

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: University of Latvia

Study field: Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology

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

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

This report presents the evaluation of the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology" (study field) at the University of Latvia (UL), containing eight programmes, covering all levels of academic education:

Sociology 43314

Sociology 45314

Political Science 43312

Political Science 45312

Diplomacy 45312

Cultural and Social Anthropology 43314

Cultural and Social Anthropology 45314

Social Sciences 51312

The evaluation was conducted by a panel of six experts, accompanied by a coordinator from the Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA), who visited UL on July 6-7, 2023, with four experts and the coordinator present in person and two experts present online for the duration of the visit agenda. In addition to the on-site visit, the experts thoroughly analysed the self-assessment reports (SAR) of the study field and study programmes, which was submitted to AIKA through its e-platform, following national regulations governing the assessment procedure. The experts also requested and received additional information from UL before and after the visit to ensure a comprehensive analysis leading to conclusive findings and recommendations, which have been presented to UL field management in the form of preliminary feedback during the concluding day of the on-site visit.

The assessment of the study field and relevant study programmes reveals many strengths. All programmes are well-integrated into the UL Faculty of Social Sciences, and management demonstrates excellent problem awareness, problem solving, and strategic planning capacities regarding the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". The UL faces structural challenges in the social sciences field, including insufficient teaching staff financing and doctoral students financing, a decreasing number of state-subsidised slots, declining national birth rates that inevitably affect student intake, a student body on bachelor's (BA), master's (MA) and doctoral levels that is full-time or part-time employed, and competition for excellent students both on the global and state level. However, the solutions that the study field management is implementing to mitigate these structural challenges are commendable, such as support for student mobility, internationalisation efforts that attract students from abroad and increase the competitiveness of the study field graduates, support for international research and project outputs, and creative timetable solutions that accommodate the schedules of employed students.

In terms of finance and material-technical basis, the doctoral programme attracts a high student interest, and the e-study environment is modern and accessible. The library has a sufficient budget, with a preference for e-resources and English literature. Adequate learning infrastructure and premises are available, and a planned move to a new location promises a more modern environment. The financing and material-technical aspect also contains several areas for improvement. Transparency regarding finances, including project funding, tuitions, and state grants, is lacking in some cases. Although there is a high demand for sociology graduates, attracting prospective students and ensuring the financial sustainability of sociology programmes is becoming increasingly difficult. The university prioritises research over teaching, leading to instability for researchers dependent on project cycles. Additionally, there is no incentive for academic staff to

promote their field or programme through public articles or media engagement.

In terms of teaching, the study programmes receive overwhelmingly positive evaluations from students and graduates, especially in anthropology. The programmes have qualified teaching staff, including PhD level instructors with good academic publishing and mobility records. English is fully integrated into the programmes, and there is a wide variety of courses available in political science, anthropology, and sociology. The study programmes show progress in meeting internationalisation goals through literature readings, guest lectures, and staff mobility, but student mobility remains limited, despite excellent opportunities available at UL via cooperation agreements with world-leading universities. Opportunities for academic staff to develop new skills and competencies exist, although their sustainability is yet to be determined. Flexibility is provided to accommodate students with full-time jobs. However, there are concerns regarding staff burnout protection, sensitivity and harassment training protocols, as well as the lack of an explicit policy on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The absence of a policy on generative AI poses challenges, and there are few incentives for academic staff to take on more teaching responsibilities. On average, the course descriptions at all levels are comprehensive, logical and provide a good knowledge balance between legacy and innovation, although some cases have been identified where the literature in course descriptions needs updating, mid-course grading is inconsistent, and feedback may not always be provided. Students point to a need to provide more work-related skills and improve elective choices. In political science programmes, the student-centred approach is not fully implemented, and students have limited control over their curriculum. Drop-out rates, particularly in sociology, are a concern, and student enrolment in sociology is decreasing. Most alarmingly, the anthropology degree title does not align with the content being taught and undermines the faculty's credibility.

In terms of research, most commendably, researchers' expertise is taken into account in assigning particular courses and scientific supervision. Interdisciplinarity is fostered through staff mobility, joint research seminars, and research pooling. The doctoral level benefits from an adequate supply of Latvian Research Council (LZP) experts, and financial support, including a publishing and conference participation budget, as well as direct bonus incentives for scientific publishing. The research outputs of the senior academic staff are generally well represented in international databases, including Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), and the field demonstrates a trend of increasing visibility, which could be further accelerated by a mandatory Google Scholar profile requirement. MA and PhD level students report satisfactory access to publishing opportunities, including as second authors in the publications by their scientific supervisors. Although research outputs are sometimes under-ambitious, a trend towards an increase of contributions to the international debate, particularly in fields prioritised by the university, is certainly emerging, not least due to the development planning undertaken by the management of the field. It should however be noted that some students report occasional difficulties in writing in critical approaches, feminism, and queer studies.

In quality assurance, the implementation of the previous evaluation recommendations is generally satisfactory, and the field has an ambitious development plan. There is a good computerised course evaluation data collection process in place, and resources are allocated for annual course description updates. Anthropology programmes demonstrate efforts to improve study quality through student-led focus groups and a culture of permanent feedback. Sociology students and graduates are in high demand from employers, indicating positive outcomes. The evaluation has also discovered several points where improvements would be welcome, including the self-assessment process, which is currently sporadic and inconsistent at times, and the compliance with the quality assurance manual is limited. A laudable general culture of feedback is observable across the study field, which should be deepened, as currently still a lack of consistency in implementing a

student-centric approach, addressing student feedback, and improving the performance of academic staff can be detected. Students are often unaware of complaint or proposal procedures. The extent to which employers' recommendations are considered is unclear, and there is a lack of transparency regarding feedback from employers in political science programmes.

Overall, the panel believes that while addressing the identified challenges is important to enhance the quality of education, promote faculty and student well-being, improve research outputs, and ensure effective quality assurance practices, there are notable strengths in the UL study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology" and its programmes that leave no question as to the compliance of the study field and the assessed programmes with the requirements for accreditation (in the case of anthropology, the panel notes legal impediments to the change in degree title that should be resolved to enhance the level of compliance).

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

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

##### **Analysis**

1.1.1. The aims of the study field are centred around six strategic goals, in line with wider UL strategy. It is notable that the entire academic staff were involved in translating UL goals into goals of the study field (SAR, p. 17). The first of the goals, international recognition, comprises research and the study programmes. Emphasis is given to high-quality publications, attracting research funding, and the organisation of conferences and events. Study programmes gain international recognition through participation in the Erasmus programmes and the attraction of foreign students. On all these counts the study field is doing well, and room for improvement is recognized. The second, uniqueness of the offer and competitiveness is translated as student-centred and research-based teaching. Concretely, this means emphasis on support for first-year students and on mobility access throughout. It also, and commendably, it means involving students in decision-making by consulting with them in ways that go beyond surveys (discussions of survey results for example is mentioned [SAR, p. 18] but there is scope for developing this further) and a pursuit of more student-centred learning methods. Measuring student knowledge acquisition and skills is also mentioned. Contribution to society translates into partnership with society and democratic development. These goals guiding the principal activities in the study field evidence a strong commitment to inclusivity, student-focused approach and research-informed teaching that is socially relevant. This includes cooperating with schools, maintaining contact with alumni, publicising work through media and social networks. As an aspirational basis, the translation of general UL goals into study specific ones is clear and provides good direction. The institutional development goals also offer clarity and centre around talent development, environment and governance, and organisational culture. In terms of the first, staff excellence is understood in conjunction with cooperation in science, industry, teaching, and training (SAR, p. 17). The second is understood as the provision of an open, creative, and collaborative research and teaching environment. The third is understood as the promotion of innovation. These encompass teaching events for staff, offering sabbaticals and staff exchange, and offering career development to doctoral students. It also includes collaborations with companies and institutions (including internships), lectures and other events with industry representatives, and organising an innovation lab. The active pursuit of all of these is evident throughout the report.

The direction of the study field is in compliance with stipulated guidelines.

Social relevance is understood in tandem with EU alignment and the place of Latvia in the EU frames this understanding. The study field is geared towards producing graduates who can work in governmental, non-governmental and policy sectors, as well as bodies and institutions in economy,

media, PR, research companies, and international organisations (IOs) (SAR, p. 20). This aspiration is fully in alignment with the goals identified above, and seem achievable, but perhaps more difficult to evidence success.

1.1.2. The SWOT analysis provided in SAR is clear, detailed, and frank. It identifies strengths in established reputation, staff quality, material base, interdisciplinarity, and collaboration with employers. Threats are identified in financial provision from state budget, degree of international recognition, narrow specialisation in Latvia-focused research, and little renewal of staff (SAR, p. 20). These weaknesses can be addressed by opportunities to attract international research funding, training of new staff through the doctoral programme, regional cooperation, cooperation with social and industry partners, new facilities, and centralised support. Remaining threats are declining student numbers, global competition, rise in STEM programmes, and socio-economic conditions (identified mainly as post-pandemic, but possibly more general than this) (SAR, p. 21). The strategy and goals (2.1.1) directly link to this analysis and the solutions envisioned to address weaknesses and threats are endemic (e.g. attraction of funds through international projects rather than negotiation of state budget), making the strategy that results from the SWOT analysis robust. The goals in the strategy are also both short- / medium- term (e.g. international funding, improvement of publication visibility, regional partnerships) and longer-term (attracting new staff through the doctoral programme). This makes the SWOT analysis applicable to the 6-year horizon and the strategy and its outcomes sustainable in the longer term. The SWOT analysis also provides room for exploring bolder initiatives however, such as expansion of capacity through new recruitment and lobbying for increased state funds. The narrow focus of research on Latvia, evidenced from other documents in the annex (CVs, publication list) offers another avenue for longer-term initiatives that would help existing staff internationalise and broaden their research (e.g. through international collaborations) and also attract new staff with wider interests. This is also potentially a strength, however, making research socially relevant and attractive to national bodies, including funders and employers. The SAR also includes mention of an interdisciplinary Bachelor's programme and consideration of digitalization options as directions for further development. Both of these are bold propositions that should be explored with caution as to their potential weaknesses. Missing from the SWOT is the titling of anthropology degrees in ways that do not fully represent the content of what is taught and the knowledge graduates gain. This is currently a threat and offers direction for improvement in the future.

1.1.3. The management structure detailed in the SAR is in accordance with regulations. The processes it identifies for the development of courses and responsibility allocation are clear. On the academic side, the SAR details the roles of programme directors, heads of study field, the Study Field Council, Faculty Council, the Study Programme Quality Assessment Commission, and finally the Academic Department. In terms of support services, these are UL-wide, comprising the Student service and Academic Competence Development Centre. Mention is also made to cooperation with student representatives in the faculty and the UL Student Council (SAR, p. 26). The management structure evidences good centralised support as well as autonomy of course staff to develop the courses they teach.

There is a relatively high satisfaction with the implemented study programmes, expressed both on behalf of currently enrolled students, as well as graduates (there were no students which graded their respective programmes with a grade less than 8 on a scale from 0 to 10, while there average grade was 8.5-9 depending on a particular programme).

Decision-making processes are detailed, clear and evidence-based. There are two areas in which the management structure could pay more attention: one is the lower-level management of the teaching offer and the second the content of student-facing roles. In terms of the first, processes for module-level oversight could be considered to provide consistency across content and evaluation

(e.g. moderation of grading, assessment review). The role of support staff at study field level could also be enhanced with a view to easing staff workload. In terms of the second, responsibilities and activities entailed in student-facing roles could be clearly specified, with a view to addressing EDI issues and ensuring clear processes for complaints and review, while also enabling realistic workloads for staff. This is especially important given the emphasis placed in other parts of the report on student-oriented approaches and the modelling of teaching on Oxbridge-like one-to-one approaches (SAR, p. 320).

1.1.4. The SAR provides access to all regulations relating to this criterion and contains detailed information on admission of students at all levels, ways of recognizing study periods and professional experience, prior formal and non-formal education, and assessment of students' achievements and learning outcomes. The processes comply with regulations, are logical and effective, and involve stakeholders to a sufficient degree. Specifically, the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) clarifies that undergraduate (UG) admission is centralised at national level, Masters' level admission is decentralised at faculty level, while doctoral study is centralised at UL level. Given the goal of attracting international students to programmes, UG admissions appear to constitute a weakness, placing the emphasis on international recruitment at Masters' level. Masters' level admissions are streamlined well across the programmes, excepting the lack of minimum requirement for the Master's Studies Programme in Social and Cultural Anthropolgy (MSP SCA). Doctoral admission processes are clear on the central level, but the role of potential supervisors in the process is not visible. Review of requirements and recognition of studies is well documented and there is an impressive list of institutions with which such recognition has been carried out. There are regulations on internships and recognition of professional experience, but an opportunity to put them to practice has not yet arisen (SAR, p. 30). Overall this part is convincing and well evidenced.

