been analysed. RARZI provides stationary computers, projection and sound equipment, office software and other technical support necessary for the full implementation of the study process. All aforementioned resources are available to staff and students for use in the study process [SAR p. 38-39, 41; on-site visit].

For the improvement of these resources, a contract with a private company has been signed for the provision of IT support in the updating and modernisation of existing equipment, to improve the ability to transmit in-person events such as classes and conferences in an online setting. This plan is also outlined in the Development Plan of the Study Field, planning to build the conference room by the end of 2023 and fully equip it by March 2024. [SAR, p. 41; on-site visit].

The SAR mentions that a special group of academic and administrative staff has been created for the improvement of infrastructure and IT resources, but during the on-site visit, it is discussed that no such formal group exists. Resources are improved mainly by receiving feedback from professors about their needs for the implementation of the study process [SAR, p. 41; on-site visit]. Overall a formal unified system for infrastructural and IT resource development does not seem to be in place, however, more considerable plans are integrated into other planning documents of RARZI, which clearly define the responsible people for each developmental step. In this context, experts can do nothing but encourage the institute to continue its work and commend it for its efforts to provide a high-quality study environment for its staff and students.

1.3.3. As previously mentioned, 2-4% of the RARZI budget is annually allocated to the improvement of the local library resources, excluding the subscription to new scientific databases, which is covered separately. The book collection is regularly supplemented, especially when new materials in Latvian become available (the academic staff are often themselves authors of these translations). There is an established procedure for the acquirement of new methodological and information resources for the library – the study course descriptions are analysed for their content and appropriate study materials are sourced from the existing materials, and if an insufficiency is identified, the staff is surveyed on this and the possible materials to be purchased in the future [SAR, p. 40]. New materials are also sought out by recommendation of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, as it often emphasises what specific areas of learning may need more attention at any given time in society. Additionally, it may depend on the needs of the students for their theses. When their topics are known, the library offers support to help find relevant literature [on-site visit]. Database subscriptions are also a collegial decision made by a professorial group in accordance with several base criteria for the databases (e.g. focus on the fields of Catholic theology, psychology, and social sciences). All such decisions are approved by the Director and the Moderator of RARZI [SAR, p. 40].

Currently the library houses more than 80,000 physical books, although more than half are in foreign languages as the materials in Latvian are scarce [SAR, p. 37, 39; on-site visit]. The library is currently in the process of digitization and cataloguing in the electronic library information system ALISE, however, it is not yet a part of the Library System of Latvia [on-site visit]. Experts highly recommend joining this system, as it would allow for efficient reviewing and ordering of resources outside of the library from more than 1,400 libraries across the country [Latvijas bibliotēku portāls]. There is a reading room equipped with stationary computers and laptops that allows work at the library as well, including work with databases such as EBSCO [SAR, p. 40; on-site visit]. The library is available to students at times that are sufficient to meet their needs, and individual access can also be organised, if necessary, thanks to the relatively small number of students [SAR, p. 39].

Overall, an efficient system for the improvement and purchase of methodological and informative provisions exists.

1.3.4. RARZI has recognized the importance of developing an e-study environment and a distance learning platform for its students and staff. A contract has been signed with an IT company to create a unique e-study platform for RARZI, which is expected to be implemented by September 2024. This will offer new and effective forms of studies to their students and enhance the quality of education. Previously no e-study platform has been used. Remote studies were implemented only during the obligatory periods of the global pandemic, using Zoom and Google Meet platforms, but RARZI emphasises the importance of in-person teaching in accordance with the Pope Francis' Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties and does not regularly organise remote classes [SAR, p. 41]. However, to improve the accessibility of their studies, a distance learning platform is also in the works and is planned to be fully functional by 2025. This will allow the institute to adapt to any unforeseen circumstances that may require remote studies in the future.

Even though only a few digital educational resources are applied by teachers, there is a continuing need for advancements in this field. To maintain quality during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were trained to work online, a portion of the computer supply was updated, and student surveys were conducted to identify and eradicate weaknesses. With the assistance of the Google Meet platform, RARZI also swiftly restructured its on-site study format and shifted to remote studies. These efforts assured the continuity of the study and the maintenance of quality standards [SAR, p. 27]. Considering that we all live in the digital era, it is important that the institute invests its resources and organise people who will deal more with the presence of the institute on various digital teaching platforms.

MS Office 365 software is available on 20 computers at the premises for RARZI students and staff. Wireless internet is also provided for those who bring their laptops. All computers have a local network and internet connection. Projectors, screens, sound equipment, and two mobile projectors are installed in the study rooms. Two laptops can work with the mobile projectors without any extra equipment [SAR, p. 41]. Overall the equipment is adequate for the implementation of in-person studies.

1.3.5. The process of attracting and hiring academic staff at RARZI includes advertising the vacancies and conducting the election procedures set forth by PLU. The information systems of the Catholic Church are used to announce academic staff vacancies [SAR, p. 41], which ensures that the relevant stakeholders are informed of such proceedings.

Applicants are evaluated in an open competition based on criteria such as education, experience, research, communication skills, and compatibility with the FTPLU. These criteria are defined by the PLU and described in Part III: Academic Staff of the Regulations of RARZI. In short, applicants must submit their documents to the Office of the Institute. The Council of the Institute reviews them and sends them to the FTPLU if approved. The academic staff of the Institute votes to approve. The nominee needs to get more than half of the votes in the first 2 rounds of the election with the majority of eligible voters present. If no one gets the required votes in 2 rounds, the election will be between 2 nominees who got the most votes in the last round or if there are more than 2 such nominees – between 2 nominees who have served the longest in academia. If the votes are still equal, the nominee with the longest academic service will be elected. Voting is done by secret ballot. The Faculty then decides whether to accept the applicant or not. If accepted, the Moderator appoints the applicant to the academic position [SAR, p. 42; RARZI Affiliated to PLU Regulations].

RARZI emphasises that changes in their staff composition have been insignificant during the last reporting period, as the existing academic staff has had long-standing cooperation with them [SAR, p. 44], however, if there is such a need, changes will be made, as is noted in the Analysis of Survey Results – study courses can be shifted among the staff to eliminate inefficiencies and provide better organisation of studies [Annex 8, Results of the Surveys of Students, Graduates and Employers, p. 2, 5]. The current staff is highly qualified, with 50% of them holding a doctorate, while others are in the process of attaining it or being practising professionals in the field [SAR, p. 44].

1.3.6. The quality and need for academic staff development are assessed regularly as described in the Regulations and the Development Strategy of RARZI.

Feedback on each study course is gathered via student surveying, where the perceived competencies of each teaching staff member are also assessed [SAR, p. 43], however, after further inspection these are evaluated in a combined manner of scoring “delivery of study course” on a scale of 1-5, which is not a very complex way of evaluation. It is evident from the analysis of survey results that on average all study courses have received a delivery score above 4.0 in the last 4 years. If a study course receives a score of 4 or below, it is analysed in depth, discussions are had about the opportunities to improve the study course and/or the development of the staff members involved with the study course implementation [Annex 8, Results of the Surveys of Students, Graduates and Employers, p. 2]. Professional development needs are then dynamically assessed.

Staff members regularly partake in peer learning as those taking part in various conferences organise lectures and seminars where they share their experiences. In the last reporting period, 8 members of academic staff participated in PLU conferences in Rome [SAR, p. 43]. If additional professional development is needed in the field of IT and ICT usage, this is provided personally to each staff member by request, e.g. such needs arose when remote classes had to be implemented during the pandemic [SAR, p. 43]. Similarly, if a staff member looks out for personal development opportunities, RARZI can review the possibility of providing financial support and is generally flexible and forthcoming to allow staff members time off their teaching duties for personal development [on-

site visit].

For pedagogical development, RARZI also reaches out to other institutions for a deeper understanding of the teaching process and academic success, e.g. in 2022, 19 members of academic staff (which represents 50% of the total teaching staff, including visiting and guest lecturers) participated in a course of Student-Centred Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, organised by the Riga Stradiņš University Centre for Educational Growth [SAR, p. 43]. This course was chosen based on the analysis of the needs of professional didactic development of the teaching staff, which are regularly assessed through student and staff feedback. The course aimed to improve the staff's skills in designing and delivering student-centred courses, using active learning methods, and providing constructive feedback to students. The teaching staff is also regularly trained for application to various projects, building the knowledge and competencies needed to write project applications and find suitable partners [on-site visit].

The implemented training and the further didactic and professional development needs of the teaching staff are measured by comparing and analysing the changes in the yearly or semi-yearly student survey scores. This is effective, as the end goal of development is perceived as further improvement of the study environment.

1.3.7. The academic staff of RARZI have a balanced workload that allows them to pursue their research interests and professional development. The teaching load is low due to the small number of students enrolled in the institution, and any cases of overload are handled by the Moderator [SAR, p. 44]. The staff are also encouraged and supported to collaborate with other institutions (e.g. some do research at the University of Latvia and Riga Stradiņš University), where they can conduct scientific work and attend conferences [on-site visit].

However, the regular research activities of the staff are not remunerated by the institution, and they are not regulated by any formal criteria to have a set amount of time for research. The staff have to rely on their motivation and initiative to engage in research and popularisation of their studies, although they do it willingly [on-site visit].

Administratively, the teaching staff is involved in the management of the study field and the study programmes, as well as the quality assurance system. They participate in the Council of RARZI, form a working group of professors, and have regular meetings with the Head of the Study Department and the Directorate. The teaching staff is directly involved in the creation and improvement of the study programmes, the content and delivery of the study courses, the evaluation of the student achievements, and the supervision of the student research papers. They also have to report on their work to the Council of RARZI [SAR, p. 18–20]. A few of the academic staff also hold administrative positions at RARZI, e.g. the Director is involved in three study courses and the project manager is involved in two [Annex 9, Basic information on the teaching staff], however, this is a notable minority – the administrative personnel is largely independent of the teaching work, which allows for more efficient work. A potentially concerning workload is for the Director, who is also the Director of the study field [SAR, p. 19]. They are not only teaching three study courses but are also responsible for quality assurance, strategic management, implementation of development plans, international cooperation, communication with PLU and the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, creating and applying to projects, planning the study process, picking final thesis reviewers and other administrative tasks [SAR, p. 9–10; 24].

Another challenge that the staff encounters related to work-life balance is the difficulty of participating in foreign mobility programmes for self-development. This is especially true for the staff who are also priests in the parishes, as they have to balance their teaching and pastoral work. The priests are often not full-time academics but rather serve people in their congregation and parish as their primary duty. They have an education, but they do not live a life of academia. Unfortunately, there are not enough priests in the country to allow them to take part in exchanges without compromising their pastoral responsibilities [SAR, p. 14, 17, 44, on-site visit].

1.3.8. RARZI has identified the most necessary support needed by their student pool. There is additional support at the beginning of studies where an individual approach is used and meetings with the administration are had to inform students about all the tools and services available to them, as well as to address their needs and responsibilities [SAR, p. 45].

RARZI students can get spiritual and psycho-emotional support from the chaplain, which helps them cope with stress, adaptation, relationships, and crises. The assistance is especially popular during exams and thesis writing [SAR, p. 45; on-site visit]. An interesting aspect of student support and involvement in the community of their field is the organisation of Recollections aka retreats where staff and students participate 2-3 times a year. The purpose of these retreats is the collective discussion of spiritual life, networking and forming a more collegial relationship among the students and staff [SAR p. 20, 33; on-site visit].

RARZI also provides a student lounge where students can relax, eat, and socialise before or after lectures. The lounge was created in response to students' feedback about the lack of nearby facilities [SAR, p. 45].

RARZI deals with students' financial difficulties on a case-by-case basis. RARZI administration and the Foundation Board can arrange deferred payment of tuition fees and debt settlement plans. The chaplain and the dean of the student's parish may also help. Each year at least 2 students ask for an amended payment schedule and it is provided. RARZI has never expelled any student for unpaid tuition fees. Some students receive financial support from foreign sponsors or international foundations to cover their tuition fees or pursue doctoral studies abroad [SAR, p. 45, on-site visit]

Unfortunately due to the state of the premises, RARZI cannot accommodate students with physical disabilities [SAR, p. 17, on-site visit].