1.1.5. The methods, principles and procedures for assessing achievements of students have been developed according to national and university regulations and are clearly defined. The relevance of assessment methods and procedures for achieving the aims of study programmes and the needs of students is analysed in great detail in the SAR and conforms to a large extent to the goals of high-quality and student-centred learning. Specifically, the SAR describes a uniform system whereby the first lecture of each module is devoted to setting out rules for study and assessment and course organisation; it mentions on-going evaluation of students' work, including through mid-term and final assessments; a rubric-based approach centering on a 10-point system; provides possibilities for evaluating participation; and mentions possibilities following failed examinations (SAR, p. 32-33). It also explains the principles guiding assessment (openness, possibility of review, mandatory assessment, varieties of assessment and conformity). These provisions are in line with student-centred approach that enhance learning and promote fairness. The variability of assessment (also exhibited by the module outlines) is particularly commendable, as is the use of a rubric and the clear provision of the point system. The possibility of assessing attendance, which does not appear uniform, allows scope for module-level flexibility. Minimum weightings at UG level exams place emphasis on mid-terms rather than final exams (50% vs. 10% respectively). This possibly encourages students to frontload their efforts. Dissertation assessments are impressively comprehensive, at seemingly all levels, making for an extremely rigorous process that potentially greatly increases the competence of students in independent study and research, early on. On the other hand, it could be onerous for students and taxing on staff workload, pointing to an area that might be reviewed. The complaints and appeals process is detailed, clear, and thorough but the committee heard little of how it operates in practice. There seem to be little specific contact points for relating complaints and issues and much of the resolution seems to be ad hoc, except in the case of anthropology where there are instituted meeting points and times that provide opportunities to address issues. More should be done towards a more diligent, inclusive, and proactive complaints

process (also point 1.2.3).

1.1.6. The study field complies with UL principles and procedures pertaining to academic integrity and follows university-wide mechanisms for their observance. There are effective anti-plagiarism tools that promote the development of the internal culture of UL that are applied and the students at all levels are informed about them. The system is being made even more efficient through the procurement of a new tool with wider access than the previous one (SAR, p. 38). Ethics procedures are mentioned for all levels and more detail could be given on what these entail exactly.

Developments outside the reporting period, and specifically the uptake of generative AI are understandably not addressed in the report. This is likely to be an area of necessary focus in the coming reporting period and significant resourcing, centrally as well as at study field level, needs to be available, including in terms of workload.

Specifically, the advent of Generative AI presents a unique and formidable challenge for the academic evaluation process within the "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology" study field at the University of Latvia. This advanced technology, capable of generating high-quality text that is nearly indistinguishable from human-written text, can bypass traditional anti-plagiarism measures, thereby complicating the assessment of student performance.

Evidence from the on-site meeting on 6 July suggests that the academic staff within this field are grappling with the implications of this technological development and are currently unsure of how to address it effectively. While some have attempted to modify their student assessment requirements to counteract the use of Generative AI, the strategies discussed, such as requiring students to compare multiple texts, can still be circumvented by the latest iterations of this technology.

These circumstances indicate a pressing need for a more comprehensive understanding of Generative AI among academic staff. It is paramount that faculty members be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to: (a) discern which current assessment practices may be rendered obsolete by AI; (b) devise new evaluation criteria that cannot be easily manipulated by AI technologies; and (c) teach students how to use AI tools ethically and effectively for their studies, research, and future employment.

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

Conclusions:

The aims of the study field are clearly defined and attainable, being centred around 6 strategic goals, in line with wider UL strategy. The SWOT analysis provided in SAR identifies strengths in established reputation, staff quality, material base, interdisciplinarity, and collaboration with employers. Threats are identified in financial provision from state budget, degree of international recognition, narrow specialisation in Latvia-focused research, and little renewal of staff. These weaknesses can be addressed by opportunities to attract international research funding, training of new staff through the doctoral programme, regional cooperation, cooperation with social and industry partners, new facilities, and centralised support. The management structure evidences good centralised support as well as autonomy of course staff to develop the courses they teach. Decision-making processes are detailed, clear and evidence-based. There are two areas in which the management structure could pay more attention: one is the lower-level management of the teaching offer and the second the content of student-facing roles. The methods, principles and procedures for assessing achievements of students have been developed according to national and university regulations and are clearly defined. A more detailed complaints and appeals process description could be included in the next report with indications of how it is concretely being implemented in practice. The study field complies with UL principles and procedures pertaining to academic integrity and follows university-wide mechanisms for their observance. Ethics procedures are mentioned for all levels and more detail could be given on what these entail.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Compliance with regulations.
- 2) Student-focused approach.
- 3) Collaboration with stakeholders in the sector.
- 4) Awareness of SWOT aspects and solid strategy on their basis.
- 5) Relatively high satisfaction with the implemented study programmes, expressed both on behalf of currently enrolled students, as well as graduates.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) Resourcing due to dependence on state funding – also linked to (lack of) clarity in assessing workload and support provision at study field level.
  - 2) National focus in research (also a strength as it furthers collaboration with national stakeholders).
  - 3) Inability of existing anti-plagiarism measures to detect AI-generated text. Lack of awareness and understanding among academic staff about the capabilities and implications of Generative AI.
  - 4) New developments and challenges: post-pandemic and generative AI in particular and their intersection as digitalization possibilities are being approached.
  - 5) Documentation of student-focused activities and feedback in practice.
  - 6) Titling on anthropology degrees being dependent on state regulations that do not reflect the content of the degree fully
- Current regulation around UG admissions may stifle internationalisation.

## 1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

### Analysis

1.2.1. The University of Latvia has implemented two publicly available documents that highlight its commitment to quality management. The Quality Policy of the University of Latvia ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/2/Kvalitates\\_politika\\_majas\\_lapai\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/2/Kvalitates_politika_majas_lapai_ENG.pdf)) emphasises the importance of continuous improvement, strategic development goals, and collaboration with the public. It sets out a set of quality-related principles and actions to be implemented in science, studies, and cooperation. The Quality Action Policy of the University of Latvia further defines guidelines for quality management in scientific research and studies, aiming to ensure internationally recognized results and competent practitioners. These policies are based on the university's values, principles of total quality management, and the EFQM excellence model, and demonstrate the university's commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in its academic endeavours.

In 2021, the university implemented a comprehensive Quality Management System Manual (Kvalitātes vadības rokasgrāmata) that spans 140 pages and holds binding implications for the fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. This manual serves as a foundational document for ensuring quality and sets out the guidelines and procedures to be followed. Additionally, the University of Latvia has developed its strategic direction through the University of Latvia Strategy for 2021-2027, which defines 21 achievable outcomes (key performance indicators). The implementation of these strategic objectives is a primary focus of the university's Quality Management System, further emphasising its commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in education. The provided texts clearly demonstrate that the University of Latvia has established and maintains a quality assurance system.

While the University of Latvia has implemented a comprehensive Quality Management System Manual and a strategic plan to guide its quality assurance efforts, there remains some uncertainty regarding the extent to which this system ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and relevant study programs.

To enact the Strategy for 2021-2027, a Development Plan for the Study Field "Sociology, Political



Science, Anthropology" has been established (Studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija, antropoloģija" attīstības plāns). This ambitious document intends to assess the study field's results using over 30 indicators, measuring achievements according to the results of year 2020/21, 2023/24, and 2026/2027.

The UL Quality Management Handbook prescribes that the review of the implementation of recommendations from previous assessments for the development plan of the study field over a six-year period, including the evaluation of current measurement results, should be undertaken in the preparation of the study field's annual report (p.66). However, upon inspecting the UL's website (<https://www.lu.lv/par-mums/dokumenti/pasnovertejuma-zinojumi/>), it was noted that the annual reports for the study field for 2019, 2020, and 2021 are unavailable. This was explained during a site visit as a result of the significant workload in preparing the university and the study field for accreditation. Instead, evaluators were offered a compilation titled "Analysis of Student, Graduate, and Employer Survey Results." (Studējošo, absolventu un darba devēju aptauju rezultātu analīze). This document allowed assurance that the study programme regularly collects data from students and graduates about the quality of the study programme and courses, and also organized an employer survey in 2022. Despite this, there were several areas in which the document could not provide assurance: a) that other surveys prescribed by the UL Quality Management Handbook (p.58) were regularly conducted and/or analyzed; b) whether employer surveys were regularly conducted or only episodic; c) most crucially, whether all study programs in the study field regularly analyze the data collected and strive to improve their programs. In this regard, it is concerning that the 2018 annual report

([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Julijs\\_2019/Augusts\\_2019/SOC\\_POL\\_ANT\\_2018\\_PUB.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Julijs_2019/Augusts_2019/SOC_POL_ANT_2018_PUB.pdf)) is more thoroughly prepared than the 2020 report ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/5.\\_DAZADI/pasnovertejuma-zinojumi/2020/1\\_PARSKATS\\_SOCIOL-POLITOL-ANTROPOL\\_2020\\_PUB.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/5._DAZADI/pasnovertejuma-zinojumi/2020/1_PARSKATS_SOCIOL-POLITOL-ANTROPOL_2020_PUB.pdf)), where the analysis of the survey results is overall formal. Reports for 2019, 2021, and 2022 were not created. This indicates a lack of serious commitment at the study field level to analysing feedback from students, graduates, and employers to improve study programs. The public unavailability of this data also hinders students, graduates, and employers from following up on whether their feedback has any impact. One of the purposes of publicly available annual reports on the UL website should be to ensure transparency.

Overall, the lecturers in the study field have access to quality data on how their courses are evaluated by students, which is positive since students are obliged to fill out course evaluation forms (meeting with academic staff during assessment visit). The lecturer sees their rating according to various parameters and how it compares with the faculty's average ratings. All students' written comments are also available for review. However, a significant question arises as to the extent to which lecturers and study programme directors further analyse this data. During the assessment visit on July 6-7, lecturers, students, graduates, and employers in the study field were surveyed. Feedback on the responsiveness of different study programs to suggestions and complaints about study quality was mixed. For example, anthropology students and graduates testified that continuous feedback collection is part of the programme culture, with special focus groups led by students and lecturers discussing what has worked well in the study process and what can be improved. This excellent practice should be encouraged across the study field and the UL. Meanwhile, political science students pointed out instances where, despite their completed course evaluation forms, some lecturers continued to ask exam questions unrelated to the learned material or other quality issues in courses.

Alarmingly, only very few of about 28-30 students and graduates (spanning all study programs) met during the site visit had heard about their ability to officially submit a complaint or suggestion according to the UL's Student Suggestions and Complaint Submission and Examination Procedures. This explains the meagre number of such complaints and reports received, as indicated in the SAR

of the study field (SAR, p.45). This suggests that the student-centric approach to the learning process, declared as a significant element of the UL Quality System (p.46 of the Manual), should be improved at the study field level. Simultaneously, it is very positive that students from all study programs indicated during the assessment visit that if they faced difficulties in fulfilling course requirements for personal or other reasons, the lecturers were accommodating with both teaching methods (for example, providing the opportunity to participate electronically) and testing times. Anthropology students also highlighted several cases where programme lecturers helped them solve purely practical problems related to living in Latvia and where their opinion was continuously heard in both formal and informal formats.