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

There is a clear and comprehensive budget plan that allocates regular 2-4% funding for library development. The infrastructure has recently been improved by a move, however, it is not accessible to people with physical disabilities. The material and technical support needed for the study field has been analysed and RARZI provides the necessary resources for the full implementation of the study process. There is an established procedure for the acquisition of new methodological and information resources for the library, based on the analysis of the study course descriptions, the recommendations of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, and the needs of the students for their theses. The information and communication technology solutions have been weak so far but are part of an ongoing study field development plan to be fully implemented in the upcoming years. The teaching staff is supported in their didactic and professional development opportunities and their study course delivery is regularly evaluated. Support for students is available in several directions - psycho-emotional, administrative, infrastructural, and financial (although this may need improvement).

Strengths:

1. The Catholic Church of Latvia provides funding for infrastructure maintenance, which is a significant advantage for the study field.
2. German Catholic foundations offer consistent and regular support for scientific activities and research, providing substantial funds over the years.
3. RARZI has relocated to a bigger and more suitable place for learning, which offers room for growth and easier access.
4. There is a collegial decision-making process for database subscriptions, based on several base criteria for the databases, and approved by the Director and the Moderator of RARZI.
5. The RARZI library has a large and diverse book collection, with more than 80,000 physical books, although more than half are in foreign languages. There is a flexible and accommodating library

access policy, thanks to the relatively small number of students.

6. RARZI uses the information systems of the Catholic Church to announce academic staff vacancies, which ensures that the relevant stakeholders are informed of such proceedings.

7. Feedback is gathered on each study course via student surveying, where the perceived competencies of each teaching staff member are also assessed.

8. The academic staff of RARZI have a balanced workload that allows them to pursue their research interests and professional development.

9. RARZI has identified the most necessary support needed by their student pool and provides additional support at the beginning of studies where an individual approach is used and meetings with the administration are held.

10. RARZI students can get spiritual and psycho-emotional support from the chaplain, which helps them cope with stress, adaptation, relationships, and crises.

11. RARZI organises Recollections aka retreats where staff and students participate 2-3 times a year, which foster the collective discussion of spiritual life, networking and forming a more collegial relationship among the students and staff.

12. RARZI deals with students' financial difficulties on a case-by-case basis and can arrange deferred payment of tuition fees and debt settlement plans. RARZI has never expelled any student for unpaid tuition fees. Some students receive financial support from foreign sponsors or international foundations.

Weaknesses:

1. There is no established formal system for research funding attraction or distribution, which may limit the potential and quality of scientific development.

2. There is no formal group of academic and administrative staff for the improvement of infrastructure and IT resources but relies on feedback from professors.

3. RARZI does not have a formal system for infrastructural and IT resource development, but integrates its plans into other planning documents.

4. The library has a scarcity of materials in Latvian, which may limit the accessibility and relevance of the library resources for some students and staff.

5. The library is not yet a part of the Library system of Latvia, which would allow for efficient reviewing and ordering of resources outside of the library from more than 1,400 libraries across the country.

6. There has been no e-study platform previously, which may indicate a lack of experience and expertise in online education. There is an overall insufficient utilisation of digital learning resources.

7. RARZI does not seem to have a formal and systematic mechanism for measuring the impact of the implemented training on the academic staff performance but relies on comparing and analysing the changes in the yearly or semi-yearly student survey scores, which may not capture the full extent of the staff development.

8. The regular research activities of the staff are not remunerated by the institution, and they are not regulated by any formal criteria to have a set amount of time for research.

9. The Director of the institute faces a high workload, being in several administrative positions as well as teaching several study courses.

10. The staff encounter difficulty participating in foreign mobility programmes for self-development, especially for those who are also priests in the parishes, as they have to balance their teaching and pastoral work.

11. RARZI cannot accommodate students with physical disabilities due to the state of the premises, which limits the accessibility and inclusivity of their studies.

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

## Analysis

1.4.1. Based on the report, RARZI's institutional status, areas of operation, and the values outlined in its strategy and goals (which include providing a comprehensive religious and theological education rooted in the Catholic tradition, fostering an inclusive ecumenical dialogue, addressing specific societal needs, and actively engaging in shaping public opinion and promoting societal welfare), it can be said that RARZI is primarily oriented towards fostering collaboration [SAR, p. 46]. The teaching staff of RARZI has formed a team in partnership with RTI to engage in theological research and produce annotated scientific translations of documents from the Church's magisterium. This collaborative effort aims to advance the fields of religion and theology, as well as contribute to the development of scientific terminology. Additionally, it is noteworthy to add that RARZI has established a close collaboration with the Lutheran Academy and with the University of Latvia for several years. The institute has primarily been engaged in the coordination of scientific conferences in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and the Embassy of Latvia to the Holy See. Also, RARZI teachers teach at other higher education institutions in Latvia [SAR, p. 46–47]. The report's analysis provides limited evidence that scientific research conducted at RARZI aligns with their strategic objectives during the previous period and that the efforts made in this regard are related to the relevant study field. Specifically, based on the plan (2010–2025) and the comprehensive analysis in the report, only a portion of the plan has been realized [Annex provided after the on-site visit, Perspective Development Plan of RARZI for 2010-2025]. Hence, there is a discernible lack of commitment towards fostering international scientific networks and projects. The absence of specific sub-programmes and modules within study programmes is also evident (this could be advantageous since it would allow students to select the course material and methods of study more freely, adding a hybrid study option to in-person, online, and distant learning). The general plan is problematic because it does not specify the responsibilities of groups and individuals within RARZI [Annex provided after the on-site visit, Perspective Development Plan of RARZI for 2010-2025]. Moreover, it does not provide annual reports that would track the accomplishment of specific strategic goals and provide a clearer picture of how filled this criterion is. It is noteworthy, though, that RARZI, through its invaluable translations and general endeavours to maintain the foundations of the Catholic and Christian spirit in society, helps to preserve the Latvian national identity [SAR, p. 48]. The new strategic plan (2023–2027) was created with greater clarity and demonstrates RARZI's ability to meet this essential criterion in the future [Annex 3, Development Plan for the Study field].

1.4.2. According to SAR, the connection between the scientific research of the study field and the study process is logical and justified [SAR, p. 48]. The institute sees this connection in its publishing activity, which is dominated by translations of Church documents that are then used in the teaching process. In addition, during most study courses, RARZI teachers introduce students to scientific articles in the subject area. The bachelor's degree curriculum includes study courses that introduce students to the selection and analysis of professional literature, research methodology, and the processing, interpretation, and presentation of research results [SAR, p. 49]. RARZI considers the participation of students in conferences as part of their educational process to satisfy this criterion. Students in both study programmes prepare their thesis in close collaboration with their mentors and, in the case of a master's thesis, with additional scientific advisors. At times, students from RARZI engage in research projects; nevertheless, the report does not include explicit details regarding the specific projects undertaken [SAR, p. 50].

The correlation between scientific inquiry and the study process extends beyond mere engagement in translation endeavours, completion of master's and doctoral thesis, and conference speaking. This relates to how tangible scientific findings are incorporated into the study process. The evidence submitted by RARZI in response to the expert team's request demonstrates that scientific research

carried out by teachers directly influences the curriculum. Therefore, it can be said that this criterion is fulfilled [Annex provided after the on-site visit, 4. Examples of changes in the courses themselves in accordance with new scientific knowledge].

1.4.3. According to SAR, RARZI has scientific collaborations with Catholic universities in Rome, including the Pontifical Lateran University, the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Pontifical Atheneum of St. Anselm, and the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. The meetings and report mention cooperation with the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland), then cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, and forms of Erasmus+ cooperation with the Faculty of Theology of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and the Catholic University of Ruzomberok. Notable partnerships include those with the Franciscan University of Steubenville (United States) and the Ukrainian Catholic University [SAR, p. 50-51; on-site visit]. Establishing connections with the aforementioned institutions may serve as a foundation for future scientific collaboration on an international scale. Currently, it does not exist (as scientific) with all the mentioned institutions. One form of scientific cooperation is visible only with Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and the Ukrainian Catholic University. Cooperation with those two institutions is visible in terms of teachers' participation in scientific conferences. Of course, this is not enough to say that RARZI has developed international scientific cooperation. Such connections should be utilised in at least one significant scientific project. Even at the outset, it is evident from the meetings that there are no such efforts [on-site visit]. The teachers at RARZI have been recognised with numerous national and international awards, which have greatly contributed to the reputation and recognition of RARZI both domestically and internationally. This fact should be used, especially when it comes to different forms of cooperation [on-site visit; Annex provided after on-site visit, 5. Awards]. RARZI has additional underutilised resources that could be utilised to enhance its international visibility. "Terra Mariana" is a scientific journal that is not published regularly. It is also insufficiently utilised that, along with RTI, RARZI is the only institution in the entire region that deals directly with Catholic theology, both geographically and culturally. It is apparent from the aforementioned that RARZI, for whatever reason, does not maximise its scientific and international cooperation potential. This is transmitted indirectly to the study programmes administered by RARZI.

1.4.4. Various forms of teaching staff engagement in scientific work can be observed [Annex 12, P12\_Summary of Quantitative Data2.docx] albeit lacking well-defined strategies to facilitate such involvement. Hence, it is evident that the teaching staff is engaged in several areas such as church history and international relations, fundamental theology, canon law, spirituality, anthropology, psychology, and translations of select classical works about Catholic spirituality. Teachers play a significant role in various academic disciplines such as philosophy and ethics, the history of culture and art, education, and pedagogy [SAR, p. 53-54]. The scientific participation of a certain percentage of the teaching staff is apparent in several domains. However, it is seen that another subset of the staff appears to be inactive, possibly due to a lack of mechanisms in place to evaluate and raise their level of scientific engagement.

1.4.5. According to SAR, students are involved in various scientific activities. RARZI ensures and facilitates the involvement of students in scientific research mainly through seminars, report writing and presentation during study courses, writing for term papers, bachelor's thesis and master's thesis, participation in scientific conferences of students, and participation in projects implemented by RARZI. For example, according to SAR, students are involved in the preparation of international academic lectures, organising book or journal openings and related conferences, preparation of courses for catechists and compilation of the research journal of RARZI and RTI Terra Mariana, and they also take part in events at the Summer Music Academy [SAR, p. 54-55]. Although these forms

of student participation in scientific activity are essential, they are insufficient. This is merely confirmed by the document that was subsequently appended per the expert team's request (Evidence of student participation in scientific research work.docx). Students should be more involved in writing scientific papers with their teachers and in scientific projects as much as possible, and RARZI should keep track of all of this. The current observation that RARZI maintains an optimal teacher-to-student ratio of 1:1 at the time of writing SAR indicates significant promise in this aspect. This ratio represents an optimal approach to ensure a high-quality introduction of students to scientific activity, implementing the knowledge and skills possessed by RARZI teachers [SAR, p. 81, 103].

1.4.6. At RARZI, several forms of innovation are employed to facilitate the modernisation of the learning environment and the development of spiritual resources. One notable aspect to consider is the individual's involvement in the Summer Academy for Liturgical Music. The Centre of Catechesis of RARZI has long been responsible for the coordination of a programme known as Spiritual Impulse. This study course is specifically designed for catechists and attracts participants from both the student body and graduates of RARZI. The teaching staff and students of RARZI have established a fruitful collaborative relationship with Radio Marija, wherein they actively engage in radio shows, interviews, and the creation of their shows. The teaching staff of RARZI organised a session on anthropology and ethics for high-ranking officials of the Latvian Prison Administration as part of efforts to enhance collaboration between the two entities. They also successfully initiated a collaborative effort with healthcare organisations, leading to the organisation of a seminar focused on the topics of life and death. This seminar was specifically designed for the medical employees of the Riga East University Hospital [SAR, p. 56–57]. All these initiatives are commendable, but RARZI requires a more comprehensive promotion plan and, more importantly, the development of digital learning resources, which are essentially the foundation of contemporary education [Analysis of the 1.2.1. criteria].

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

RARZI's scientific research path is partially aligned with the institute's strategy and the study field itself. For launching larger scientific projects, international cooperation networks lack stronger connections. In addition, there is a lack of clearer strategic planning, in accordance with which the responsibilities for the implementation of individual goals would be divided, as well as annual reports that would monitor the execution of these goals during the period for which the SAR is applicable. This has been partially addressed by the new strategic plan (2023–2027), which experts hope will be accompanied by regular implementation reports. The link between scientific research and the teaching process is also only partially apparent, and there is insufficient evidence to support this link. This is particularly evident when it comes to the scientific works of students and teachers, as such works appear to be lacking. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that teachers incorporate their scientific accomplishments into specific courses, a praiseworthy practice that should be maintained in future efforts. There is also a great deal of remaining potential when it comes to international cooperation, even though all the prerequisites are present. Innovations that could have a positive impact on the study procedure also have room for enhancement.