It is commendable that the academic staff of the study field has an obligation specified in their employment contracts to review their course programs annually for improvement, for which a special remuneration is allocated (assessment visit on 6 July, discussion with UL management and discussion with academic staff of the study field). However, it is alarming that some of the faculty members expert panel met during the assessment visit were unaware of such an obligation. Only the academic staff of the anthropology programme could confirm that the results of this survey are regularly discussed with other lecturers. This raises doubts about whether the process specified in the UL Quality Management System is being observed: "The Director of the study programme monitors the implementation of the study process and related issues. The need and possibility of adapting the course of the study process are discussed and agreed upon in the meetings of the respective faculty structural units (departments/chairs), ensuring the exchange of information and best practices, as well as prompt or preventive response according to the diversity and needs of the students. Regular discussions on pedagogical methods and teaching modes, examination methods are ensured in departments/chairs." (p.48 Quality manual)

Also, the surveyed employers, for the most part, could not answer whether their suggestions for improving the learning process were taken into account (on-site visit on 6 July). Upon reviewing the self-assessment materials submitted by the study field, particularly the analysis of the survey results of students, graduates, and employers, the self-assessment report of the study field, and the annual reports for 2018 and 2020, it can be concluded that, overall, the directors of study programs are aware of the main needs of employers (for example, for better data analysis skills or policy document writing skills among graduates), but there is no confidence that systematic work is being done to include these skills in the study programs. It is worrying that during the assessment visit, the surveyed students and graduates could not confirm that they had received any feedback from UL about whether their suggestions after the surveys had been considered. Feedback to the survey respondents should definitely be provided (on-site visit on 7 July). A positive exception is the students of the anthropology program, who could mention how lecturers adapt the course even before its completion. Likewise, employers in the sociology field mentioned positive incidents when UL lecturers try to find out from them whether recent sociology graduates are well capable of doing the job and what skills would still be needed to include in student programs, following their own initiative in conversation.

It is praiseworthy that faculty members have had the opportunity to improve their professional qualifications in recent years. At the same time, the faculty members themselves are concerned about whether there will be opportunities to continue this in the future, as professional development was part of a project financed by the European Social Fund, which will eventually end. It is essential that even if the European Union funding is not received, UL can continue to fulfil its obligation set out in its Quality Management Manual: "UL ensures the development of the academic staff, promoting the professional growth of LU employees, career planning and implementation at UL, and effectively managing UL's human capital. UL provides opportunities and motivates faculty to enhance their professionalism, supports and encourages scientific activity, thereby strengthening the link between studies and scientific research, embodies student-centred education principles, promotes innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies in the study process. UL

ensures the professional development of its faculty, organising and offering various continuing education programs, supporting participation in various local and international associations and other types of organisations and their organised conferences or events, promoting collegial learning of academic staff, as well as participation in projects at local and international levels.” (p.53-54 of the Manual).

1.2.2. The procedures for the development and review of the study programmes, as stated in the Regulations on University of Latvia Study and Continuing Education Programmes ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_EN/3/Study\\_and\\_continuing\\_education\\_programmes.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_EN/3/Study_and_continuing_education_programmes.pdf)) and Procedure for Preparation of the Annual Reports of the Study Fields of the University of Latvia ([https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/3.\\_STUDIJU\\_UN\\_ZINATNES\\_PROCESU\\_REGLAMENTEJOSIE\\_DOKUMENTI/Ikgadejo-parskatu-kartiba-2022-apstiprinata.doc](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/3._STUDIJU_UN_ZINATNES_PROCESU_REGLAMENTEJOSIE_DOKUMENTI/Ikgadejo-parskatu-kartiba-2022-apstiprinata.doc)), are in place and are clear and logical. The development of a new joint doctoral study programme in Social Sciences seems to have followed the necessary procedures, further reinforcing their practical applicability.

However, there are gaps in the process that raise questions about its efficiency. The absence of annual self-assessment reports for 2019, 2021, and 2022 (<https://www.lu.lv/par-mums/dokumenti/pasnovertejuma-zinojumi/>) indicates a lack of consistent application of the regulations and procedures. These reports are critical in assessing the program's performance and identifying areas for improvement, thus their absence hampers the process of course revision and improvement.

The feedback mechanisms exist as well, but their effectiveness is questionable. There seems to be a disconnect between the feedback provided by students, graduates, and employers and the responses to these suggestions. Apart from anthropology programs, there also appears to be a lack of systematic feedback provided to the students and employers about whether their suggestions were taken into consideration, which could impede the open exchange of ideas. This could potentially harm stakeholder engagement and trust in the system.

In conclusion, while the necessary procedures and feedback mechanisms are defined and logically structured, their implementation and efficiency require improvement. More consistent adherence to procedures, regular self-assessment, and more effective communication of feedback would enhance the overall effectiveness of the process.

1.2.3. From a procedural standpoint, the UL has established clear protocols to handle student complaints and suggestions. Admission Regulations at the University of Latvia (UL Senate Decision No. 2-3/68 of 31.05.2021) provide the opportunity for UL applicants to lodge complaints regarding irregularities in the admission procedure. Similarly, the UL has an updated Procedure for the Submission and Resolution of Students' Proposals and Complaints (the UL Order No 1-4/501 of 28.09.2022,

[https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti\\_LV/3.\\_STUDIJU\\_UN\\_ZINATNES\\_PROCESU\\_REGLAMENTEJOSIE\\_DOKUMENTI/6\\_STUDJO\\_1.PDF](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/LU.LV/www.lu.lv/Dokumenti/Dokumenti_LV/3._STUDIJU_UN_ZINATNES_PROCESU_REGLAMENTEJOSIE_DOKUMENTI/6_STUDJO_1.PDF)), which outlines the format and process for students to submit proposals and complaints. This procedure provides an avenue for students, individually or in a group, to voice their concerns and suggestions, thus promoting the implementation of improvements.

However, despite these mechanisms being in place, there is a clear indication that they may not be effectively utilised or understood by the students. The very low number of complaints and proposals submitted across eight study programs since 2013 (SAR, p. 45) suggests that students might be unaware of their rights to submit complaints and proposals, indicating a lack of effective communication about these mechanisms.

The assessment visit and survey responses from lecturers, students, graduates, and employers in

the study field shed light on varying degrees of awareness and responsiveness to the mechanism of submitting complaints and suggestions.

In the anthropology programme, for instance, there appears to be a proactive, positive culture around the collection and discussion of feedback. The presence of special focus groups, led by students and lecturers, to discuss what is working well and what can be improved is a commendable practice. The fact that this feedback mechanism has been integrated into the programme culture suggests effective communication and responsiveness, which should be encouraged and replicated across all study fields and within the UL.

However, the experiences in the political science programme paint a different picture. Despite filling in course evaluation forms, students indicated that there have been instances where their feedback was not addressed, with issues such as irrelevant exam questions persisting. Specifically, the political science students' assertion that they would have utilised the official complaint procedure had they known about it underscores the importance of transparency and communication about these processes. It shows that there is a willingness among students to engage with these mechanisms when they perceive issues with their study programs. This also implies that the low number of complaints and suggestions may not necessarily indicate satisfaction with the programs, but rather a lack of awareness about the avenues available for voicing concerns or making suggestions.

In conclusion, while the procedures for handling complaints and proposals are in place, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is inconsistent across study programs and is hampered by low student awareness.

1.2.4. Based on the information provided, the UL has established an extensive and comprehensive system for collecting various types of data pertinent to the operation and assessment of its study programmes (SAR, p.46-50). It also organises several surveys that cover different aspects and stages of the student and graduate experience, which should ideally form a strong foundation for continuous improvement of the study programmes.

However, there are concerns regarding the implementation and follow-up procedures associated with these feedback mechanisms. Notably, feedback from employers, a key stakeholder in the efficacy of study programmes, appears to lack a regular and systematic process. The latest survey involving employers took place in 2022 (Studējošo, absolventu un darba devēju aptauju rezultātu analīze), however, there is no evidence indicating that this was part of a consistent feedback initiative or merely an ad hoc event driven by the accreditation needs of the study field. Prior annual reports for 2018 and 2020 (<https://www.lu.lv/par-mums/dokumenti/pasnovertejuma-zinojumi/>) do not contain any reference to soliciting employer feedback, further underscoring this concern. This issue is compounded by an apparent absence of an established mechanism to inform employers about the consideration and possible implementation of their feedback, contributing to a perceived lack of responsiveness and engagement on the part of the UL (July 6-7 on-site visit, discussions with students, graduates and employers).

More alarmingly, this lack of feedback also extends to students and graduates. During the on-site visit they expressed uncertainty about whether their input and suggestions were considered, indicating a lack of communication between the university and these stakeholders. There is a significant missed opportunity here for the university to demonstrate its responsiveness and commitment to continuous improvement.

A positive exception to this pattern appears to be the anthropology programmes, where students indicated that instructors were proactive in adapting courses based on feedback. This practice of active responsiveness should be extended across all programmes at the university. Similarly, sociology employers reported positive interactions with academic staff regarding graduate capabilities (July 6th, on-site visit), showing that individual initiatives can yield beneficial exchanges of information.

In conclusion, while UL has implemented an extensive data collection mechanism and instituted various feedback procedures, the effectiveness of these systems is undermined by a lack of consistent feedback loops and clear communication with stakeholders. In order to fully capitalise on these mechanisms and ensure continuous improvement of the study field, UL needs to improve its responsiveness to feedback from all stakeholders, especially students, graduates, and employers, and ensure they are informed about how their feedback is being used to shape study programmes.

1.2.5. The UL has taken significant steps to ensure that information about its study programmes, key documents, and processes is available to prospective students, current students, and the public through its website, [www.lu.lv](http://www.lu.lv), and <https://www.lu.lv/par-mums/dokumenti/>. Moreover, individual faculties (<https://www.szf.lu.lv/>) have their own respective websites which provide more granular information. The UL and UL Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) faculty websites are available in both Latvian and English, and they contain valuable information about their respective programs.

While 7 of the 8 programmes under evaluation have extensive information available, the doctoral program's information is basic and lacks detail on the overall plan of the programme or courses (<https://www.lu.lv/en/studies/faculties/faculties/faculty-of-social-sciences/doctoral-studies/social-sciences/>).

Nevertheless, even for the rest of the programmes there seems to be a minor issue with visibility and accessibility of certain sections, particularly those that provide more detailed information about the study programmes. For instance, the "additional information about the study programme" section, which contains critical information about each study course, is not easily noticeable, potentially hindering a comprehensive understanding of the courses offered.

In conclusion, while the UL's online presence is generally well structured and informative, some key areas require improvement. These include enhancing the visibility and accessibility of detailed information about the study programmes and ensuring consistency in the quality and depth of the information provided for all programmes.

Despite the strong academic foundation and robust job market for graduates, both the bachelor's and master's programs in Sociology at the UL face a significant challenge in terms of recognition and understanding of the field. The issue has been highlighted by both students and graduates who often find themselves needing to explain their field of study to others. This lack of understanding and visibility can limit the appeal of the programme to prospective students, especially in the current context where students are increasingly gravitating towards STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Greater exposure and understanding of social sciences can serve as a counterbalance, emphasising the importance and relevance of these fields alongside STEM.

A contributing factor to this lack of visibility is the limited media presence of sociologists. In the contemporary media landscape, discussions and analyses of topical societal issues are often dominated by experts from the fields of political science, anthropology, and communication. There are very few sociologists among these high-profile opinion leaders.

The limited media presence of sociologists was confirmed during the on-site assessment visit on 7 July. According to academic staff, public appearances and media engagement are currently low on their list of priorities, given the high workload associated with teaching, research, and project proposal writing.

To address this issue, it is recommended that the study programme and the wider field provide incentives for teaching staff to engage more with the public and media. This could involve writing opinion pieces, commenting on topical issues in the media, or participating in public debates and forums. By doing so, sociologists could help popularise their field, raise its profile, and increase its visibility. This would not only enhance the recognition and understanding of sociology among the general public, but also likely increase the interest of prospective students in sociology programmes, and potentially help to balance the current trend favouring STEM fields.

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

### Conclusions:

The UL has implemented a comprehensive Quality Management System Manual and an ambitious University Strategy, both aiming to elevate the quality and standards of the university and the study fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology.

The Study Field Development Plan for "Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology" at the University of Latvia (UL) is a commendable attempt to evaluate the field's progress through the use of over 30 indicators. The goal is to assess achievements over the years 2020/21, 2023/24, and 2026/2027, which demonstrates a structured and longitudinal approach to improvement.

Despite the clear strategic objectives, it appears that there is insufficient commitment to regular data analysis and feedback incorporation, with the unavailability of annual reports for certain years and inconsistencies in survey procedures. While there are instances of positive feedback mechanisms within certain courses, there is a general lack of awareness among students about their right to officially submit complaints or suggestions.

The Study field has been successful in providing key information about its study programs, relevant documents, and procedures through its main and faculty-specific websites. While information for most programs is extensive, the doctoral programme lacks detailed information.