Strengths:

1. The potential for fostering high-quality international collaboration through affiliation with a respected international university.
2. A good teacher-student ratio, which is a fundamental requirement for successfully encouraging student engagement in scientific research activities.

Weaknesses:

1. Absence of annual reports that would verify the implementation of the scientific research strategy.
2. Absence of larger scientific projects.
3. Students' insufficient participation in scientific research processes.
4. Absence of mechanisms that would influence teacher scientific engagement.
5. The publication of the only scientific journal is irregular.

## **Assessment of the requirement [2]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

As indicated in the analysis of the previously mentioned criteria [1.4.1; 1.4.3; 1.4.4.], the fundamental conditions (future merger with RTI, ecumenical cooperation, good strategic plan, important role of teachers in different scientific fields, international connections) are there for the advancement of scientific efforts at an elevated standard. However, it is imperative to initiate the mechanisms (the consistent evaluation of the execution of the scientific strategy and the encouragement of teacher and student engagement in scientific and research activities via projects, scientific publications, and mobility initiatives are essential elements) that will effectively activate these conditions to fully meet this requirement.

## **1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

1.5.1. The RARZI has reported in the SAR [p. 57–60] strong cooperation with the institutions in Latvia based on a clear criterion for collaboration: (1) common interest in humanistic and ethical ideals of European culture; (2) desire to strengthen the spiritual and ethical foundations of Latvian society; (3) common research interests; (4) employment and career opportunities for graduates of study programmes [SAR, p. 57]. The RARZI cooperation with the institutions in Latvia covers three areas: implementation of the study process, provision of the research process and contribution to the society.

Because of belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, the closest collaboration has been developed with the RTI: study courses in theology were delivered at RARZI by the teaching staff of RTI. This cooperation was so successful that it resulted in a plan to merge these two higher education institutions in the near future.

Among other higher education institutions in Latvia, the most successful collaboration is with the Luther Academy representing the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in the field of theological education in Latvia. This collaboration is evidence-based and is implemented in various forms: joint workshops, training of teaching staff, conferences and other activities for the benefit of the society. The sustainability of the cooperation is ensured by the cooperation agreement between RARZI and the Luther Academy.

In the provision of the study process, collaboration with other theological education institutions in Latvia is implemented. The teaching staff of RARZI (Ž. Narkēviča and A. Kravalis) have taught study courses and supervised research papers at the Latvian Christian Academy; the teaching staff of the Baltic Pastoral Institute (E. Mažis) was invited to teach a course on Pastoral Counselling for the MSP at RARZI [SAR, p. 47]. This kind of cooperation is indicative of RARZI's orientation towards ecumenical collaboration.

The collaboration between RARZI and the state education institutions in Latvia is implemented

through individual involvement of the RARZI teaching staff in the study process at the University of Latvia (Ž. Narkēviča has taught study courses at the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the University of Latvia) and the Riga Stradiņš University (Ingrīda Trups-Kalne was involved in the development of the field of psychology and psychotherapy). The teaching staff of the University of Latvia are visiting lecturers at RARZI (the ordinary lecturer of the Faculty of Theology Andris Priede teaches History of the Church, and the ordinary professor of the Faculty of Humanities Jānis Priede is a visiting professor in the Holy Scriptures) [SAR, p. 47].

The collaborative research is implemented through cooperation in applied research projects between RARZI and RTI, mainly in the development of theological terminology in Latvian, production of translations and academic comments of the documents of the Magisterium of the Church. In collaboration with RTI the collection of academic papers Terra Mariana is published.

The cooperation in developing the research process is mainly of individual character: the teaching staff of RARZI worked as part-time researchers in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia (M. Kiope) or were members of research projects of the Riga Stradiņš University (I. Trups-Kalne) [SAR, p. 47].

The cooperation with the media, mainly Radio Marija, was mentioned in interviews by graduates during the on-site visit. They emphasised the importance of Radio Marija in popularising Christian theology and spirituality among the public. In SAR [p. 57] a successful creative cooperation with Radio Marija was also described: teaching staff and students take part in radio shows and interviews or create their talk shows.

To envisage academic cooperation and the provision of internships and careers for students and graduates, the RARZI has signed cooperation agreements with the main employers' organisations, i.e., all administrative units of the Catholic Church in Latvia [SAR, p. 58]. The cooperation agreement for internship opportunities is signed with the Riga East University Hospital, and potential agreements are negotiated with the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service and the Prison Administration of the Ministry of the Interior on the opportunities to learn about the work of a chaplain in these institutions [SAR, p. 58]. Cooperation agreements with charitable and social aid organisations are mentioned in SAR, however, the Annex 14 List of Cooperation Agreements provides only an agreement with the social rehabilitation centre Bethlehem House of Mercy.

The cooperation implemented by the RARZI strongly contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programmes. The collaboration with the RTI strengthens its teaching staff capacities. The activities organized in cooperation with the Luther Academy enhance research skills and the learning environment. The teaching staff of RARZI involved in the provision of the study process in other higher education institutions in Latvia acquire competencies that foster the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programmes. Cooperation with the media contributes to the development of applied skills of communication in its various perspectives like the ability to share ideas, to gain knowledge about the principles of communication, and to produce media products. To sum up, manifold cooperation enhances the general knowledge of religion and theology among the population and thus helps to increase the interest in studying these subjects at RARZI.

1.5.2. The cooperation with different institutions from abroad within the field of religion and theology contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field. While Annex no. 14 List of cooperation agreements only provides one agreement with institutions abroad, namely, Franciscan University of Steubenville (USA), the cooperation is much broader because of: (1) RARZI affiliation to the PLU; (2) mutual agreements in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

RARZI's affiliation with the Pontifical Lateran University allows the integration of the experience of other countries into the study programmes and activities of RARZI. The management of RARZI takes place in close collaboration with the PLU. Aside from supervising and controlling the academic

quality of studies and their conformity to the teaching of the Church, the PLU contributes to the study process, for example, the teaching staff of the PLU participate in the defence of bachelor's and master's theses [SAR, p. 58-59].

In the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, mutual agreements are signed with several higher education institutions [SAR, p. 51]. Cooperation has taken place with the Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania), Ukrainian Catholic University (Ukraine), Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (Poland), and the Catholic University in Ruzomberok (Slovakia). The number is not high because of the very strict criteria for selecting cooperation partners: a common field of study and its link to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. The efficiency of cooperation is discussed within the group of professors and a decision is taken by the Council of RARZI. The cooperation has been initiated mainly in two ways: by the initiative of foreign universities or by RARZI teaching staff, who studied at universities abroad.

The German Catholic foundations have made a significant contribution to the development of the infrastructure of research and studies. Renovabis, Bonifatiuswerk, and Kirche in Not have contributed to the development and validation of new study courses, support for scientific research, funding for conferences, and symposia, the preparation of teaching and methodological materials, the translation and publication of the documents of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church [SAR, p. 100].

Cooperation with non-governmental organisations contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field. The experts from the crisis centre Dardedze took part in the development of a study course in the field of prevention. This study course was developed under the supervision of an international expert in trauma psychology and crisis intervention Gottfried Ugolini (Pontifical Gregorian University, Italy).

The international cooperation within the field of religion and theology contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field. The cooperation partners are selected given the specific features of the study field and the relevant programmes. The group of experts considers international cooperation highly beneficial for cognitive abilities, learning, problem-solving skills and socio-relational capabilities.

1.5.3. According to annexes Statistical data on foreign students and teaching staff [Annex 15], Statistical data on the incoming and outgoing mobility of students [Annex 16] and Statistical data on international students and teaching staff [Annex 17], RARZI has developed a system and procedures for the attraction of the teaching staff from abroad within the field of religion and theology: the teaching staff from Catholic universities is attracted on the grounds of cooperation agreements signed with universities abroad, as well as through participation in the international academic conferences, and mobility opportunities for teaching staff at RARZI. This system includes the procedure of involvement of a group of professors in the evaluation of the incoming mobility, with final decisions taken by the Council of RARZI. [SAR, p. 59]. In the study year 2019/2020 one foreigner joined the academic staff and from 2020/2021 two foreigners are teaching at RARZI. The RARZI recruited a French-Latvian bilingual professor from Belgium and Dr Theol. from Poland with a high motivation and capacity to learn Latvian at an advanced level, as was observed by the experts during the assessment visit. The recruitment and retention of foreign nationals has a positive effect on the internationalisation of academic staff.

The RARZI has received the Erasmus Higher Education Charter for 2014/2020 and 2021/2027 which provides an opportunity to participate in the Erasmus+ programme. In the reporting period, the incoming and outgoing mobility of the teaching staff had effective results. On the grounds of the cooperation agreements concluded with the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (Poland), the Catholic University of Lublin (Poland), the Catholic University in Ružemberok (Slovakia), the Catholic University of Ávila (Spain), the Catholic Institute of Toulouse (France) and Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas (Lithuania) the exchange visits of academic personnel and experience

exchange visits of the staff have taken place regularly. Annex no.17 proves the number of incoming teaching staff mobilities (9) and outgoing teaching staff mobilities (5). RARZI is the only institute affiliated with the PLU that participates in this programme [SAR, p. 59].

While the SAR explains that “there has been one visiting student during the period” [p. 60], Annex no. 16 shows that the incoming mobility of students was not implemented at RARZI. The main obstacles for incoming student mobility are: (1) part-time studies at RARZI, (2) no courses are taught in English, (3) RARZI cannot provide an opportunity to fully integrate into the student-peer community [SAR, p. 60]. A systematic plan and procedures for attracting more incoming students were not provided by RARZI.

Regarding outgoing mobility, SAR explains that RARZI students took advantage of Erasmus+ mobility opportunities and took part in a mobility programme at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and the Catholic University in Ružemberok [SAR, p. 60]. The students have taken advantage of internship exchanges as well. However, in the reporting period, the outgoing mobility of students is low (four outgoing mobilities in the study years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019) [Annex 16, Outgoing and incoming mobility of students]. SAR points out the students’ difficulties in participating in Erasmus+ study mobility because they cannot leave their families or work for a longer period [p. 52]. In assessment visit interviews, the managing staff of RARZI and students pointed to the negative effect the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had on the development of international relations during recent years. During the on-site visit, the students expressed their willingness to take part actively in outgoing mobility.

The RARZI is engaged seriously on the international dimension of teaching staff mobility but international student mobility opportunities provided by the Erasmus Higher Education Charter could be used much more actively. To improve international students’ mobility dynamics some practical strategies can be used: to create a strong online presence (be visible, a well-designed, quality online content); to develop marketing materials tailored to the international students; to build relationships with the Catholic organizations worldwide since the international students’ mobility is associated with access to theological education in their home country.

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

RARZI's affiliation with the Pontifical Lateran University has a positive effect on internationalisation and gives an opportunity to integrate the experience of other countries into study programmes. The cooperation of RARZI with other higher education institutions in Latvia, especially RTI and the Luther Academy, is well-established and closely linked to the study programmes. Cooperation in the form of internships works very well with all the main employers’ organisations in Latvia, as well as with foreign institutions in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. Collaborative research is implemented through cooperation in applied research projects between RARZI and RTI, but cooperation in developing the research process is mainly of individual character. The cooperation projects in research would be needed to enhance the academic level of the research and study programmes in RARZI. The cooperation with the media in order to popularise Christian theology to a wider audience is successful. The cooperation with the NGOs contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field. The teaching staff mobility is well implemented, and the number of guest lecturers has increased over the last study year. Student mobility is modest, and there are several obstacles to it. However, the motivation of students to benefit from Erasmus+ possibilities is high enough. The incoming students’ mobility is not provided by RARZI. The institution has acknowledged the need to develop incoming students’ mobility, but no clearly defined strategy has been established for achieving this goal.

Strengths:

1. Strong cooperation with the Pontifical Lateran University that contributes to the development of

the study field.

2. Well established internship cooperation with the employers' organisations in Latvia and with foreign institutions in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

3. Dynamic cooperation in applied research projects to find a solution for immediate problems facing the field of theology.