### Strengths:

- 1) The UL has comprehensive Quality Management protocols in place and clear and logical regulations for the development and review of study programs. It has also developed a comprehensive system for data collection and survey organisation related to its study programs.
- 2) The obligation for academic staff to review and improve their course programs annually is a promising practice for ensuring ongoing quality enhancement.
- 3) UL has an extensive system for data collection and regular surveys that cover various aspects of the student and graduate experience.
- 4) The anthropology programmes show a positive example of active responsiveness to feedback, adapting courses based on student input.
- 5) Positive interactions were reported between sociology employers and academic staff, suggesting effective communication at the individual level.
- 6) The UL and UL FSS faculty websites are comprehensive and multilingual, catering to both Latvian and English-speaking audiences.
- 7) Most programs under evaluation provide extensive online information about the courses and the study programme.

### Weaknesses:

- 1) Despite the University of Latvia's Quality Management Handbook outlining the need for regular review of previous assessment recommendations, the absence of annual reports for the study field for 2019, 2020, and 2021 raises questions about the consistency of implementation and adherence to procedures. This omission, attributed to workload from the accreditation process, potentially undermines the development plan's effectiveness by obstructing progress tracking and strategic adjustments.
- 2) The limited awareness among students regarding their ability to officially submit complaints or suggestions indicates an inadequate dissemination of information, undermining the efficacy of the University's Quality Management System.
- 3) Despite stated obligations, some faculty members are unaware of their responsibility to review and improve their course programs annually, raising doubts about the adherence to the established Quality Management System.
- 4) A lack of systematic communication about whether suggestions from students and employers

were considered could harm stakeholder engagement and trust in the system.

5) The process for collecting and utilising employer feedback lacks regularity and systematic procedures.

6) The online LU.LV information provided for the doctoral programme in Social sciences is basic and lacks detailed insight into the overall plan or the courses offered.

7) Despite a strong job market for graduates, the bachelor's and master's programs in Sociology at the UL struggle with public recognition, largely due to the lack of incentives for teaching staff in the "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology" study field to engage in public and media activities.

## **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

The UL has evidently made significant efforts to ensure the continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of its study fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. These efforts are underscored by the implementation of a comprehensive Quality Management System Manual, a robust University Strategy, and the development of an ambitious Study Field Development Plan. The latter provides a framework for the longitudinal evaluation of the study field through a plethora of indicators.

However, there are indications of inconsistencies in the application of these quality assurance systems. Notably, there is an absence of annual reports for certain years, and the procedures for data analysis and feedback incorporation appear to be irregular. Furthermore, student awareness regarding their ability to submit official complaints or suggestions seems to be lacking, and the procedure for collecting and utilising employer feedback seems to lack regularity and systematicity.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

All the necessary policies and procedures are in place (2 quality management policies adopted by the University and quality management handbook)

- 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

All the necessary policies and procedures are in place (Regulations of Study Programmes and Continuing Education Programmes of the University of Latvia)

- 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

All the necessary procedures are in place( document: Studiju kursu pārbaudījumu organizēšanas kārtība Latvijas Universitātē)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The necessary stipulations regarding to qualifications of the academic staff are in place. Also the procedures or assessing their work quality are in place.

- 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

Data collection procedures appear to be in place, yet there is a lack of systematic analysis and evaluation of this collected data. This is evident in the absence of annual self-assessment reports and the lack of a clear and transparent process for evaluating the implementation of the Study Field Development Plan for "Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology", which stipulates specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

- 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 University of Latvia (UL) has implemented an extensive Quality Management System Manual and an ambitious University Strategy to improve its study fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology, as indicated by the Study Field Development Plan. However, some inconsistencies exist in the application of these quality assurance systems, such as the absence of annual reports in certain years, irregular procedures for data analysis and feedback incorporation, limited student awareness about their ability to submit official complaints or suggestions, and an irregular and non-systematic process for collecting and utilizing employer feedback. Despite UL's commendable efforts to improve its study fields, further consistency in applying these systems and improved communication to students and other stakeholders is necessary for achieving continued improvement and efficient performance of these study fields.

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

#### Analysis

1.3.1. On page 53 of the SAR it is stated that "the UL system for financing the study field and the corresponding study programmes is based on the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 994 of 12.12. 2006 Procedures for Financing Higher Education Institutions and Colleges from the State Budget, Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 445 of 05.07.2016 Regulations on Remuneration of Teachers and other external and internal regulatory enactments." Interviews with programmes' management, Faculty's management, members of the academic staff, students and graduates did not reveal any weakness with regard to the system of determining and redistributing financial support for the implementation of the study field.

Generally, the FSS managed to increase its revenue from 2 946 677 EUR in 2017 to 4 596 799 EUR in 2021 (data were provided upon expert's request). This constitutes a 56% increase, while for tcomparision, World Bank data show that Latvian GDP cumulatively grew by 35% in the same period. The share of research funding was stable in the period from 2017 until 2021 and was on average 20%. However, in 2022 there was a sharp increase in the share of funding which crossed the 30% mark. The preliminary projections for 2023 also envisage a similar share. Therefore, the steady



increase in revenues, especially research grants, make a solid basis for conforming to the criterion of financial sustainability.

For the sake of transposing the above mentioned financial resources into high-quality teaching and research there is a system in place which ensures effective redistribution across various faculties and programmes (SAR, p. 54). The income obtained through state budget and tuition fees undergoes a priori deduction of indirect expenses for centralised costs in accordance with the current redistribution procedure.

When it comes to covering the overhead costs for the implementation of various research projects, academic staff pointed to a generally stimulative policy at the UL level, which withholds 10-15% of awarded grants for the above mentioned purposes.

Faculties are responsible for their own funding within the cycle of yearly budgets. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management. Inquiry into the inner workings of this management nexus revealed that all administrative and financially-related decisions cannot be passed unless the Council of Executive Directors consented to the proposals under consideration. A discussion with the Dean in charge of the FSS revealed that there haven't been any contentious issues in the cooperation with the Executive Director and that programmes are run smoothly.

Actual revenues and expenditures are recorded at the faculty level, without separating results for each programme or study field. The administration of the faculty monitors the outcomes of the study process, the dynamics of the number of students, the balance of the cost of a particular programme with the state budget subsidy and tuition fees and, if required, makes the necessary adjustments in the organisation of the study process to ensure the long-term viability and development of the study field of the faculty.

UL supports financial subscriptions to social science databases, computer equipment, software, multimedia studio materials (SAR, p. 62-64). It also funds development of new study courses and programs, as well as upgrading of existing courses content. Research investments come from EU and national Latvian research programs, effective cooperation agreement programs, and specific UL funding e.g. for biennial Human Development Reports.

UL also has specific funds available for the development of doctoral study programs including financing of hardware and software (e.g. NVivo qualitative data analysis software), guest lecturers and support for PhD students travel to summer schools and conferences. Discussions with students confirmed all of the claims above.

The SAR might offer a more nuanced analysis of the funding trend in per capita terms (either per student or per employee) in the future. Future SARs should from the outset include basic financial data at the Faculty-level (the total funding and its structure, as well as crude expenditure structure with items such as salaries, research equipment, capital investments, stipends, etc.). In that regard, one can infer conclusion as to whether there is sufficient funding for the achievement of stated mission and goals.

1.3.2. UL FSS study and scientific processes take place in 4693.1 m<sup>2</sup> of rooms equipped for teaching, administrative and research processes. There are 25 rooms of different sizes suitable for various groups of students. In the future the UL FSS should report on the ratio of students to existing floor space. Given the declining student population the space should not constitute a constraint. There is plenty of technical equipment such as laptops, PCs, cameras, digital labs, etc. There is a state-of-the-art library with a high level of digitalization. A tour of the premises showed that all claims made in the document are true and valid. Overall, the infrastructure under review is to be assessed as very good. Interviews with key stakeholders underlined that there are plenty of opportunities for acquiring necessary books, databases, software packages, as well as for co-financing conference attendance in country and abroad. Furthermore, it is stated that "the library provides acquisition of information resources on the orders of the UL academic staff, on the proposal

of the students' self-government or the Library staff, which are entered in LUIS and approved by the dean or the executive director of the faculty (SAR, p. 59). This model avoids costly duplications and wasting of resources.

The resources available to the FSS in its new premises are expected to be of even higher quality. The relocation to House of Letters in Torņakalns will provide improved venue for fruitful discussions, enhance interdisciplinarity, ensure sustainable management and progress towards more efficient use of available resources. Closeness to other UL faculties will allow for more cooperation with other units. Six UL faculties of humanities and social sciences will be located in the House of Letters: Faculty of History and Philosophy, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Business, Management and Economics, and Faculty of Theology. Moreover, some of the identified opportunities on page 22 of the report are: possibilities to augment research funding from international funds, to increase the number of foreign exchange students by expanding the number of courses taught in English (1.2.1.) or to develop a joint study programme, awarding the graduates a joint diploma, with other higher education institutions of the Baltic Sea countries (1.2.4).

1.3.3. It is commendable that the UL offers a whole gamut of necessary resources for the fulfilment of its stated mission and objectives. In 2022 Library users had access to 1.8 million items of information resources. The study field "Politics, Sociology and Anthropology" encompasses 26 426 titles in 60 485 printed copies of information, mostly in English, Latvian, Russian and other foreign languages.

Information-related services are provided in the 8 branch libraries of the University of Latvia Library. Natural Sciences Library and House of Science Library offer additional resources which are available to students 24/7. The process of obtaining literature is digitised to a significant extent. There are numerous tutorials on how to improve the use of available resources on behalf of students and teaching staff. E.g. "Step by step: Library for you", "Electronic Union Catalog and Primo for success of your studies", "Get to know e-resources", "E-resources in the field", "Introduction to information literacy", "Introduction to the Scientific Publication Process", "Bibliography and Citation Management Tools", "Using the Web of Science and Scopus Databases in Studies and Research".

The study field profits from subscriptions to multidisciplinary e-resources that include the materials for the study field such as: Cambridge Journals Online, EBSCO Central & Eastern European Academic Source, Emerald eJournals Premier, JSTOR, Oxford Journals Online, OECD iLibrary, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, ProQuest Ebook Central Academic Complete Collection, SAGE Journals, Sage Research Methods, ScienceDirect, Scopus, SpringerLink Contemporary Journals, Web of Science, Wiley Online Library E-Journals Full Collection.

Furthermore, there are numerous databases available to researchers: MarketLine, Jurista Vārds and Izglītība un Kultūra. It is important to note that the UL has access to Orbis - - the database provides statistical information on approximately 300 million global companies, public and private companies. Additionally, there are a myriad of books accessible via VLeBOOKS and ProQuest Ebook Central Academic Complete Collection.

The aforementioned paragraphs show that the UL is committed to the realisation of its strategic plan by increasing the share of e-resources and developing remote access to e-resources. Once a year, the UL Library evaluates and analyses the usability of subscribed databases. A detailed account of the statistics of the usage of various e-resources was provided.

This shows that the UL has a developed procedure for using the existing and obtaining new resources. In a discussion with students and members of the academic staff the issue of potentially insufficient resources have never been seriously raised, which is very commendable.

1.3.4. The study field has a wide range of e-tools and software packages on offer to its employees and students such as: MS Office 365, SPSS, Question Pro, Autodesk, MathWorks MatLAB, Esri ArcGIS,

Apart from MS Teams, the UL also hosts BigBlueButton (hereinafter referred to as the BBB system), which is an open-source web-based online video conferencing system.

In the self-assessment report there is a mention of UL possessing two e-education environments – [studijas.lu.lv](https://studijas.lu.lv) and [edu.lu.lv](https://edu.lu.lv). However, there is little information in substantive terms with regard to the way how those platforms function and how they fit into the implementation of various study programmes. This should be corrected in the future. However, the UL has provided a detailed description of how the open-source e-study environment is being created. The platform in use is Moodle, which fosters a stimulating and interactive learning environment, and enables constant tracking of each student's progress towards outlined goals.

The overall conclusion is that the study field provides information and communication technology solutions which ensure an effective and appropriate study process, as well as that it can be executed remotely. Some students would prefer more room for remote lectures. However, organising hybrid learning sessions would be quite mentally-taxing on members of the academic staff and would negatively impact on the group dynamic. Hence, remote learning should be reserved only for exceptional circumstances.

1.3.5. The study field executed by UL conforms to the notion of transparent, competitive and open tenders, in order to attract talented and motivated personnel. Competitions for elected academic positions are announced openly. Public calls for applications for the elected academic positions, including the function and terms of reference for the respective position, are published on the UL website <https://www.lu.lv/par-mums/vakances/>, internationally advertised vacancies: <https://www.lu.lv/en/about-us/vacancies/>, and also in National Scientific Activity Information System and State Employment Agency of the Republic of Latvia vacancy portal.

According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, teaching staff members are elected for a term of 6 years. At the end of the term, the faculty decides on the need to announce a new competition. As the self-assessment report stipulates: "There are no restrictions regarding the term of office." However, it is necessary to provide a detailed description of the conditions when a new competition is due and when it is not.

The applicants for academic positions must deliver an open lecture, which is evaluated by two reviewers, who issue their opinion on the quality of the lecture. The election procedure is carried out either by the decision-making body of the relevant unit (in the case of assistants, research assistants, researchers, senior researchers, lecturers, and assistant professors – by the respective Faculty Council), however in the case of associate professors and professors – by the relevant Professors Council.

For the sake of passing a more objective and fair decision the lecture should be evaluated by an odd number of reviewers, 3 or 5. This would also avoid the need for reconciliation between two reviewers with dissenting opinions.

From a discussion with the members of the academic staff one could infer that there are mechanisms in place to either reprimand or dismiss non-compliant colleagues, which fosters meritocracy and enables new entrants into the collective, if incumbents perform poorly.

So far, there is a lack of significant presence of FSS in the most prestigious international projects consortiums such as Horizon 2020. This kind of funding might play a vital role in attracting highly-qualified and talented members of the academic staff.

1.3.6. There are several important documents which directly or indirectly ensure the professional and didactic development of the teaching staff: UL Strategy 2021–2027; Republic of Latvia Cabinet regulation No. 569 of 11.09.2018 Regulations on the Necessary Academic and Professional Qualifications of Pedagogues and Professional Competence Development Procedures; Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 129 of 25.02.2021 Procedure for the Evaluation of the Scientific and Pedagogical Qualifications or Artistic Creativity of a Professor or Associate Professor Candidate and

of a Professor or Associate Professor in Office. Apart from Faculty-level initiatives there are also universitywide efforts. The UL Academic Department and the UL Adult Education Centre of the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art (UL AEC) provide informative, consultative and methodological support to the UL academic staff almost on a daily basis. The UL Academic Department conducts an electronic survey of the UL academic staff, assembling information about the current professional development needs of lecturers of all faculties. This was also confirmed during assessment visit in a discussion with the members of the academic staff.

The UL has developed requirements and selection criteria for attracting new doctoral students and teaching staff within the operational programme Growth and Employment SO 8.2.2. One additionally noteworthy initiative implemented refers to the special study programme for heads of study fields and programme directors, which is essential for the unified implementation of study programmes at the UL. This programme was developed and implemented from 12 to 28 October 2021.

Members of the academic staff have access to funds aimed at their professional development such as attending international conferences, workshops, seminars, summer schools, etc. Each member has on average 1000 EUR per year to cover travel expenses, plus funding available through competitive national and international projects. In addition, doctoral students have access to funds which cover language-editing of peer-reviewed articles, as well as participation in international conferences and summer schools.

Table 2.3.6.1. provides a detailed account of activities performed on behalf of academic staff in order to improve on their didactic, teaching, research and other skills. On the positive side, increasingly more personnel decide to improve on their didactic skills necessary to perform well in the higher education setting. Attending national level scientific conferences has also picked up a pace and more than doubled in the reporting period 2016-2021. On the negative side, teaching lectures and study courses within the Erasmus and Erasmus + programmes, as well as participation in Erasmus or other staff development programmes has plummeted from an already low level. Certainly, one cannot neglect the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, but the decline had already started before 2020.

Finally, despite new and praiseworthy initiatives already undertaken for the purpose of improvement, it would be advisable to ensure the unified skill-set for lecturers and young researchers entering the system for the first time. Therefore, some sort of obligatory training should be introduced. Furthermore, the results of teaching staff evaluations should be linked to mandatory participation in didactic seminars, if members of the teaching staff obtain subpar evaluation grades. The panel of experts has noticed a lack of systematic approach in communicating the fulfilment of key performance indicators (e.g. citation list covering separately Google Scholar, Scopus, WoS, various grant types and corresponding sums, as well as completion rates within various programmes). Missing citation metrics precludes fair and transparent evaluation of results and effectiveness of the implemented measures. Therefore, the future self-assessment report should come with more hyperlinks to external documents and web-sources that attest to the fulfilment of required criteria, primarily by relying on obligatory Google Scholar profiles for all members of the academic staff.

1.3.7. Teaching and research within the study field “Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology” is conducted by 96 lecturers, out of which there are 42 of them who are UL academic staff. 56 lecturers hold a PhD. On average, each member of the teaching staff holds 3-5 courses. The research assignments take from 20% to 50% of the overall workload.

Study groups are of reasonable size and the declining number of students lowers the workload of professors. However, this is more than compensated through increased emphasis on research.

One problematic aspect of this part of the self-assessment report is the arbitrary calculation of the expected workload. The document states: “Distribution of workloads is at the discretion of the heads of departments. The workload also includes supervising bachelor's theses (16 h/year), master's

theses (24 h/year) and doctoral theses (50 h/year), as well as reviewing bachelor's, master's and doctoral theses (2–20h/per thesis).” As opposed to this metric, a far more useful metric would be the number of supervised students per study programme.

In the annex one can find a statement of the UL on the respective foreign language skills of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programmes ( Declaration\_English.pdf). The statement claims that academic staff masters at least B2 level of English language proficiency according to the European Language Proficiency Assessment.

Unfortunately, there is no underlying formal proof for this statement. Nonetheless, the level of English language proficiency, both on behalf of UL academic staff, as well as students, was superb during the assessment visit procedure. Therefore, language skills represent an asset in the process of internationalisation. However in the future it is essential to create a separate annex document comprising language credentials for each member of the academic staff, to ensure full transparency. In this document one should enumerate the precise number of published papers in English, the number of presentations in international conferences held in English and the number of lectures in English delivered at foreign or domestic universities. This would create a verifiable track record of English proficiency. This, together with an increased number of courses taught in English will attract more foreign students in search of new educational opportunities.

1.3.8. The students studying at the UL are offered academic support, career development support and psychological support. Student-related issues, their rights and obligations, are handled through the following bodies and offices: Faculty student self-government, Trustee/Curator, Coordinator, study advisor, Mentor, Student Council (SC), Study programme director and Department of Study Service.

The most important body for students is the student self-government that has the right to participate in the decision-making bodies of the UL at all levels, as well as the right to participate as observers in the tests and examinations. The representatives of the student self-government in the UL Senate, the Faculty Council and the Constitutional Assembly have the right of veto in matters affecting the interests of students.

The Career Centre is an especially important entity responsible for students' career development. One interesting facet of its work is the possibility of uploading a CV into its database of users, which connects employers and internship providers with students. The Department of Study Service provides necessary psychological help necessary for promoting mental health in a demanding environment. There are specific provisions for disabled students which are extremely important.

In the future, the electronic resource “E-career” should expand its network with partners in neighbouring states, especially Lithuania and Estonia, so there is enhanced mobility of students looking for internship and work opportunities in the Baltic region.

Discussion with students from various study programmes showed that there is generally plenty of support for students with specific life situations such as sickness, disability, family-related stressful situations, etc. Members of the academic staff are forthcoming and flexible, especially with regard to work-study balance, since a large majority of students are working. In that regard, most classes of MA in Diplomacy and DSP in Social Sciences programmes are held from Thursday to Saturday.

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

Conclusions:

UL FSS possesses necessary resources for implementing the study field. There is an established system for determining and redistributing financial support but the presentation of it in the self-assessment report should be more detailed. The key principles for distributing funding between UL

and its faculties have to be better explained. One also needs to provide the precise amount and composition of funding per every year under review. In the SWOT analysis one of the identified weaknesses is to be found in the insufficient financial provision (low amount of funding allocated from the state budget, insufficient number of students). Unfortunately, the extent of this weakness is not specified, nor is an account available of how it is being alleviated by compensatory measures. The informational resources and infrastructure are in very good standing. There is a wide range of e-resources, as well as a sufficient number of copies of bibliographic units available to researchers, academic staff and students. Local students receive satisfactory support in terms of their career development and psychological support. Having in mind the rising number of international students one needs to ensure that the same applies to this group as well. There is a big discrepancy between incoming and outgoing mobility of students, which highlights the issue of the availability of resources that incentivise mobility in the first place.

The recruitment of teaching staff is formally compliant with the law and internal regulations but more information should be provided on how competitions open and when. There is also evidence that relevant procedures have been improved over the past years. Appointment committees should be odd in number. The workload of the staff should be better explained in terms of contact and teaching hours per staff member. The same should apply to administrative tasks. The supervision work should be expressed in the number of students and not in the number of hours since the latter indicator is difficult to assess.

The UL supports didactic and scientific development of its personnel via multiple initiatives. However, one would profit from a more systematic approach for new entrants into the system, as well for incumbents who are poorly graded by students or are unsuccessful in producing the required level of scientific publications, especially in international peer-reviewed journals. More information could also be provided on the two e-platforms used.

#### Strengths:

- 1) New infrastructure and synergies among structural units unleashed by moving to the new campus.
- 2) The prime position among the the Latvian HEI.
- 3) Very good availability of various e-resources, databases, news outlets and software packages.
- 4) Career Centre and its orientation at forging new linkages between students and the employer community.
- 5) Qualified academic staff with significant experience in research and teaching, equipped with very good foreign language skills.
- 6) Accessibility of tools essential for improving the quality of teaching and related didactic skills.
- 7) Accessibility for disabled students.
- 8) 24/7 library services and plenty of work space.
- 9) Good linkages with major stakeholders in Latvian society (private employers and public institutions).
- 10) Inclusion of academic staff in international epistemic networks such as European Social Survey.
- 11) Very high English proficiency both on behalf of academic staff, as well as students and graduates.

#### Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient track record of outgoing academic mobility both on behalf of academic staff, as well as students (the latter should be weighed against the fact that most students are working and it is difficult for them to reconcile academic mobility and their work-related obligations).
2. Lack of competitive terms for attracting highly-qualified academic personnel from other domestic and foreign HEI.
3. Decline in the number of students, especially in certain study programmes such as Sociology.

4. Insufficient number of highly cited researchers while many members of the academic staff do not even have valid Google Scholar profiles and do not contribute enough to the UL's recognizability.
5. Lack of systematic approach in communicating the fulfilment of key performance indicators (e.g. citation list covering separately Google Scholar, Scopus, WoS, various grant types and corresponding sums, as well as completion rates within various programmes) - the future self-assessment report should come with more hyperlinks to external documents and web-sources that attest to the fulfilment of required criteria.
6. Lack of substantial presence in the most prestigious international projects consortiums such as Horizon 2020.

## 1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

### Analysis

1.4.1. Social sciences are one of the four research directions in the UL Development Strategy, with others being humanities, natural, and technical sciences, and the Development Plan of the field clearly prioritises research visibility and recognition. The directions of the scientific research of the study field correspond to the development goals of the UL, which prioritise developing "scientific excellence", according to the Self-assessment report of the University of Latvia Information on the Higher Education Institution/College, 1.1. According to the SAR, "Scholarly research in the Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology study field is organised according to the UL Strategy 2016–2020, the UL Strategy 2021–2027 and FSS Strategy". The research directions focus on: Latvia in international relations, especially relations with Russia and the new European neighbours; democracy and minorities; regional development in Latvia; media, information and culture (SAR). These directions are fully relevant for the study field and industry, and the Field Development plan pays significant attention to cooperation with the industry. It strives for an increase of "thematic lectures, events with the participation of industry representatives" ( Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology study Field Development Plan, 5.1.2.) which will allow the management to better monitor and respond to the industry needs.

The scientific output of the teaching staff involved in the study field is above average. Out of 82 staff listed in the "List of publications, conferences, projects, artistic creativity and professional experience of teaching staff (2016–April, 2022)", 21 have a Scopus H higher than 1. It should be noted, however, that 30.5 %, or 25 persons, have no Scopus presence at all. One could posit that UL is a leading national research university, yet its outputs and contribution to the international debate in the fields prioritised by the UL tend to be under-ambitious at times, with teaching and research staff opting for local or low impact outputs. This has also been flagged in the Development Plan, which prioritises the increase in "the overall Google Scholar Hirsch Index for 20 elected academic staff in the field" as well as " in articles in Scopus and WoS Q1 and Q2 journals" and by 2027 (p.4.)