Weaknesses:

1. Cooperation in research projects is of individual character.

2. A systematic plan for attracting more incoming students is not provided.

3. A link to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church as a criterion for selecting cooperation partners does not strengthen ecumenical cooperation.

### **Assessment of the requirement [3]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The international cooperation is well established because of RARZI's affiliation with the Pontifical Lateran University, however, this opportunity for collaboration should be used more intensively. The network of affiliated institutions to the PLU can be used to build relationships with Catholic organizations worldwide. Cooperation at the international level has mainly been practised in the frame of the study process and, mainly by the teaching staff, in frames of the Erasmus+ programme. To develop the incoming students' mobility a comprehensive strategy should be established. International cooperation in research should be developed. The cooperation inside Latvia can be assessed very well, particularly with the employers' organisations.

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

#### **Analysis**

1.6.1. During the previous study field evaluation (16.12.2011), several recommendations were given. RARZI has reviewed possibilities to implement them and responded accordingly.

The following recommendation was given: "Considering the qualification of teaching staff, experience in teaching at different levels, and the excellent library, it could be found a possibility for a doctoral study programme at the institution. To do this there are several possibilities, for example, joint programmes."

It was identified that the activity of RARZI is determined by the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church, the Instruction for Congregation of Catholic Education "Reform of the Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences" (28 June 2008), the Apostolic Constitution "Veritatis Gaudium on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties", as well as other rules and regulations adopted by the Holy See. These documents set forth that doctorate studies can be implemented by universities or independent affiliates, and not by institutes. Thus, it is impossible to establish a doctorate study programme without changing the status of RARZI. Likewise, due to the decreasing number of students and high prime costs of doctorate study programmes, this possibility was not considered any further.

In this HEI situation where the owner (the Catholic Church) is located in another country (Vatican), this primary decision to open/close new study programmes must be made by the mother institution. In this case, RARZI is just one of the countries where PLU is located. Latvia's regulations also do not demand that in one study field, there must be all levels (bachelor, master and Ph.D.) study programmes.

The study field assessment team of experts at this particular moment suggests not to develop the RARZI Ph.D. study programme, but to work more on developing existing study programmes.

Another recommendation given: "It would be reasonable to have one study programme on each level of academic career. In the current situation, it means also considering the integration of the existing master-level study programmes into a module-based one."

According to the recommendations and RARZI's implementation plan, while implementing this, the admission of students in the MSP in religion providing qualification of a teacher of philosophy, ethics and religious education (46141) was discontinued in the academic year 2018/2019 as a result of the decrease in the number of applicants due to the reform of the secondary education content. Religious education was removed from the content of secondary education, and potential applicants were not sure about employment opportunities after completing their studies and receiving this qualification. Thus, RARZI currently offers one study programme at the bachelor's level and one study programme at the master's level. Hence, the recommendation can be considered as implemented, because, in the previous assessment, only one recommendation was made for the second-level professional study programme awarding qualification of teacher of ethics and religious education (46141). This recommendation from 12 years ago is no longer valid because there is no need for a qualification that cannot be used in practice - no more religion classes at public schools (grades 1-3).

The third recommendation was: "Second level professional study programme (46141) should be transformed to the MSP or integrated as a module in some existing MSP." Due to changes in the labour market, the study programme was closed in 2013, thus this recommendation is no longer relevant.

Implementation of recommendations has allowed adjusting the study field to the interests of employers by also taking into account the number of applicants and making the study process more compact and modern. As a result, the study field offers one study programme at the bachelor's level and one study programme at the master's level.

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

After a previous evaluation, RARZI received some recommendations and responded accordingly. One recommendation was to find a possibility for a doctoral study programme at the institution. However, this was impossible due to the regulations of the Catholic Church and the high costs of such a study programme. RARZI decided not to pursue this option and focus on developing existing study programmes instead. Another recommendation was to have one study programme on each study level of academic career and integrate the existing MSP into one module-based study programme. RARZI followed this suggestion and discontinued the admission of students in one MSP (46141) that was no longer relevant due to the changes in the secondary education content and the labour market. RARZI now offers one BSP and one MSP that are more aligned with the employers' needs and the student's interests. Recommendations have overall been taken into account and responded to as far as possible.

Strengths:

1. RARZI has shown flexibility and responsiveness to the recommendations and the changing environment.
2. RARZI has optimised its study programmes to match the demand and relevance of the students and employers.

Weaknesses:

1. RARZI has passed on the opportunity to collaborate with other institutions or affiliates to offer a doctoral study programme.

## Assessment of the requirement [4]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All previous recommendations have been analysed and considered.

### 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

#### Short-term recommendations

Within 2 years, the institute should establish an internal quality assurance system with three levels: management and decision-making (in the case of RARZI, this is the director), supervisory (or advisory, such as the office for quality assurance), and executive (such as the committee for quality assurance that organises, coordinates, implements internal evaluation procedures, and develops institutional mechanisms to ensure quality).

Within 2 years, start with the implementation of an earmarked funding mechanism for scientific activities, wherein a predetermined annual allocation of financial resources will be used to promote teachers' engagement in scientific activities. These activities encompass the publication of papers in esteemed international databases, participation in academic conferences, authoring books, and other scientifically beneficial pursuits as determined by the institute's management.

Within 2 years, create a policy for rewarding the best teachers and frequently track their national and international successes.

Within 2 years, the current editorial board should activate the scientific journal "Terra Mariana" and take all necessary steps to include it in international databases (Scopus, Web of Science, etc.) and ensure its regular publication as soon as possible. It is important to include international scientists and scientists from other institutions on the editorial board of the journal.

Publish annual reports on the strategy plan's implementation.

Systematically (each year) engage students in scientific activities through collaborative publication of scientific articles and active participation in scientific projects and keep regular records of this.

Within 2 years establish a formal decision-making body and system for the determination of necessary improvements in infrastructure and IT resources and their subsequent use and impact on study quality.

Within 2 years establish a formal mechanism for the measurement of impact of staff training and staff performance.

#### Long-term recommendations

Within 3 years seek ways to enhance the demand and understanding for pastoral counsellors.

Within 2-6 years find means to increase the number of enrolled students and taught courses.

Within 3 years, develop and conduct a study for at least one new lifelong learning programme with continuous monitoring and analysis of participant satisfaction.

Within 3 years, RARZI should consider integrating greater flexibility into its study programme offerings by utilising innovative approaches in design, development, and delivery. This could involve incorporating distance learning and e-learning methods, allowing the institute to promptly adapt to dynamic shifts in market demand, student funding, and stakeholder requirements.
Within 3 years, it is essential to establish a solid public information policy and a committee to supervise the auditing of the institute's websites, with clearly defined responsibilities.
Within 3 years, create a plan and launch activities to establish an international network to include or launch at least one significant scientific project. Establish larger and more collaborative scientific projects.
Establish mechanisms to enhance the faculty's engagement in scientific research.
Within 6 years establish an improved system for the attraction of research funding and the improved funding of the staff's research.
Establish the RARZI library as part of the official library system of Latvia.
When implementing the new e-study platform, ensure the teaching staff's training for its use and create unified requirements for its use across the study courses.

## **II - "Religion and Theology " ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Religion and Theology " ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

2.1.1. The Academic BSP Religion and Theology (code 43221) complies with indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of Religion and Theology. According to the Classification of Education [Cabinet of Ministers Regulation no 322, Regulations on Classification of Education in Latvia], the study programme is qualified under the programme group "Religion and Theology", which corresponds to the field of study. The degree awarded in religion and theology is in line with the content of the study programme analysed in more detail below. The period of the implementation of the study programme, which is 3 years and 3 months, is evaluated as adequate for acquiring the necessary skills and competencies to enter the labour market.

2.1.2. According to the SAR [p. 67], the title of the study programme is "Religion and Theology" in the study field of Religion and Theology with education classification code 43221 with the last 3 numbers (221) standing for religion and theology according to Regulations on Classification of Education in Latvia [Cabinet of Ministers Regulation no 322]. There is no qualification given after graduating as it is an Academic Bachelor study programme. The experts have concluded that the aim and objectives are explicitly defined. The study programme aims to offer students an integrated acquisition of theoretical knowledge and research skills in Catholic theology and religious sciences needed for further studies, research and professional activity [SAR, p. 65]. The objectives are field-specific, measurable and achievable [SAR, p. 65].

The learning outcomes defined in Annex 21 are following the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 322 on the Classification of Education in Latvia. The learning outcomes, i.e. knowledge, skills and competencies, and admission requirements (secondary education and entrance exam) [SAR, p. 65] are interrelated. The study programme is implemented in Latvian thus no proof of proficiency in the English language is necessary. The implementation of the study programme in Latvian complies with

the guidelines of language policy of the Republic of Latvia.

Upon successful completion of the study programme, the bachelor's degree of humanities in religion and theology is awarded. Annex 22 demonstrates that the degree awarded to students corresponds to the aim of the study programme, content and learning outcomes.

It was observed by the experts during the site visit that the part-time studies are a reasonable and justified way of implementing the study programme for a couple of reasons: (1) offer a more flexible way to study for people who cannot devote themselves to their studies on a full-time basis; (2) allow students to combine their studies with full-time employment necessary to pay tuition fees.

In the opinion of the experts, the title, code and degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. According to the information provided in the SAR [p. 67-68], the study programme aims to train young specialists in theology and religion with a view to further studies at the master's level and lifelong learning. The aim is based on the requirements of the Congregation for Catholic Education of the Vatican. The admission requirements of this study programme are secondary education and an interview on motivation to choose particular studies [SAR, p. 67]. According to the SAR [p. 68], the study programme is a part-time study programme with 120 CP to be covered during the study process of 3 years and 3 months. The duration of the study programme implementation is reasonable and justified. After successful completion of studies, the students are awarded bachelor's degrees in humanities in religion and theology. On-site visits showed that the labour market demand for graduates is high.

2.1.3. According to SAR [p. 66], the corrections made to the study programme's parameters consist of the changes in the title of the programme. During the reporting period, the title of the programme was "Religion". The new title of the programme is "Religion and Theology". These changes are justified by closer relevance to the content of the programme because a significant part of the programme consists of study courses in Catholic theology. The type and level of the study programme, as well as the duration and format of studies, have not been changed. In the opinion of the experts, the changes made reflect correctly the content of the study programme. According to SAR [p. 66], minor changes were introduced to the content of the programme: to improve the quality of studies, changes were made to the free elective course section C. After the clarification of the goals and objectives of the study programme they are following Latvian Qualifications Framework (hereinafter - LQF). All changes made to the study programme's parameters are well justified and would be supported.

2.1.4. The study programme provides high-quality humanities education with an emphasis on religious studies in historical and contemporary contexts. Religious studies enhance understanding of human cultures and societies and foster critical and analytical skills. A key skill that students develop is learning how to learn, which is vital for any career path. Learning not only improves our competencies in various domains of life but also enriches our well-being and health, which are essential for personal growth and civic engagement. The graduates of the study programme can work in various fields related to religion, such as church ministry, academic research, media analysis, public administration, religious education, human rights, social work, etc. They can pursue careers as clergy, scholars, analysts, civil servants, politicians, social workers, charity workers, journalists, and more. The employability of the graduates is regularly verified by personal interviews [BSP SAR, ch. 3.1.3.].

The number of students in the study programme has fallen from 78 to 37 in the last 10 years, due to a complex variety of reasons, such as demographic and economic factors [BSP SAR, ch. 3.1.4.]. The study programme needs at least 10-12 students each academic year (a total of 40-48 students) to be sustainable and cost-effective [BSP SAR, ch. 3.3.3.]. It faces a serious challenge in attracting and retaining students in a niche field that is based on Catholic tradition and theology when it is not

financially supported by the state.

The institute does not have full-time studies as an option, which might make it less attractive to some prospective students. However, this also provides a more adaptable way of studying for those who cannot commit to full-time studies and enables students to balance their studies with a full-time job that is needed to cover the tuition fees [on-site visit].