The Doctoral study programme in Social sciences serves as an excellent springboard for young researchers, providing them with research, cooperation and internationalisation opportunities. During the on-site visit, the students expressed their satisfaction with the support for conference attendance, as well as the involvement into research work by their supervisors. The programme is thought in both Latvian and English (SAR of the Study Programme "Social Sciences" (51312), 3.1.2., ), allowing your researchers to feel at ease in international academic settings.

1.4.2. With teaching staff focusing on their research expertise during course design and supervision on BA, MA and PhD levels, there is a logical and justified connection between the research goals and the study process. According to the CVs of the teaching and research staff, UL possesses a wide expertise pool, ensuring that the students of all levels can find topics with high-level supervision. It should be noted, however, that on the BA and MA levels, students sporadically report difficulty in writing in critical approaches/feminism/queer studies. It was expressed during assessment visit

interviews that someone wanting to undertake such topics would have to be “brave”.

The LZP experts are in adequate supply (12 out of 21 academic staff, as per HEI other annexes, Experts DSP.pdf). According to the information provided during the on-site visit, the programme management monitors the prolongation of the LZP status, ensuring that the PhD review panels can be compiled and PhD dissertations can be defended.

According to SAR and conversations with teaching and academic staff during assessment visit, research is coordinated by the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI) founded in 2004 (SAR of the study field, 2.4.1). One of the goals of the ASPRI development strategy 2020-2024 is to purposefully and systematically promote the connection of studies and research by involving students. For example, to offer topics of courses, BA, MA theses within the scope of ASPRI research directions, or to offer master's and doctoral level students opportunities to participate in research conducted by the academic staff in case of availability of appropriate funding. The students and graduates' accounts do not amount to systemic involvement in faculty research, but individual cases, especially doctoral level, have been reported.

1.4.3. International cooperation is certainly one of the strengths of the study field. The English language is fully integrated into the research process, and excellent language skills among the students and staff are a testament to the UL community's capacity for internationalisation. During the on-site visit, the management of the study field reported that UL routinely organises guest lectures and supports staff conference visits and research visits. According to the Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology study Field Development Plan (Mandatory Annexes, II - Description of the Study Field - 2.1. Management of the Study Field), the management of the study field is planning to increase regular organisation of international events (workshops, seminars, guest lectures, etc.) in the study field and related research to at least 3 per year by 2026/2027. Perhaps the quantitative goals set in the plan could be higher, but the approach is certainly a testament to international cooperation being purposefully developed in the field. As for incoming mobility, according to Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of lecturers of the UL study field “Sociology, Political science, Anthropology” (Mandatory Annexes, II - Description of the Study Field - 2.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation), before the COVID-19 pandemic, there would be 1-2, but not higher than 4, incoming lecturers in Political science and Sociology. As there is no data provided on 2022/2023 and 2023/2024, the current situation is difficult to determine, still, the management of the field shared the keenness to attract more visible international staff for stays at the UL with the panel, and expressed optimism that the new premises at Torņakalna with excellent workspaces will prove to be a good value-added in such invitations.

As to the outward mobility, however, there seems to be a disconnect between the opportunities provided and the trips taken. Senior researchers and academic staff have sabbatical opportunities and are represented in world's leading research centres as visiting fellows, e.g., as the panel was informed during the meeting at the HEI, Daunis Auers' upcoming sabbatical at University of Washington. Still, the overall numbers of outward mobility seem very low: according to Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of lecturers of the UL study field “Sociology, Political science, Anthropology” (Mandatory Annexes, II - Description of the Study Field - 2.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation), before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were a maximum of 3 total outgoing researchers per year in Political science and Sociology. During the pandemic, understandably, the number dropped to 0, and, as there is no data provided on 2022/2023 and 2023/2024, the current situation is difficult to determine. At the meeting with the teaching staff during the on-site visit, it was confirmed that the staff is not interested/does not see it as feasible to engage in outward mobility, stating financial, long term workload (“I have to teach a course”) and personal constraints. Participation in international research projects is currently not visible enough, as researchers do not have information on their project participation linked to their work profiles on the UN website. Currently, it is not evident as to who is involved in international consortia, and this information



would certainly contribute to the prestige of the HEI. That can be easily solved by updating the UL website with relevant information or by introducing a dedicated science portal.

1.4.4. According to the on-site meeting with the UL management, as well as the meeting with members of the group responsible for the preparation of the SAR and with the director of the study field, the UL is incentivising teaching staff to be more involved in scientific research. The policies of financial bonuses, including for research outputs and Horizon project applications, are in place – a one-time bonus per article indexed with Scopus or Web of Science was mentioned during the meeting with the teaching staff, and the teaching staff as well as management confirmed financial bonuses for the preparation of a Horizon project application within an international consortium, if the application passes the quality threshold but is not successful. The SAR states that there will be five grants of EUR 6500 each in 2023 “for articles to be published in journals indexed to the Web of Science or Scopus databases, and with an impact factor no lower than the average for the field of research”. International academic travel is also supported, as “FSS research staff (lead researchers, researchers, research assistants), can apply for support for travel expenses to international conferences and seminars in Latvia and abroad, covering travel, accommodation and per diem conference expenses up to EUR 1000 per year.” (SAR of the study field, 2.4.4.) This policy appears to be effective, as the number of Publications of the academic staff of the study field “Sociology, Political science, Anthropology” that have been indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, ERIH+ databases (Mandatory Annexes, II - Description of the Study Field - 2.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation, Data table.pdf) has been steadily increasing on a year-by-year basis with 58 publications in 2016 and 80 publications in 2021 (latest data on 2022 has not been included). Still, it should be noted that according to the SWOT analysis, the contribution to the international debate in the fields prioritised by the UL is under-ambitious, with teaching and research staff opting for local or low impact publishing outlets.

It appears that the strategic direction towards international projects and the support for staff, as well as the fact that the academic staff reports a significant part of their income being ensured via project participation, has led to an increase in research project participation (Mandatory Annexes, II - Description of the Study Field - 2.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation, Data table.pdf), with 31 international projects in 2016 versus 60 international projects in 2021 (latest data on 2022 has not been included).

Around 25% of teaching staff 21 have a Scopus H higher than 1. It should be noted, however, a search of the teaching staff names (Biographies of the teaching staff members, Mandatory Annexes, II - Description of the Study Field - 2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field) ) in scientific databases reveals that over 30% of the teaching staff have no Scopus presence, and Google Scholar presence is not a universal standard among staff.

1.4.5. SAR states that BA “students can choose the topics of their course papers ... under the direction of an academic member of staff with research interests in this area, and ideally develop the theme through several course papers to the bachelors dissertation level”. On the BA and MA level, according to SAR, the students “receive lists of relevant research topics”. The on-site interviews with study field management and staff also confirmed that researchers' fields of expertise are taken into account during teaching and scientific supervision task allocation. The students have opportunities to volunteer as data collectors in research projects. (SAR of the study field, 2.4.5.). The SAR mentions BA students' in Sociology participation in a 2018 project commissioned by the Department of Education, Culture and Sports of the Riga City Council, along with other examples.

On the PhD level, the students “can receive support for research activities such as undertaking new research, conference participating and publication” (SAR of the study field, 2.4.5.). These opportunities are being used – during the on-site meetings, one student reported being supported for a summer school at Sciences Po, and another testified to having received travel funding for a

conference.

During the on-site visit, however, PhD students reported low income and decreased competitiveness due to structural issues on the national level, including the PhD financing model. As the stipend for PhD students does not offer sufficient means for survival, students report having to take up work to finance their livelihood, which in turn impacts their scientific and academic outputs. As one student put it: “Yes, I took on a part-time job, but the part time job still takes up 80% of my time.” The students expressed that they cannot compete with the scientific outputs of fully financed PhD students in other countries, who are “doing this every day from nine to five, while we do this as a hobby after hours”.

Overall, BA, MA and PhD programmes of the study field offer sufficient opportunities for students to pursue research goals.

1.4.6. The SAR mentions the PhD programme “Social sciences”, licensed in 2021, as an example of innovation, as it consolidates the resources in line with good international practices (SAR of the study field, 2.4.6.). The management of the study field informed the panel during the on-site visit that the consolidation introduces more opportunity for social research interdisciplinarity.

However, issues in innovative content still remain, specifically, during the on-site interviews, BA and MA students reported sporadic difficulty in writing in critical approaches/feminism/queer studies, indicating that such studies are yet to be normalised within the academic culture of the HEI.

During the on-site tour of the facilities, the panel determined that UL provides technologically innovative solutions within the study field: multimedia lab with up-to-date recording technology and soundproof premises is available for students, and is integrated into the study process, as tasks for students include innovative production of research and analytical video content (examples demonstrated by study field director). Accessible computer rooms with computers equipped with advanced research and design software are located on the premises where the lectures of the study field are taking place. The tour of the library showed the availability of up-to-date database subscriptions. The library has a sufficient budget for replenishment of literature, with preference given to e-resources, and guidance and classes are offered for staff and student instruction. The new premises in Torņakalns (reportedly upcoming Summer 2024) will provide more incentives and innovative solutions for the staff and students alike. All of the above has a positive impact on the research outputs and the study process.

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

Conclusions:

The study field has a good footing in the research directions prioritised by the UL and the study field Development Plan, which are also relevant for the study field and industry on the national level.

UL strives to integrate scientific research in the study process of the study programmes of all levels. International cooperation is being developed adequately. Teaching staff and PhD students are being integrated into research networks domestically and internationally. Students of BA and MA levels also are provided with opportunities for research, according to the specialisation of the teaching staff. Although the structural challenges of the social sciences field are prevalent, including the low income of the teaching staff and PhD students, and the UL lacks the resources to mitigate them, this point should not be regarded as a weakness of the study field.

Strengths:

- 1) Around 25% of teaching staff 21 have a Scopus H higher than 1.
- 2) Students of all levels can find topics with high-level supervision.
- 3) Research outputs are being financially incentivised, leading to a higher output.
- 4) The research process is internationalised, English language is fully integrated into the research

process, with students and staff demonstrating excellent language skills.

5) The Doctoral study programme in Social sciences serves as an excellent springboard for young researchers, providing them with interdisciplinary research, cooperation and internationalisation opportunities.

6) LZP experts are in adequate supply (12 out of 21 academic staff)

Weaknesses:

1) Over 30% of the teaching staff have no Scopus presence, and Google Scholar presence is not universal among staff.

2) Contribution to the international debate in the fields prioritised by the UL is under-ambitious, with teaching and research staff opting for local or low impact publishing outlets.

3) BA and MA students sporadically report difficulty in writing in critical approaches/feminism/queer studies, indicating that such studies are yet to be normalised within the academic culture of the HEI.

## 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:** Fully compliant

UL demonstrates compliance among all criteria of scientific research. Minor weaknesses have been identified in research visibility, but they do not affect the requirements.

## 1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

### Analysis

1.5.1. During the on-site interviews it was established that the cooperation partners are selected based on the specific features of the study field and relevant study programmes, including the Latvian ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, which are perfectly matched for a graduate skillset in political science and diplomacy, as well as sociological companies, e.g., Central Statistical Bureau, SKDS Research Centre, et.al., which are perfectly matched for a graduate skillset in sociology and social anthropology. The employers representing the state sector, municipalities and NGOs have shown that the study field is highly regarded and the graduates are sought after in the labour market. Apart from the stakeholders already mentioned, The SAR of the study field (2.5.1) mentions the Latvian Sociological Association (LSA), Āgenskalns neighbourhood association, the Museum and Research Centre "Latvians Abroad" among its cooperation partners in teaching, research projects, and social outreach.

During the on-site visit, the management of the study field expressed an understanding of the need for cooperation between the study field and Latvia's industry leaders by planning to increase the number of the final papers performed in cooperation with companies (Development Plan, p.11). Students report cases when their scientific supervisors offer research topics in line with industry needs – specifically in Sociology, a student testified that her supervisor offered her a specific topic a sociological research company was interested in, and put her in touch with the company. Some PhD graduates are employed at the scientific institutes within the UL. Such cooperation contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programmes.

There appears to be no instituted internship system, and the knowledge about internship opportunities among the students are largely lacking. Perhaps outside factors, including the Covid pandemic, have contributed to this. However, on an individual level, the students and graduates have expressed that their supervisors have contacts with leading social polling and research

companies, which match the framework of the study field, and students can use these contacts to contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and relevant study programmes.

According to II - Description of the Study Field - 2.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation, the study field, List of cooperation agreements in the study field "Sociology, Political science, Anthropology", available in the Study field annexes, HEI is involved in cooperation with another HEI in Latvia, specifically via the Cultural and Social Anthropology Master's programme of Anthropology student exchange agreement between Riga Stradiņš University and University of Latvia.

Cooperation with other HEIs in Latvia is being achieved via joint projects, and the "Master's programme of Anthropology student exchange agreement between Riga Stradiņš University and University of Latvia" is an excellent example of synergising the niche fields of UL with other HEIs. This process should be deepened.

1.5.2. According to II - Description of the Study Field - 2.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation, the study field, List of cooperation agreements in the study field "Sociology, Political science, Anthropology", available in the Study field annexes, the HEI has 8 general agreements applicable to all study programmes in Political science (Political science and Diplomacy) including such prestigious institutions as Humboldt- Universität zu Berlin and University of Helsinki, as well as 50 agreements specifically in Political science, 2 in Diplomacy, 1 in Public Administration, 3 in International relations. There are 8 general agreements applicable to all study programmes in Sociology, additional 4 in Sociology and Culture Studies, and 10 in Sociology, including Universität Leipzig and several regional universities, such as university of Tartu. In Cultural and Social Anthropology there are 12 universities from abroad that have cooperation agreements with the HEI. It should be noted, however, that the data should be reviewed and updated more frequently, as there are currently 31 agreements listed in the List of cooperation agreements that ran out in 2022.

According to the interviews with students, graduates and staff during the on-site visit, as well as the course mapping for BA and MA programmes of the field, the study field has a strong practical competence in supranational institutions, including EU, NATO, OECD, and UN, transferring the knowledge and networks onto the learning outcomes. All levels of students are involved in visits to EU institutions, and the experience is beneficial to them in the European and international labour markets. Students of Sociology 45314, Political Science 45312, Social Sciences 51312 programmes specifically mentioned their involvement in research for international organisations.

1.5.3. In recruiting teaching staff from abroad, UL relies on the framework of the Erasmus+ programme as well as the professional contacts of local academic staff (SAR of the study field, 2.5.3). Incoming teaching staff mobility is adequate, with a total of 16 academic staff involved in incoming mobility in 2022/2023 ("Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of lecturers of the UL study field "Sociology, Political science, Anthropology"", Mobility of lecturers.pdf). The study field has an impressive 107 cooperation agreements with HEIs abroad, and the list includes top universities in the world (several contracts are running out in 2023, hopefully, to be renewed). The system appears to be effective.

Outgoing mobility of staff has been quite low, ranging from 0 to 3 in the period 2013/2014-2020/2021 according to the "Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of lecturers of the UL study field "Sociology, Political science, Anthropology"", still, apart from the years of the COVID pandemic, in most cases at least one of the staff of each sub-field is abroad. "Anthropology" had comparatively higher outgoing and incoming staff mobility numbers in the period 2014-2018, explained by project participation: "CSA lecturers participate in the Wenner Gren Institutional Development Project "Development of the Anthropology Sector" in the Baltic States", in cooperation with the University of Latvia, Riga Stradiņš University, Tallinn University, Vytautas Magnus University and the University of Manchester. In 2017, the University of Tartu also joined. As part of the project,

3 exchange visits per year were organised.” (“Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of lecturers of the UL study field “Sociology, Political science, Anthropology””, Mobility of lecturers.pdf, Study field “Anthropology”). This is certainly an example of added value to the implementation of the study process and the quality of studies.

Incoming student mobility is adequate, especially for the Bachelor Study Programme “Political Science”, with 110 total students from abroad involved in the programme in 2021/2022 – a record number and an increase from 84 students in 2020/2021 (Mandatory annexes, Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of students of the UL study field “Sociology, Political science, Anthropology”, Mobility data.pdf). Students from Ukraine studying in the programme via bilateral cooperation channels account for 87 spots. Bachelor’s Study Programme “Sociology” is in a different situation, with only 1 incoming student in 2021/2022, Whereas Bachelor’s Study Programme “Cultural And Social Anthropology” having six incoming students. The reasons for such inconsistency between the programmes should be further examined. It is alarming that all Master’s study programmes, with the exception of six students in the Master’s Study Programme “Cultural And Social Anthropology”, have 0 incoming students from abroad in the period.

As for outgoing student mobility, credit points are easily transferred, and the teaching staff is very supportive of students involved in exchange programmes, as testified by students and staff during the on-site meetings. Still, the number of students taking these opportunities is quite low, with 0 to 2 students on average per programme (BSP “Political science” is a leader with 5 outgoing students), in the period 2021-2022, showing that there has not been a significant increase in outward student mobility since 2013/2014.

Although the opportunities the UL provides are excellent, during the interviews with the students, some cite work constraints, while others – the high quality of the programme at home (especially Anthropology) as reasons for not engaging in mobility. On the bright side, according to the interviews during the assessment visit with students, graduates, and teaching staff, graduates apply to universities abroad, with BA graduates accepted to state funded programmes to Lund, Berlin, Amsterdam, Helsinki, and other international schools (especially Anthropology graduates). The degrees issued by the UL in this study field are internationally valued. Returnees teach, and attract European structural funds for this purpose.

The mobility of the PhD students should be lauded, as they are actively participating in outgoing exchanges, summer schools, conferences and other forms of internationalisation at world's leading universities.

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

### **Conclusions:**

In general, the study field is highly regarded among employers, and demonstrates a strong practical competence in supranational institutions. The study field attracts teaching staff from abroad. There are 107 cooperation agreements with top universities worldwide. Outgoing mobility of staff has been low, but at least one staff member from each sub-field has been abroad recently. Credit points are easily transferred, and the teaching staff supports students involved in exchange programs, yet there is limited utilisation of outgoing mobility opportunities by BA and MA students. Degrees issued by the UL in this study field are internationally valued – there is a higher number of incoming students. PhD students actively participate in outgoing exchanges, summer schools, conferences, and other forms of internationalisation at leading universities worldwide.

### **Strengths:**

- 1) Also due to the cooperation of the HEI with the industry, graduates are sought after by the top employers within the state sector, in the private sector, and among NGOs.
- 2) Scientific supervisors offer student research topics in line with industry needs.

- 3) Cooperation agreements with world's leading universities are in place.
- 4) Strong competence in and practical cooperation with supranational institutions (EU, NATO, OECD, UN).

Weaknesses:

- 1) Internship opportunities are sporadic and not well-advertised among students.
- 2) The excellent opportunities for student and staff mobility are not being sufficiently used.
- 3) The data on the cooperation agreements has not been updated, containing 31 agreements that ran out in 2022.
- 4) Incoming student mobility numbers are inconsistent across comparable study programmes BSP "Political science" and BSP "Sociology".

### **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:** Fully compliant

Cooperation with local and international organisations on all levels is fully compliant with the requirements. Minor weaknesses have been identified, but they do not affect the evaluation of the requirement.

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

### **Analysis**

1.6.1. In total, 19 recommendations were developed in the previous assessment procedure (annex Recommendations.pdf).

In the political science and sociology programmes, both of the two recommendations given during the last accreditation exercise were promptly acted upon, with investments made in data analysis resources and the expansion of study programme e-resources.

The anthropology programmes, which received a total of twelve recommendations, have enacted ten of them successfully. The remaining two were related to the inclusion of modules from other programmes, which falls outside the competence of the programme director and study field council. Actions have been taken towards programme redesign, student support and dropout prevention, research capacity enhancement, employer engagement, and the development of a mentoring system for new lecturers. Notably, during an on-site visit (July 7th, 2023), students and graduates of the Anthropology programme expressed particular appreciation for the mentoring programme for first-year students and a dedicated course on careers in Anthropology.

Finally, the Doctoral Study Programme (DSP) in Social Sciences addressed all five recommendations provided during the licensing process. This includes formalising rules and procedures for recruitment and funding, updating course descriptions to address content fragmentation, informing stakeholders about changes in the DSPs and allowing students to gain specialised knowledge and attract more foreign lecturers (still in process).

In the course of previous evaluations, one of the recommendations emphasised the need to integrate employers into the implementation of the study process. While this is still in progress, the Study Field Development Plan (Studiju virziena "Socioloģija, politoloģija, antropoloģija" attīstības plāns) has identified two crucial tasks to be accomplished in this regard:

- 1) To organise events in collaboration with companies and institutions related to internships, final work and research implementation. By the 2023/2024 academic year, there should be at least five

final works implemented in collaboration with companies.

2) To arrange guest lectures within the study course from industry professionals. In the 2023/2024 academic year, there should be 21 such guest lectures.

These actions are planned to foster closer ties between academia and industry, allowing students to gain practical insights and develop industry-relevant skills. It is essential to underscore that not only the implementation of these commitments but also their monitoring is of utmost importance. These steps will also further the ongoing effort to integrate employers into the educational process.

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

Conclusions:

In conclusion, the implementation of recommendations from the previous assessment is largely effective, with 17 out of the 19 recommendations acted upon across the political science, sociology, anthropology programmes, and the Doctoral Study Programme in Social Sciences. Two recommendations concerning the inclusion of modules from other programmes in anthropology have not been enacted due to jurisdictional constraints.

Strengths:

1) Prompt response to recommendations from the previous assessment in political science and sociology programmes, and notable progress in the anthropology programme, particularly the appreciated mentorship for first-year students and the career-focused course.

Weaknesses:

1) The integration of employers into the Doctoral studies programme, though outlined in the Study Field Development Plan, remains an ongoing process. The study programme director should implement and monitor the planned activities, including collaboration with companies and arranging guest lectures from industry professionals, to successfully address this recommendation. Regular review and tracking of these initiatives is necessary to ensure their effective implementation and relevance to the evolving industry standards and practices.

### **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 the recommendations that could have been implemented, were implemented.

### **1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field**

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

1) Enhance efforts at state lobbying towards improving state budget allocation to ease dependence on external sources and pressure on the types of research work.

2) Enhance efforts at state lobbying towards retitling the Anthropology degree to more accurately reflect the content of the studies.

- 3) All members of the academic staff should have valid Google Scholar profiles. Future SARs should provide the option for checking citation scores of every single member of academic staff (hyperlinks to Google Scholar), as well as to report on the overall citation statistics on a programme basis (WoS and Scopus)
- 4) The readability and user-friendliness of SARs should be improved by providing it with hyperlinks to corresponding external documents and web sources. Enhance the information provided online (lu.lv website) for the doctoral program, offering more detailed insights into the overall plan and the courses offered.
- 5) Financial reporting needs to be improved by providing more nuanced overview of total revenue and expenditure, as well as their structure, at least on a Faculty level, in order to more easily assess overall financial context and the financial underpinning of available resources
- 6) Enable online access to summaries of defended BA and MA theses in Latvian and English.
- 7) Improve study field's research project transparency: Make project-related information, including project descriptions, funding sources, academic staff involvement, and project durations, available on the UL or Social Sciences faculty websites.
- 8) Ensure consistent application of the Quality Management Handbook regulations, especially regarding annual reviews of the study field's performance and progress tracking.
- 9) More opportunities should be given to students interested in writing in critical approaches/feminism/queer studies, and such fields of inquiry should be normalised within the academic culture of the HEI.
- 10) Educate students about their rights to submit official complaints or suggestions, as this is a key component in the continuous improvement of the study field.
- 11) Establish regular and systematic processes for the collection and utilisation of employer feedback with clear communication back to employers about how their feedback has been implemented.
- 12) Ensure that academic staff complies with the obligation to annually review and improve their course programs.
- 13) Conduct training sessions for academic staff to increase awareness and understanding of Generative AI and its implications for academic evaluations. Begin to revise student assessment requirements to include tasks that cannot be easily manipulated by Generative AI.

### Long-term recommendations

- 1) Increase participation in the most prestigious international project consortiums such as Horizon Europe.
- 2) Increase participation in incoming and outgoing academic mobility, both on behalf of students as well as members of the academic staff.
- 3) More horizontal academic integration would be preferable by synergising the niche fields of UL with other HEIs.
- 4) Extend the practice of active responsiveness to feedback, currently seen in the anthropology programs, to all other programs.