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

All the indicators of the study programme are in compliance with the existing preconditions of the implementation of the study programme. The study programme “Religion and Theology” complies with the study field indicators, conditions and criteria. In the opinion of the experts, the title, code, degree to be obtained of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and aim of the study programme implementation are reasonable and justified. The implementation of the study programme in Latvia complies with the guidelines of language policy of the Republic of Latvia. The goals, objectives, and learning outcomes are in line and in compliance. The study programme is in demand, and the graduates give a contribution to the development of the humanities in Latvia. The dropout rate found in accordance with the data available in the SAR needs to be addressed in the future.

Strengths:

1. The study programme fully complies with the indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of religion and theology.
2. The study programme provides students with knowledge, skills and competencies highly relevant to the field of religion and theology.
3. The implementation of the study programme is efficient and feasible.
4. The graduates of the study programme are demanded in the labour market.

Weaknesses:

1. Only self-funded places available.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. In accordance with the aim of a basic level study programme, the academic BSP “Religion and Theology” (code 43221) offers in-depth studies of general concepts, fundamental principles and history of research methodologies of religious sciences, philosophy and theology, as well as in topical problems from an interdisciplinary perspective. The experts verified that the structure, offer of study courses and content of the study programme have been shaped following the current trends in the development characterising the religious studies and theology and the labour market, as well as in compliance with Cabinet Ministers Regulation no. 240 of 13.05.2014 “Regulations on the state standard of the academic education”, and Cabinet Ministers Regulation No. 322 of 13.06.2017. The introduction of the study course Environmental Sustainability and Civil Protection demonstrates that the study programme complies with the requirements set forth by the Environmental Protection Law and the Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law.

The study programme is composed of section A of compulsory study courses (84 CP), section B of compulsory elective study courses (20 CP), and section C of free elective study courses (4 CP). The value of a bachelor’s thesis and final examination is 12 CP. The compulsory section A includes the most essential compulsory study courses in the study field. Section B of compulsory elective study

courses are comprised of compulsory elective study courses (section B1 Dogmatics or section B2 History) and study courses open to all students, such as Social Doctrine of the Church, Religious Education and Pastoral Theology. Students can choose between section B1 Dogmatics or section B2 History. The content of the study programme is interrelated, and comprehensive and reflects the latest tendencies of the respective study field. Section C should allow for complete student choice and self-development in any field of their choice, however, the Study plan of the study programme defines several specific courses [Annex 23, Study plan]. Experts would urge RARZI to ensure choice from Part B, undergraduate courses, or other university courses that would provide full academic freedom to the students similarly as in the MSP [Annex 31, Study plan].

Following the requirements set by the PLU, the first year of study gives students an insight into the fields of philosophy and spiritual formation with a gradual introduction to theological studies. The students begin study courses in the History of the Church and Patrology, Psychology, History of Culture and the English Language. During the second year, courses in Philosophy and Theology continue. The students begin courses in the Old Testament Exegesis and the Seminar on Theological Method. The second year of study provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary for research. In the second year, students can choose between compulsory elective study courses B1 Dogmatics or B2 History. The students work on a term paper (linked to elective study courses B1 Dogmatics or B2 History) and choose the topic for the final thesis. The Catholic Dogmatics and Moral Theology are taught during all three years of studies. In the third year, the main study courses in Catholic Theology continue. The development of research skills is provided by the seminar on theological methodology which offers the fundamentals of doing investigation at an academic level. During the third year, students work on their bachelor's thesis and prepare for the final examination. The content of the academic BSP "Religion and Theology" was created in close cooperation and discussions with students, teaching staff, experts in the field and employers. The results of student surveys are evaluated every year. Various improvement measures were initiated by students to enhance the quality of their studies. In the discussion during the on-site visit, the teaching staff and experts agreed that it would be useful to introduce into curricula information about project management. It did not decrease the evaluation but including this information in the study programme will offer students the skills needed to fit into the labour market.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. The study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. To attain the aims of the study courses and assess knowledge and practical skills several methods are used: lectures, seminars, individual and group assignments, discussions, etc [SAR, p. 73]. The classes are interactive due to modern technology. Of particular importance is the use of methods that encourage active participation, critical thinking and reflection of students. Based on the results of interviews with students, graduates and the academic staff, the experts concluded that the academic staff is motivated to apply innovative learning and teaching methods and to regularly update the content of study courses. Unfortunately, the study e-platform has not been used. The diversity of methods used in teaching stimulates students to take an active role in the study process. The teaching approach is closely related to the content and specificity of the study courses and ensures the achievement of the expected learning outcomes. The analysis of the curriculum shows that the learning outcomes are formulated properly.

The length of study, workload, and hours of contact teaching allow learning outcomes to be achieved. Since the study programme is implemented in a format of part-time onsite studies, in the opinion of the experts, the practical organization of the study process is optimal: with lectures and classes held on Friday evenings and Saturdays. The workload is part of the curriculum design: the specified workload for each study subject is expressed in credits. A consistent approach to workload

provides a basis for informing students of the indicative expected workload within the study programme. In the first three years of study, the expected workload is of 36 CP/54 ECTS, and in the fourth-year study – 12 CP/18 ECTS. The descriptions of the study courses [Annex 24, Descriptions of Study Courses] demonstrate that assessment methods and criteria are known in advance and accessible to students. The SAR [p. 73] points out the variety of independent assignments: students write essays and papers, as well as prepare oral reports and presentations.

The study programme is implemented using student-centred learning and teaching principles. The student-centred approach is followed in updating the study programmes and the respective study courses. Student representatives at the Council of RARZI express their views and their opinions, and all relevant issues are considered [SAR, p. 73]. The small number of students guarantees an individual approach to the learning process, and students receive strong support from the teaching staff. There is a dialogue between the teacher and the students on the format of studies and methods used in study organisation.

2.2.4. Not applicable.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. The topics of students' bachelor's theses are relevant to the field of religion and theology and correspond to the study programme. According to the SAR [p. 75], the study programme keeps a strong theological profile. Most of the bachelor's theses are dedicated to the topics of Catholic theology. The students focus on topics which are in line with their research interests. As experts understood during the on-site visit, students use the latest theoretical literature in their research. The literature in foreign languages is included in the bibliography.

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

Compliance of the study content and study course content with national regulations was demonstrated clearly in SAR. The content, learning and teaching methodology and bachelor thesis research areas of the academic BSP “Religion and Theology” fully correspond to the Latvian legislation requirements, programme assessment criteria, and requirements of the labour market. The study process is highly student-centred. The content of the study courses corresponds to the main goals of the programme. The study implementation methods work effectively to achieve the proposed objectives of the study process. The examples of bachelor's thesis demonstrated their relevance to the study field and study programme.

Strengths:

1. A clear curricula development policy.
2. The study programme has been shaped in accordance with the current trends in the development characterising religious studies and theology and the labour market.
3. The study courses are in good interconnection with each other and embrace the most important directions in theology.
4. The interrelations between students and teaching staff are particularly good.
5. Possibility of an individual approach to every student.

Weaknesses:

1. Lack of information about project management and digital humanities in the curricula.
2. The study e-platform has not been used.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

#### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The resources indicated in the analysis of the study field are used and, in general, the experts consider that the resources are sufficient for the content of the study programme. As the institute is highly specialized for a single study field and only two study programmes, access to these resources is easily available to the students and teaching staff. The study programme provides students with access to various informative resources, including a library, databases, and in the future - online platforms. The study programme provides students with adequate and sufficient material and technical support for the full implementation of the study process.

To ensure the accessibility of the library resources to the students in part-time study form, the library is open on Fridays (16-20) and Saturdays (9-17) from August until June, which coincides with the time students are present for their lectures. Individual access at other times can also be arranged if needed [SAR, p. 39].

The study programme has the features and conditions necessary for its implementation, it creates prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicates the possibility of ensuring a high-quality study process.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The study programme is funded by three sources: the Latvian Bishops' Conference, foreign Catholic foundations, and tuition fees paid by students. The first two sources are stable and operate in the long term. They are used for various purposes, such as research, development and validation of new study courses, support for scientific research, funding for conferences, symposia, continuing education events, translation and publication of Church documents, and maintenance of the study programme. However, as RARZI does not receive any financial support from the state, tuition fees are still a major source of income for the programme. They also seek to attract sponsors, donors, and international foundations to support its educational initiatives and research activities, which mainly correspond to development activities for the study programme - this acquisition has been so far successful and is actively pursued, however, reliance on project financing for development is not very reliable. There is a clear plan to merge with RTI to consolidate their academic and financial resources and increase their institutional stability.

Over the last 10 years, the number of students in the study programme has fallen from 78 to 37 students total, and seen a steady decline due to a complex variety of reasons (BSP SAR, 3.1.4.). RARZI indicates that for the sustainability of the study programme the minimum number of students should be at least 10-12 students each academic year (a total of 40-48 students in the programme), so it can be surmised that the programme is slowly becoming unsustainable if the number of students is not increased. The prime cost of the programme per student in 2021/2022 was EUR 2676.60, and the tuition fee was 800 EUR per year (BSP SAR, 3.3.3.).

Taking this into consideration, experts conclude that the financial resources available are sufficient for the basic provision of the study process, but development processes may suffer from a lack of additional funding and working above the means of the study programme in regard to tuition income.

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

The programme offers students various informative resources, such as a library, databases, and planned online platforms. The library has over 80,000 books, mostly in foreign languages, and is digitizing its collection. The programme also provides adequate material and technical support, such as classrooms, computers, audio-visual equipment, and IT services. The Development Plan includes creating a conference room and a distance learning platform. The study programme is funded by three sources: the Latvian Bishops' Conference, foreign Catholic foundations, and tuition fees, and also seeks sponsors, donors, and international foundations. Despite this, a part of the funding is tuition fees and it can be seen due to low student numbers and fees below the prime cost per student that the study programme is not entirely sustainable. There is a plan to merge with RTI to increase stability. The study programme has seen a decline in student enrolment due to various reasons. The study programme needs at least 40-48 students to be sustainable and cost-effective, while it has fallen to 37 currently.

Strengths:

1. Access to various informative resources, including a library, databases, and in the future - online platforms - is available to part-time students in the study programme.
2. Specific features and conditions necessary for the implementation of the study programme, such as stable external funding sources that fund research and development activities, and a clear plan to merge with RTI.

Weaknesses:

1. No support from the state (due to being a part-time study programme), which makes the study programme rely in part on tuition fees and donations.
2. Declining number of students, which threatens the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the study programme.

## Assessment of the requirement [6]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study provisions are compliant and sufficient for the full implementation of the study programme. Development plans are in alignment with the goals of the study programme. Some concerns regarding financial sustainability arise due to the low number of students and reliance on study fees.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. According to the report, the qualifications of the teaching staff are supported by their participation in the academic and scientific work of other higher education institutions, as well as the performance of various institutional duties [SAR, p. 79]. The study field and study programmes are carried out by highly qualified and highly skilled teachers. The qualifications of the teaching staff are commensurate with the requirements of the study programme's implementation and allow for the achievement of the programme's goals and learning outcomes. All teaching staff members engaged in the study programme, whether as permanent or visiting staff, possess a minimum of a master's degree in a relevant study field. Furthermore, all teaching staff members involved in the programme are highly knowledgeable in their respective fields and have specialised expertise in the specific

study course. Thirty members of the teaching personnel are involved in the programme's implementation. Thirteen (43.3%) of them are elected by RARZI; the rest are visiting or guest teaching staff. Among the permanently elected members of the teaching staff, 53% (7 individuals) have the academic positions of professors and associate professors. Additionally, 61.5% (8 individuals) possess a doctoral degree in various fields such as theology (3 individuals), philosophy (2 individuals), philology (1 individual), pedagogy (1 individual), or psychology (1 individual). The remaining individuals within the teaching faculty possess either a master's degree or a licentiate (lic. theol.) degree [SAR, p. 79; on-site visit].

2.4.2. In the period covered by SAR, the teaching staff remained relatively stable with some minor staff changes, mostly of a generational nature. The generational shift, the passing of teachers, and the cancellation of certain courses because they were no longer necessary were just a few factors that influenced changes in the teaching staff. Some of the reasons for changes within the teaching staff are personal, but all this does not seem to have affected the quality of teaching [SAR, p. 79-80].

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. The institute should prioritise efforts to enhance the engagement of individual teachers in publishing their research articles, particularly in journals indexed in WoS and Scopus databases, as well as other prominent scientific journals. Based on the available data, it is apparent that a significant proportion of teachers, exceeding one-third, either lack data or don't have any published scientific literature. This issue presents several challenges. Published papers most commonly are papers from various proceedings [Annex 13, Publications].

2.4.5. The institute has developed good formal and informal meetings among colleagues to share and enhance quality issues in the programme. Cooperation is notably evident in the context of the carrying out of diverse courses within the study process, the realisation of specific strategic objectives of the institute, and the engagement in numerous dialogues about Catholic education in general. The students benefit from the teacher-collegial collaboration, which positively impacts the study programme. The teacher-to-student ratio of 1:1 significantly contributes to this outcome [SAR, p. 81].

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

To carry out the study programme in accordance with all its requirements, the teaching staff is suitably qualified. The staff composition remains predominantly consistent, minimising the occurrence of significant modifications that could potentially impact the study programme, either directly or indirectly. The issue at hand pertains to the suboptimal publication activities exhibited by a considerable proportion of teachers, with over one-third of teachers falling into this category. The institute is distinguished by the effective collaboration among every stakeholder involved, which serves as a crucial guarantee for stability and efforts towards enhancing the quality of the study programme.

Strengths:

1. Expertise, consistency, and qualification of the teachers.
2. Excellent cooperation between every stakeholder involved.

Weaknesses:

1. Weak presence of scientific papers in prestigious international databases.

## Assessment of the requirement [7]

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

In order to fully meet the requirement, it is imperative to observe a large increase in the number of scientific articles, particularly those published on important worldwide platforms, notwithstanding the already high qualifications of the teaching staff and guest teachers [analysis of criteria 2.4.4.]

## 2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI provides a certification of compliance with the National Standard for Academic Education as described in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations Nr. 240 (13.05.2014.) "Regulations for Academic Education State Standard" [Annex 21, Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard]. Experts' analysis concludes that the study programme complies with the regulations.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The descriptions of the study courses [Annex 24] have been prepared accordingly, complying with the relevant requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma [Annex 19] to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with 16.04.2013. Regulation No 202 of Minister Cabinet Regulations "Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents".

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The provided biographies [Annex 10, CV] of the staff certify that the qualifications of the teaching staff meet the requirements for the implementation of the study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The Confirmation No.5/2023 27.05.2023. [Annex 11, Language Confirmation] certifies that the staff meet the language requirements for the implementation of the study programme, and professional and office duties. This is additionally supplemented by the provided biographies [Annex 10].

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement [Annex 7] corresponds to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 70 "Terms that must be included in the study contract" (23.01.2007).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI will provide the opportunity to continue bachelor's studies at the Riga Institute of Theology according to a mutual cooperation agreement [included in Annex 5, About the continuity of the study process]. Considering the planned merger and differences in their bachelor study programmes, experts urge to seek out a new cooperation partner for this purpose soon.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI will provide compensation for students' losses in the amount of tuition fees paid as confirmed by the Confirmation 27.05.2023. [Annex 6]. It is unusual to define the amount of compensation in the amount of tuition fees paid, as the student will have invested more valuable time and money in the study process and materials needed for it.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme is in compliance with the requirements set forth regarding education in the Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Latvia.

#### **Assessment of the requirement [8]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All requirements have been formally complied with although some garner comments on their execution, e.g. compensation of losses and continuation of studies.

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

The structure of study courses and content of the study programme have been shaped in accordance with the current trends in the development characterising religious studies and theology and the labour market, as well as in compliance with national regulations. The content of the programme is interrelated and comprehensive and reflects the latest tendencies of the respective study field. The content was created in close cooperation and discussions with students, teaching staff, experts in the field and employers. The study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. The topics of students' bachelor's theses are relevant to the field of religion and theology and correspond to the study programme. The study provisions are compliant and sufficient for the full implementation of the study programme. Development plans are in alignment with the goals of the study programme. Some concerns in regard to financial sustainability arise due to the low number of students and reliance on study fees. The requirement of compliance of staff qualifications with the study programme is partially compliant. In order to fully meet the requirement, it is imperative to observe a large increase in the number of scientific articles, particularly those published on important worldwide platforms, notwithstanding the already high qualifications of the teaching staff and guest teachers. All requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments have been formally complied with although some garner comments on their

execution, e.g. compensation of losses and continuation of studies. Overall no such deficiencies were identified that can not be eliminated in a 2-year period. Experts look forward to the development of the study programme after the merger with RTI to see positive changes with increased resource capacity.

Most important strengths:

- The content and implementation of the study programme are efficient, well interconnected and all-encompassing for the study field.
- The study programme has been shaped in accordance with current trends in religious and theological studies and the needs of Latvia.
- Excellent stakeholder cooperation and involvement.

Most important weaknesses:

- The number of students has fallen below the set (by RARZI) minimum requirements for sustainable implementation, which begets the question of financial sustainability.
- The digitalisation of the study programme is low; no e-study platform has been used.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Religion and Theology "**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Religion and Theology "**

### **Short-term recommendations**

Considering the upcoming merger, RARZI should soon look for other cooperation partners (other than RTI) to ensure the continuation of studies for students in case the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

RARZI should supplement the student study agreements with the planned amount of financial compensation for students, and the information about the provision of continued studies (and specifically at what study programme such an opportunity is provided) in case of study programme termination.

Within two years to develop an e-study platform.

### **Long-term recommendations**

Within three years, the editorial board of the institute's only scientific journal "Terra Mariana" should work to have it included in one of the two (WoS, Scopus) most prestigious international databases; in this way, the number of teachers' works (which are partially published in the journal) and their international visibility would increase.

Explore new ways and methods of marketing the study programme in order to reach a larger audience of potential students and improve the student dynamics.

Cooperation projects in research would be needed to enhance the academic level of the research and this study programme.

To develop a clearly defined strategy in order to provide incoming students mobility.

## II - "Religion and Theology " ASSESSMENT

### II - "Religion and Theology " ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The professional MSP "Religion and Theology" (code 47221) fully complies with indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of religion and theology, since the aim of the reported study programme is to prepare pastoral counsellors, which are needed to the state and the Church, with professional studies in religion and theology that are based on appropriate theoretical background in theology, philosophy and psychology [SAR, p. 83]. The period of the implementation of the study programme, which is 2 years and 6 months in a part-time format, is evaluated as adequate for acquiring the necessary skills and competencies to enter the labour market.

2.1.2. According to the SAR [p. 83], the title of the study programme is "Religion and Theology" in the study field of religion and theology. SAR [p. 87] demonstrates that the code of the programme is accurate and corresponds to the programme parameters: in the education classification code 47221, the last 3 numbers (221) stand for religion and theology according to Cabinet of Ministers Regulation no 322, Regulations on Classification of Education in Latvia.

According to Annex no. 28, the study programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations no. 512 of 26 August 2014 on the National Standard for the Second Level Professional Higher Education. Since these regulations are not in force, till the next study year the programme should comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations no. 305 of 13 June 2023 on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education.

According to SAR [p. 84], the admission requirements are (1) a degree of humanities in religion/theology awarded by the Pontifical Lateran University of its affiliates or equivalent higher education acquired at the education institution recognised by the Dicastery of Education and Culture of Vatican, and entrance exam; (2) at least a first cycle higher education (bachelor's degree) in the humanities or social sciences and 24 credits of basic Catholic theology, and entrance exam. The applicants holding a bachelor's degree awarded by a non-Catholic higher education institution have to take an introductory course in Catholic theology (24 credit points, 36 ECTS) to be eligible for studies at the MSP [SAR, p. 20]. There is no age restriction to apply for studies. The representatives and/or authorised entities of employers participate in the entrance exam [SAR, p. 58].

The acquired qualification level corresponds to the LQF 7 and takes into consideration the professional standards. Annex no. 7 brings evidence of the compliance of the professional MSP "Religion and Theology" with qualification of pastoral counsellor with the professional standard for pastoral counsellor (code of the profession 2636 22) approved by the Ministry of Education and Science on 21.09.2010 (no. 1-13/6302) (cf. [https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/stand\\_registrs\\_2008\\_2016.shtml](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/stand_registrs_2008_2016.shtml)). Although a new professional standard has been developed and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science for consideration in June 2022, it is still not approved, i.e., it is not in vigour. During the assessment visit, it was noted that the programme has a strong professional aspect and while students obtain knowledge and competencies of level 7 of LQF they also get a wide range of professional skills within the "pastoral counsellor" qualification.

Graduates are awarded a professional master's degree in religion and theology with the qualification of pastoral counsellor being also able to continue their education at other higher education institutions to obtain a PhD degree. The study programme has several main objectives outlining necessary knowledge, skills and competencies formulated in accordance with level 7 of the LQF level. Objectives, tasks and learning outcomes of the study programme are clearly defined. A strong impact is placed on the professional aspect of the study programme, which is highly valued by

students and employers. During the on-site visit, employers emphasised that the study programme is tailored to the demand of the current labour market. There is a high demand for the study programme's graduates in the labour market. Graduates are employed in a wide range of institutions of their choice.

The aims and objectives are explicitly defined. The learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The study programme is implemented in Latvian thus no proof of proficiency in the English language is necessary. The implementation of the study programme in Latvian complies with the guidelines of language policy of the Republic of Latvia.

2.1.3. Significant and noteworthy changes have been made to the reported study programme. Firstly, the title of the study programme has been changed from “Religion” to “Religion and Theology” in order to more accurately reflect its content. The SAR [p. 86] explains that the new name better reflects the content of the study programme because it is indicative of the link with theology. Secondly, the title of the degree awarded is changed from the master’s degree in religion with the qualification of pastoral counsellor to the professional master’s degree in religion and theology with the qualification of pastoral counsellor. These changes comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations no. 512 on the National Standard for the Second Level Higher Professional Education (not in force since June 21, 2023). Till the next study year the study programme should comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations no. 305 of 13 June 2023 on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education. The changes comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 322 on the Classification of Education in Latvia. The goals and objectives of the study programme, as well as expected learning outcomes, were clarified in accordance with LQF. All changes made to the reported study programme are well justified and would be supported.

2.1.4. Humanitarian and social aspects the graduates are specialized in may need a new perspective due to the actual geopolitical events in the world. The students of the MSP use their knowledge to help calm the public mood, keep peace and trust, and communicate with worried people online or offline. Due to Latvia’s diverse ethnic composition, certain conditions can cause social unrest and conflict. Therefore, the knowledge of pastoral work and denominational differences is important. Finding stabilising factors and a common language is a key skill in times of social, humanitarian and economic change. The students’ and graduates' active practical work as mediators on social networks, in parishes and at work is meaningful [MSP SAR, ch. 3.1.3.].

The total number of students in the study programme is variable, ranging from 4 to 20 in the last 10 years, now standing at a high of 20. They also experience on average around a 35% dropout rate. This may indicate a growing trend, however, the study programme needs at least 12–15 students in each academic year (a total of 24–30 students – a minimum number set by RARZI itself) to be cost-effective. From this experts conclude that, without external funding, the study programme has been operating above its means and never shown sustainability with its minimum number of students or reached its minimum goal [MSP SAR, ch. 3.1.4., 3.3.3.; Annex 27 Statistical data on students at the Master’s Study Programme in Religion]. It faces a serious challenge in attracting and retaining students in a niche field that is based on Catholic tradition and theology when it is not financially supported by the state.

The study programme attracts mostly older and experienced students who are interested in personal spiritual growth and service in the Church. They are usually already involved in some parish or church movement and have no illusions about the state of the job market in this field. Many students already come with existing workplaces, often in other fields, so their employment is already set; this study programme is their further personal development. The main reason for giving up studies is the lack of motivation among working students to combine studies with their work, especially in other fields. The study programme tries to prevent dropouts by providing individual counselling and support [MSP SAR, ch. 3.1.4.].

Many organisations prefer volunteers or do not have a place for pastoral counsellors in their staff, so the study programme works to popularise it and tries to create new spaces and demand for the field, as well as to cooperate with other fields that have similar professional standards [on-site visit]. Experts consider this to be significant, and good cooperation with existing stakeholders and potential employers is a key aspect in changing the existing viewpoint on the need for full-time employees with this education. Overall, the number of graduates is low enough that the demand is kept up.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

The professional MSP “Religion and Theology” complies with the study field indicators, conditions and criteria. The title of the study programme Religion and Theology and the professional qualification pastoral counsellor, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are logically interrelated. The study programme code and the degree awarded comply with the Classification of Latvian Education. The duration and the scope of the study programme implementation are reasonable and justified. The goals, objectives, and learning outcomes are in line and in compliance.

Strengths:

1. The programme has a strong professional aspect aiming to contribute to the demand of the labour market.
2. There is a high demand for the study programme's graduates in the labour market.
3. Graduates are employed in a wide range of institutions of their choice.
4. Active involvement and collaboration with stakeholders, create more demand and a paradigm shift regarding the need for pastoral counsellors.

Weaknesses:

1. The small number of students indicates a potential problem with financial sustainability.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The MSP in Religion and Theology at RARZI is designed in alignment with the standards stipulated by the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Regulations on Study Programmes. Rooted in the National Standard for Second Level Higher Professional Education, the programme is also shaped by the Classification of Education in Latvia. These frameworks guide the curriculum, which is continuously adapted to economic, social, and labour market dynamics.

The tasks of the study programme are to provide a study process based on in-depth theoretical and practical knowledge in theology, philosophy and psychology by developing independent learning skills of students; to teach the professional competencies of a pastoral counsellor; to prepare students for scientific research in practical theology – catechesis, pastoral and spiritual care [SAR, p. 83]. It is notable that the study programme aims to attract students with various intentions including those who are willing to get both professional qualification and master’s degree.

To ensure relevance, the study programme collaborates closely with industry representatives and reflects labour market trends. The structure comprises compulsory, compulsory elective, and free elective study courses, totalling 96 credit points. This goes along with an internship and a master's thesis. In more detail: The amount of the study programme is 96 CP, of which 44 CP is compulsory part (A), 4 CP is compulsory elective part (B), 2 CP is free elective part (C), 26 CP is internship and

20 CP is master's thesis. The compulsory study courses cover theology and religious studies, and they are the foundation for further specialisation (elective) study courses. Therefore, the content of the study courses is interconnected and complementary. This is a sound structure and provides students with a high level of professional competence. The study programme includes 2 CPs in Environmental sustainability and civil Protection for students who have not acquired them in the previous stage of studies. However, the study programme provides a very limited number of free elective study courses, i.e. only 2 CP.

Noteworthy is the study programme's commitment to staying current. Periodic updates incorporate recent Catholic Church documents and papal encyclicals, addressing contemporary societal issues. The correlation between the study programme changes and overarching goals is overseen by RARZI management.

The curriculum integrates theology, philosophy, and psychology, emphasising both theoretical depth and practical application. Compulsory study courses form a foundational base, covering a spectrum from Pastoral Theology to Information Technologies in Pastoral Work. Elective study courses allow for specialisation, fostering independent research skills, crucially showcased in the master's thesis.

Study courses, examinations, and final assessments align with regulatory standards and are regularly updated based on surveys from students, employers, and graduates. The study programme corresponds with the professional standard of qualifications for a pastoral counsellor [Annex 29, Compliance of the PMSP with the professional standard]. This applies to both the skills and attitudes for professional and general knowledge and competencies required for the fulfilment of the main tasks and duties in professional activity.

The high-quality descriptions of study courses, along with their mapping to learning outcomes, demonstrate comprehensive coverage of knowledge and skills. According to the self-assessment report, the study programme also compares favourably with those of leading European institutions [SAR, p. 93].

Graduates are equipped to conduct advanced research in theology and religion, articulate findings in interdisciplinary forums, and apply their knowledge to address pastoral challenges. The study programme fosters a holistic approach, preparing students to provide spiritual care and pastoral counselling in diverse contexts while being attuned to the ethical boundaries of their profession.

In general, the MSP in Religion and Theology at RARZI stands as a comprehensive, dynamic, and competitive educational endeavour, aligning with national and international standards while staying responsive to the evolving landscape of theology and religious studies. The content of the study programme is apt to lead to the achievement of the learning outcomes and able to meet the needs of the labour market. The study programme will be enhanced if students can use the e-studies platform which will improve the learning outcomes.

2.2.2. The PMSP presents a wealth of opportunities through its diverse range of study courses, enabling students to actively engage in scientific conferences both nationally in Latvia and internationally across Lithuania, Estonia, and beyond. Master's students play a pivotal role in teaching, assisting professors in lectures and even delivering sessions for bachelor's students. This involvement extends to acquiring scientific pedagogical experience through tasks like reviewing term papers and bachelor's theses. The study programme equips graduates to actively contribute to church life and parish projects. Master's students adeptly apply their theological knowledge in translating spiritual writings. This comprehensive study programme fosters in-depth knowledge, practical skills, and competencies in theology and religious studies. With a curriculum aligned with modern trends and emphasising independent assignments, discussions, and real-life professional engagement, the PMSP promotes critical thinking and research competencies. The study programme is delivered by a qualified teaching staff, holding doctorate or master's degrees in theology or related sciences. Most of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme have in-depth academic interests. There are publications in their bibliography relevant to the study

courses they teach. However, the group of experts would wish for more international peer-reviewed publications.

2.2.3. The implementation methods employed in the study programme align with the overarching study course and study programme goals, fostering the achievement of learning outcomes. This approach is grounded in the ethos of student-centred teaching and learning, acknowledging the diverse needs of the students.

The study programme operates in a part-time onsite format, featuring lectures and classes on Friday evenings and Saturdays. Embracing the principles of student-centred education, the study programme encourages active student involvement. Student representatives are integral members of the Council of RARZI, providing a channel for student opinions. Regular meetings with student groups further enhance the feedback loop.

The emphasis on student support and inspiration is evident in small-sized study groups that facilitate an individualised approach. Leveraging modern technology, lectures and classes are interactive, reflecting a commitment to innovative teaching methods. The academic staff, possessing a high level of education, continually update study course content and apply progressive learning techniques.

The teaching methodology emphasises student-centred learning, promoting independent thinking. Feedback mechanisms from students, employers, and graduates, coupled with ongoing self-assessment, contribute to continuous improvement. Student mobility opportunities enhance the study programme's international dimension, with credits earned during mobility duly recognized.

The student-centric ethos extends to facilitating mobility, recognizing study courses during mobility, and ensuring equivalence across study programmes. Updating study course content involves a meticulous consideration of student-centred approaches, with a focus on meaningful formulation of learning outcomes.

In terms of evaluation, a comprehensive mix of oral, written, and combined methods is deployed during interim tests and final examinations. The preference for methods encouraging active participation and reflection aligns with the student-centric philosophy. Dialogue and discussions are actively encouraged, fostering engagement and deeper understanding.

Independent assignments play a pivotal role in the part-time onsite format, promoting self-directed learning. The careful planning and diverse types of independent assignments contribute to a robust learning experience.

The study process incorporates both formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluations occur throughout the study process, providing continuous feedback. Summative evaluations, comprising tests and exams, are conducted at the end of each study course, reflecting the students' overall understanding of the material.

The culmination of the study programme involves students choosing topics of interest for their master's theses, showcasing the integration of theoretical knowledge with research methodologies. The ability to address real-world problems in pastoral care is demonstrated through empirical research.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a shift to remote learning, utilising platforms like Google Meet. While face-to-face interaction remains crucial, the experience underscored the need for an e-learning platform, currently under development for implementation in the 2023/2024 academic year.

In conclusion, the methods employed in the study programme are designed to align with the study course and study programme goals, promoting student-centred learning and continuous improvement. The commitment to innovation and adaptability, demonstrated during the pandemic, reflects the study programme's dedication to providing a dynamic and effective learning environment.

2.2.4. According to SAR [p. 96], an internship to obtain professional qualification is a mandatory part of the study programme, and it is implemented in accordance with the professional standard of pastoral counsellors. In order to acquire skills and competencies needed by pastoral counsellors, students are working with customers one-on-one or by working with couples, families and various groups of people. The amount of internships is 26 CP: catechesis internship at the parish (6 CP), pastoral work with the engaged and families (8 CP), chaplain's work (8 CP), and research (4 CP) [Annex 28, Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard]. The fact that the internship is planned for each study year is praiseworthy. It is important that during the internship students confidently use IT solutions in compliance with personal data and private information protection requirements [SAR, p. 96-97].

The internship, which is an integral facet of the study programme, systematically guides students towards acquiring skills and competencies delineated in the expected learning outcomes and professional standards. Comprising mandatory components aligned with the pastoral counsellor's professional standard, the internship is facilitated through agreements with relevant institutions. The Study Department of RARZI assists in securing suitable placements, considering students' residences and personal circumstances.

The overarching goal of the internship is to cultivate the skills and competencies requisite for pastoral counsellors, fostering readiness for research endeavours. Throughout the internship, students develop pastoral counselling skills through diverse engagements with clients, honing the ability to independently organise studies and research while employing professional terminology.

Catechist skills are acquired by participating in parish catechesis, applying theological knowledge, and analysing fundamental ideas. Students also acquire skills necessary for chaplaincy in state and non-governmental settings, including creating safe environments and collaborating across diverse cultures and religions.

The structured internship, spanning semesters, exposes students to diverse facets of pastoral counselling, including catechesis, pastoral work with the engaged and families, chaplaincy, and research. This phased approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the pastoral counsellor's role in various spheres.

During the internship, students demonstrate responsible and confident use of IT solutions while adhering to data protection requirements. Regular supervision ensures task fulfilment, strengthens motivation for continued studies, and reinforces commitment to a career as a pastoral counsellor.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Reasonable and well-balanced organisation of the study process provides obtaining general theoretical knowledge in the field of theology followed by professional knowledge and skills contributing to the elaboration of the master thesis, which is defended at the end of the studies in the presence of a commission. The programme focuses on the development of individual research interests and skills, which are later demonstrated in the writing of master's theses. The students' work on their master's thesis is marked by gradual progress. The primary objective of these theses is to delve into specific subfields of theology, with topics chosen based on their relevance to the field, the labour market, and the personal interests of students. The collaborative process involves close interaction with supervising tutors and may extend to other members of the teaching staff at RARZI. Study courses are delivered by highly qualified teaching staff and experienced professionals making a strong emphasis on the practical aspect of the study programme.

Over the reporting period, students successfully defended theses on diverse topics, exemplifying the broad spectrum of interests within pastoral counselling. Topics ranged from the exploration of Eucharistic sacrifice in the Old Testament to issues related to marriage, family, existential questions, and societal concerns. Topics for a master's thesis, chosen because of a practical internship (written about diverse aspects of catechesis, issues related to marriage and family etc.), are relevant to the

field and correspond to the study programme.

The choice of topics is driven by students' own interests, subsequently examined through the lens of Catholic Church teachings and informed by their accumulated experiences. The theses are evaluated by a commission, with individual assessments by each member. Final grades, ranging from 5 to 10, reflect the quality of work, with the highest grade awarded to seven students during the reporting period.

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

The content of the study programme is relevant and complementary addressing the goals of ensuring the achievement of established learning outcomes considering the feedback from all relevant employers. The descriptions of the study courses are well prepared in compliance with the provisions outlined in the regulatory enactments. During the study process, a wide range of teaching methods are implemented.

Strengths:

1. The programme has a strong practical orientation and strong cooperation with employers.
2. The synergy between the theoretical part and internship creates a very good inter-connectivity.

Weaknesses:

1. The study programme only has a very limited number of free elective study courses.
2. Even if the teaching staff in general have in-depth academic knowledge of their fields, the general number of academic publications could be higher.
3. The programme will be enhanced if students can use an e-studies platform which will improve the learning outcomes.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme fully complies with the indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of religion and theology. The study programme has several main objectives outlining necessary knowledge, skills and competencies formulated in accordance with level 7 of the LQF level.

Objectives, tasks and learning outcomes of the study programme are clearly defined. A strong impact is placed on the professional aspect of the study programme, which is highly valued by students and employers. Till the next study year, the study programme should comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations no. 305 of 13 June 2023 on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education.

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The study programme has adequate resources for its content and learning outcomes, as confirmed by the experts and the analysis of the study field. The institute is highly specialized for a single study field and two study programmes, which ensures easy access to the resources for the students and teachers. These resources include a library, databases, and online platforms (planned for the future). The library is open on Fridays and Saturdays when the part-time students have their lectures, and can also be accessed individually if needed [SAR, p. 39].

The programme is funded by the Latvian Bishops' Conference, foreign Catholic foundations, tuition fees, and other sources of sponsorship and donation [MSP SAR, ch. 3.3.3.]. There is a plan to merge with RTI to increase stability. Currently, the provisions of the study programme are sufficient for the implementation of the study programme and the achievement of its learning outcomes.

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The study programme is funded by three sources: the Latvian Bishops' Conference, foreign Catholic foundations, and tuition fees paid by students. The first two sources are stable and operate in the long term. They are used for various purposes, such as research, development and validation of new study courses, support for scientific research, funding for conferences, symposia, continuing education events, translation and publication of Church documents, and maintenance of the study programme [MSP SAR, ch. 3.3.3.]. However, RARZI does not receive any financial support from the state due to the part-time form of the studies, and tuition fees are a topical source of income for the study programme. They also seek to attract sponsors, donors, and international foundations to support its educational initiatives and research activities, which mainly correspond to development activities for the study programme - this acquisition has been so far successful and is actively pursued, however, reliance on project financing for development is not very reliable. There is a clear plan to merge with RTI to consolidate their academic and financial resources and increase their institutional stability.

Over the last 10 years, the number of students in the study programme has varied from 4 to 20 students [MSP SAR, ch. 3.1.4.; Annex 27, Statistical data on students at the Master's Study Programme in Religion]. RARZI indicates that for the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the study programme, the minimum number of students should be a total of 24-30 students, so it can be concluded that, external funding notwithstanding, the study programme has been operating above its base means and faces a serious challenge in attracting and retaining students in a niche field that is based on Catholic tradition and theology [MSP SAR, ch. 3.3.3.]. Considering this, experts suggest reevaluating the minimum number of students needed, and if it is truly at this number, then reviewing what can be done to have reliable and stable financial coverage in the long term, noting for future accreditations that student fees will not cover their study expenses and some base funding will always be had to cover them instead.

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

The programme offers students various informative, material, and technical resources in a bigger and more suitable place for learning; the material resources are sufficient for the implementation of the study programme. The study programme is funded by three sources and seeks more sponsors and donors, and there is a plan to merge with RTI to increase stability, however currently the study programme shows some shortage of sustainability in the long term, as the minimum number of students defined for sustainability is not reached. The provisions are otherwise sufficient for the study programme.

Strengths:

1. RARZI provides students with adequate and sufficient material and technical support, such as classrooms, computers, audio-visual equipment, and IT service, in a bigger and more suitable place for learning.
2. There is a clear plan to merge with RTI to increase its academic and financial stability.

Weaknesses:

1. Heavy reliance on tuition fees as a major source of income, as RARZI does not receive any

support from the state.

2. The diminishing number of students threatens the sustainability of the study programme.

### **Assessment of the requirement [6]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation needs of the study programme. The development plans and merging institutions will further improve the available resources.

### **2.4. Teaching Staff**

#### **Analysis**

2.4.1. The teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme meet the necessary qualifications as outlined in the requirements for the study programme and regulatory enactments. Additionally, the qualifications of the teaching staff are suitable for effectively achieving the goals and learning outcomes of the study programme and relevant study courses. All teaching staff members engaged in the study programme, whether as permanent or visiting staff, possess a minimum of a master's degree in a relevant study field. Additionally, all teaching staff members involved in the study programme are experts in their respective fields and have specialised knowledge in the specific study course. A total of 18 members of the teaching staff are involved in the implementation of the study programme. Seven (38.8%) of them are elected by RARZI; the rest are visiting or guest teaching staff. Of the permanent elected members of the teaching staff, 5 (71.4%) are professors and associate professors, and 6 (85%) hold a doctorate in theology (2), philosophy (2), pedagogy (1), and psychology (1). Other members of the teaching staff hold a master's degree or a licentiate (lic. theol.) degree. Four members of the visiting teaching staff hold a doctorate in theology, and most of them are professors at the Riga Institute of Theology. In general, the study field and study programme are executed by proficient teaching staff [SAR, p. 101].

2.4.2. The teaching staff's structure has been very constant, with only modest changes during the reporting period. Changes in the teaching staff's structure are usually due to generational shifts, doctoral studies, or appointments (nominations) to other positions needed by the Church. In principle, all the changes that took place did not affect the teaching process or practice within the study programme in a qualitative sense. The study programme is following the requirements specified in the regulatory enactments. [SAR, p. 101-102]

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. The institute should make it a top priority to encourage more individual teachers to publish their research articles, particularly in publications that are indexed in the WoS and Scopus databases, in addition to other renowned scientific journals. [Annex 13, Publications]. As this is a professional study programme, an analysis of the teachers' biographies reveals their broad practical experience. Also, based on the research of teachers' biographies, it is possible to see that they have five-year practical experience as one of the requirements for the implementation of this study programme. Consequently, their capacity for dialogue, communication, and pastoral and catechetical labour uniquely distinguish them. Certain teachers have prior experience working with families and spouses, as well as environmental protection initiatives and civil society welfare

strategies [Annex 10, CV]. Certainly, this experience is extremely valuable in determining the level of study.

2.4.5. The institute has implemented effective formal and informal meetings among colleagues as a means to facilitate the sharing and improvement of quality-related matters within the framework of the study programme. Cooperation occurs across multiple levels. It mostly pertains to the collaborative process of developing courses of study and establishing overarching objectives. This collaboration is also evident concerning students, their initiatives and challenges, as well as future employers [SAR, p. 103; on-site visit].

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

To effectively implement the study programme and meet all of its objectives, the teachers have the necessary qualifications. The composition of the personnel remains mostly unchanged, reducing the likelihood of substantial adjustments that could potentially affect the study curriculum, whether through direct or indirect means. The matter under consideration relates to the weak publication of scientific papers in prestigious international databases and the insufficient scientific research engagement of some teachers. The institute's notable characteristic is the successful cooperation among all stakeholders, which plays a vital role in ensuring stability and striving to improve the quality of the study programme. The teaching staff possesses a commendable degree of professional expertise and practical experience.

Strengths:

1. Expertise, consistency, and qualification of the teachers.
2. Excellent cooperation between every stakeholder involved.

Weaknesses:

1. Weak presence of scientific papers in prestigious international databases.

### **Assessment of the requirement [7]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

To fully meet the requirement, it is imperative to observe a large increase in the number of scientific articles, particularly those published on important worldwide platforms, notwithstanding the already high qualifications of the teaching staff and guest teachers [analysis of criteria 3.4.4.] The level of practical experience demonstrated by the teachers involved in the implementation of this study programme appears to be good [Annex 10, CV].

### **2.5. Assessment of the Compliance**

#### **Requirements**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI provides certification of compliance with the National Standard for the Second Level Professional Higher Education as described in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 512 26.08.2014. [Annex 28], valid at the time of submission. Compliance with Regulations No 305 Regarding the State Standard of Professional Higher Education should also be reviewed by RARZI. Experts' analysis concludes that the study programme complies with the regulations.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI provides a comparison with requirements and evidence of compliance to the professional standard "Pastoral counsellor" 21.09.2010. [Annex provided after the on-site visit, Annex 7 Conformity of the study programme with the professional standard], and a project of the professional standard "Pastoral counsellor" submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science in 2022 [Annex 29].

The study programme is compliant with both the existing standard and the project. The updated professional standard expands upon the existing standard therefore experts evaluate this as adequate and insightful.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The descriptions of the study courses [Annex 32] have been prepared accordingly, complying with the relevant requirements.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma [Annex 26] to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with 16.04.2013. Regulation No 202 of Minister Cabinet Regulations "Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents".

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The Confirmation No.5/2023 27.05.2023. [Annex 11] certifies that the staff meet the language requirements for the implementation of the study programme, and professional and office duties. This is additionally supplemented by the provided biographies [Annex 10].

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement [Annex 7] corresponds to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 70 "Terms that must be included in the study contract" 23.01.2007.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI will provide the opportunity to continue master's studies at the Faculty of Theology of the Lateran Pontifical University according to a Letter of acknowledgement [included in Annex 5, About the continuity of the study process]. This is compliant, yet experts would urge to indicate specific study programmes in which students will have this opportunity.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

RARZI will provide compensation for students' losses in the amount of tuition fees paid as confirmed by the Confirmation 27.05.2023. [Annex 6]. It is unusual to define the amount of compensation in the amount of tuition fees paid, as the student will have invested more valuable time and money in the study process and materials needed for it.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme is in compliance with the requirements set forth regarding education in the Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Latvia.

**Assessment of the requirement [8]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All requirements have been formally complied with although some garner comments on their execution, e.g. compensation of losses and continuation of studies.

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

The study programme fully complies with the indicators, conditions and criteria of the study field of religion and theology. The study programme has several main objectives outlining necessary knowledge, skills and competencies formulated in accordance with level 7 of the LQF level. Objectives, tasks and learning outcomes of the study programme are clearly defined. A strong impact is placed on the professional aspect of the programme, which is highly valued by students and employers. Till the next study year, the study programme should comply with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations no. 305 of 13 June 2023 on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education. The study provision is sufficient for the implementation needs of the study programme. The development plans and merging institutions will further improve the available resources, but for now, the financial resources are somewhat unpredictable. In order to fully meet the requirement, it is imperative to observe a large increase in the number of scientific articles, particularly those published on important worldwide platforms, notwithstanding the already high qualifications of the teaching staff and guest teachers. All requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education institutions and other regulatory enactments have been formally complied with although some garner comments on their execution, e.g. compensation of losses and continuation of studies. Overall no such deficiencies were identified that cannot be eliminated in a 2-year accreditation period. Experts look forward to the development of the study programme after the merger with RTI to see positive changes with increased resource capacity.

## Main strengths:

- Strong professional aspects, active collaboration and involvement of stakeholders to create a study programme addressing societal and labour market needs.
- Strong connection between theoretical studies and internship.

## Main weaknesses:

- The number of students is continuously under the self-defined minimum casting doubts about sustainability.
- Lack of an e-study platform and digitised learning materials.
- Weak presence of scientific papers by academic staff in international databases.

**Evaluation of the study programme "Religion and Theology "**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## 2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Religion and Theology "

### Short-term recommendations

RARZI should supplement the student study agreements with the planned amount of financial compensation for students, and the information about the provision of continued studies (and specifically at what study programme such an opportunity is provided) in case of study programme termination.

### Long-term recommendations

Within three years, the editorial board of the institute's only scientific journal "Terra Mariana" should work to have it included in one of the two (WoS, Scopus) most prestigious international databases; in this way, the number of teachers' works (which are partially published in the journal) and their international visibility would increase.

Explore new ways and methods of marketing the study programme in order to reach a larger audience of potential students and improve the student dynamic.

Review the chances of moving along the updated professional standard, and find out what is the reason for the delay.

In order to provide students with study resources online at any time, within two years to develop an e-study platform.

In order to ensure optimal academic achievement within six years to increase the number of international peer-reviewed publications.

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

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

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

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:		Partially compliant	RARZI has partly managed to establish a quality assurance system that fulfils all its functions towards students and their satisfaction according to the quality assurance policy. It is questionable how effective the system formed by RARZI is [see analysis of criteria 1.2.1.]

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Requirement Evaluation</b>		<b>Comment</b>
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)		Partially compliant	As indicated in the analysis of the previously mentioned criteria [1.4.1; 1.4.3; 1.4.4.], the fundamental conditions (future merger with RTI, ecumenical cooperation, good strategic plan, important role of teachers in different scientific fields, international connections) are there for the advancement of scientific efforts at an elevated standard. However, it is imperative to initiate the mechanisms (the consistent evaluation of the execution of the scientific strategy and the encouragement of teacher and student engagement in scientific and research activities via projects, scientific publications, and mobility initiatives are essential elements) that will effectively activate these conditions to fully meet this requirement.
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.		Partially compliant	The international cooperation is well established because of RARZI's affiliation with the Pontifical Lateran University, however, this opportunity for collaboration should be used more intensively. The network of affiliated institutions to the PLU can be used to build relationships with Catholic organizations worldwide. Cooperation at the international level has mainly been practised in the frame of the study process and, mainly by the teaching staff, in frames of the Erasmus+ programme. To develop the incoming students' mobility a comprehensive strategy should be established. International cooperation in research should be developed. The cooperation inside Latvia can be assessed very well, particularly with the employers' organisations.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation			Comment
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.	Fully compliant			All previous recommendations have been analysed and considered.

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

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Religion and Theology (43221)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Good
2	Religion and Theology (47221)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Good

### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

No dissenting opinions