- 5) Encourage and facilitate more interactions between academic staff and employers across all study fields.
- 6) In order to promote the study field, provide incentives for teaching staff to engage more with the public and media. This could involve writing opinion pieces, commenting on topical issues in the media, or participating in public debates and forums.
- 7) Monitor the evolution of AI technologies and continually update training for academic staff to ensure they stay informed about the latest developments. Continue to refine and adapt student assessment requirements as necessary to counteract the use of advanced AI technologies.
- 8) Incorporate the use of AI technologies into the curriculum, teaching students how to use these tools effectively and ethically in their research and future work.
- 9) Introduce EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.
- 10) Consider the possibility of creating a specialised committee for each study programme, which would take care of the affairs of every particular programme.

## **II - "Political Science" ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Political Science" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

2.1.1. According to the programme SAR 3.1.2., the “title of the study programme has been formulated according to the guidelines provided by the Cabinet of Ministers 13 May 2017 decree number 322 “Regulations on Latvia’s education classification” and according to the thematic groups identified in the Latvian education classification. Political science is part of the wider group of social sciences, and the degree awarded after completion of studies corresponds to the study direction “Sociology, political science and anthropology”, therefore, the code of the BSP Political Science is in compliance with the study field of “Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology” according to the Cabinet of Ministers decree number 322 “Regulations on Latvia’s education classification”. The goal stated in the parameters of the academic bachelor study programme “Political Science (43312)” (BSP Political Science), “BSP Political Science prepares professionals with an in-depth knowledge of political science and its sub-disciplines”. The SAR of the BSP Political Science clearly defines the subsectors to be political theory, comparative politics, international policy, and public politics and governance, (SAR, 3.1.2.). This aligns with the expectations of the broader field of political science. The title “Political Science” is in line with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation 264 “Regulations on the profession classification, professions in line with basic missions and fundamental qualification requirements”, with the profession “political scientist” corresponding to Group 2633 “Philosophers, Historians and Political scientists”. According to Group 2633 description “305. Those employed in the professions of the separate group ... carry out scientific research work, describing past events and activities, looking at the development of social and economic structures, cultural and political institutes, and use the acquired knowledge as a basis for state, diplomatic and similar policies.” The results of the BSP Political Science are closely aligned with this legal description of the profession, constituting: “major theories and concepts of political science, major issues addressed by political theory, and subfields of political science; the politics of Latvia, the European Union and other countries; various policy research approaches and methods, comparison of different opinions on theoretical and practical issues in political science, convert acquired knowledge to skills to implement theoretically and empirically oriented research, use quantitative and qualitative

methods; preparation of policy planning documents using knowledge of public administration organisations' objectives, development plans, budgeting principles and domestic and international political contexts; communicate research findings in writing and present them orally, respond to criticism and observe standards of academic ethics; assessment and independent interpretation of recent developments in political science and understanding the social impact of political decisions; .. understand the social impact of professional activities; development of proposals for the improvement of policies, public participation, and the quality of the implementation of regulatory acts and policies at the governmental and municipal levels of public administration." (Parameters of the study programme).

2.1.2. The title BSP "Political Science" and its code (43312) are interrelated with the degree "Bachelor's degree of Social Sciences in Political Science" (Parameters of the Study programme) to be obtained. The goal of the BSP "Political Science" is "prepare professionals with an in-depth knowledge of political science and its sub-disciplines. It gives the necessary skills and competences to apply this knowledge to their professional activities in the national, municipal, non-governmental and private sectors." (Parameters of the study programme). This corresponds to the Mission of the UL, which states "UL contributes to global science, higher education, knowledge, technology transfer and innovation, and ensures the growth of Latvian democracy and culture, the development of the Latvian language and the prosperity of the national economy." (SAR of the Study field, 1.1.) The tasks and results listed in the Parameters of the BSP "Political Science" also feed back into the title, the degree, and the goal of the programme and the mission of the UL. It is safe to conclude that the BSP "Political Science" indications align well with each other.

The Parameters of the BSP "Political Science" list bachelor thesis as the final examination of the study programme, which is in line with the Higher Education Law 58.1. According to the SAR of the BSP Political Science, the courses included in the BSP "Political Science" cover the description of qualifications provided by the Cabinet of Ministers regulation 240, and the documents provided in the programme Annexes, including the Mapping of the Study Courses ( Mapping of the study courses POL BSP.xlsx) and descriptions of the Study courses/modules (Study courses POL BSP.pdf) second this assessment. Courses include: European Union I: Integration and Institutions; European union II: Policies and Decision-making; Basics of Economic Theory; Introduction to Latvian Legal System; Introduction to Political Science; Introduction to public administration; Introduction to Sociology; Introduction to International Politics; Introduction to Political Science Studies; Latvia's Politics (Political system); Research Methods in Social Sciences; Policy Analysis; Political Theory; History of Political Ideas; Research Methods in Political Science; Local governance (Programme annexes, Study courses POL BSP.pdf). The students and graduates attest to a rich programme with particular emphasis on the 1st semester of studies. One notices a slight overlap in course names (Introduction to Political Science, Introduction to Political Science Studies) and the covered topics (e.g., methods form part of several courses), still, this does not amount to the level of a weakness.

The duration of the full time studies within the BSP "Political Science" is 3 years, and 120 CP are provided. The BSP "Political Science" is available in Latvian, which is reasonable and justified given the mission of the UL, still, during the on-site visit the academic staff and students underscored the high level of integration of the English language into the programme, with many course readings and all guest lectures provided in English and all staff having a sufficient command of English. This, according to the students, allows for a successful integration of incoming students from abroad into the BSP "Political Science".

2.1.3. According to SAR, as well as the information provided by the BSP Political Science management during the assessment visit, "the goal, missions and learning outcomes of BSP Political Science" have been clarified (SAR of the Study Programme "Political Science" (43312), 3.1.). The implemented minor changes are well justified.

2.1.4. The general conclusion on the economic and social justification of BSP Political Science is that the programme is necessary, based on the needs of public administration for highly qualified employees with in-depth knowledge in domestic politics, international relations and foreign policy. According to SAR, a graduate survey of 2021 showed that “82% said that it helped them to gain new knowledge and skills, 60% argued that their competitiveness was higher than comparable graduates of other university programmes. ... 60% said that it prepared them well for the labour market, 87% said that the process facilitated the development of characteristics which served them well in the labour market, 67% believed that the education helped them to shape their career, and 65% said that they used what they learned during the programme at work. 61% of respondents have spent at least some time working in a sector that relates to the study programme.” (SAR of the BSP Political Science, 3.1.3.) According to the “Student statistics in the bachelor study programme “Political science””, matriculation of the BSP Political Science has been steady, being around 40 students per year. Half of the matriculants are self-financed, attesting to the prestige of the BSP Political Science. The interviews during the on-site visit show that the graduates of the BSP “Political Science” enjoy high employability. All MA level students, who are graduates of the BSP Political Science, have been employed right after graduation by state institutions (incl. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence), and the private sector (public relations companies as well as media were mentioned). The employers underscored the good preparedness of the BSP Political Science graduates for work situations and the high applicability of the knowledge obtained during the course of the programme – as one graduate put it, “we can work anywhere and do anything well”. During the interviews, none of the students or graduates mentioned any difficulty in finding employment upon graduation from the BSP “Political Science”.

2.1.5. N/A

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

Conclusions:

The BSP Political Science aligns with the study field of "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". The title, code, degree aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements of the BSP Political Science are interconnected and in line with the UL Mission. The courses included in the programme, as described in the SAR, correspond to the qualifications outlined in the Cabinet of Ministers regulation. Employers in the state, private, and NGO sectors highly value graduates of the programme, indicating its strong reputation. It is noteworthy that half of the matriculants are self-financed, indicating the programme's prestige.

Strengths:

- 1) The BSP Political Science is strongly rooted in the study field.
- 2) The BSP Political Science provides a wide set of courses and is highly informative.
- 3) The graduates have good employment opportunities in the state, private, and NGO sectors.

Weaknesses:

none

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The content of the BSP Political Science is topical, because the study courses/modules are orientated to the analysis of current functioning political systems, political institutions, political parties, governments, movements and trends of the global international system. The content of the

study courses / modules is interconnected. While it includes many study courses, their content strictly applies to politics, political studies and important neighbouring disciplines as Law and Economics. At the same time the content of the BSP Political Science is complementary, because it includes all four of the most important subsectors in the political studies: political theory, comparative politics, international relations, and public policy & governance. The BSP Political Science also includes relevant courses/modules, which are designed to cover quantitative and qualitative research methods. In general the BSP Political Science complies with standards that one would expect to find in similar programmes at comparable universities. For this reason the content of the BSP Political Science corresponds to the main goal of the BSP Political Science to prepare professionals with an in-depth knowledge of political science and its subdisciplines. During assessment visit interviews with graduates and students of the BSP Political Science generally confirmed that the main learning outcomes of acquiring the skills and competences needed by graduates for professional activities are successfully implemented. Respectively the interviews with employers confirmed that the needs of the industry and labour market also are met quite adequately.

The conclusion, which is derived from both the on-site visit conducted on 6-7 June and the analysis of documents collecting student, graduate, and employer feedback (see document "Studējošo, absolventu un darba devēju aptauju rezultātu analīze" and study field assessment reports for 2018 and 2020), indicates a wish among these stakeholders to incorporate elements into the curriculum that would provide a better understanding of the workings of the public sector. Given that a significant number of BSP Political Science graduates find employment in government and municipal roles, there is a desire for more exposure to the legal texts underpinning public administration, the production of policy-oriented documents, and the conduct of data analysis specifically for public policy purposes rather than for purely scientific ends. This feedback suggests that enhancing the curriculum to better align with the practical realities and demands of the public sector could equip graduates more effectively for these roles.

However, at the same time, the graduates and students expressed some noteworthy observations and comments about the BSP Political Science, which would be valuable for BSP Political Science managers to take into account. Basically the above-mentioned respondents expressed concerns with high intensity (too many readings) and limited flexibility (the offered specialisations either in public policy & administration or in international relations was rather a formality) of the BSP Political Science. Of course, these comments should be viewed with caution, because, as it was clearly revealed in the SAR, the BSP Political Science fully complies with national regulations (state education standard, annex: Education standard POL BSP.pdf). However it is worth noting that the BSP Political Science is rather "conservative" in comparison to the Education standard. While the Education standard says that the mandatory part of the programmes should be no less than 50 CP, this BSP Political Science has the mandatory part, which consists of 72 CP. The same for restrictive electives, which consist of 46 CP against 20 CP of the requirements in the standard. And free electives are almost not present in the BSP Political Science at all (only 4 CP). In this case, the Expert Panel doubts whether it is necessary for the program to have such a large mandatory part. Especially since some courses (e.g. "Research Methods in Political Science" and "Research Methods in Social Sciences") obviously overlap.

BSP Political Science managers during the assessment visit explained to the expert panel that the relatively limited number of Free Electives was determined by objective conditions. The FSS was located quite remotely from other Faculties of the University, so it would be difficult for students to attend elective courses in other Faculties. Nevertheless, the panel would like to recommend revision of the BSP Political Science design in order to make it more "liberal" by devoting a larger part of the BSP Political Science for Free Electives and provide students with the conditions not only to delve deeper into basics of political science, but also to go "out of box" and apply other critical approaches. This can be partially implemented even within the boundaries of the Faculty of Social

Sciences. The expert panel positively assesses that the content of the study programme already includes a sociology component. But at the same time, it has to be noted that the programme can benefit from greater integration within Anthropology study programmes. And from next year, when the Faculty will move to new premises, even greater opportunities will open up to make greater use of the fact that the FSS is part of a larger entity of the University of Latvia.

#### 2.2.2. N/A

2.2.3. The study implementation methods of the BSP Political Science beyond doubt contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the BSP Political Science. The classical methods are adopted in this regard. Each course has lectures and seminars. The role and involvement of students increases at each level of the BSP Political Science. Also of great importance is independent work which students are using for preparing for seminars and writing the papers that are required in the courses. The minimum literature that is to be read is prepared for each class, including lectures.

However, after the interviews during the assessment visit with managers, students and graduates of the BSP Political Science there are certain doubts whether the so-called "student-centred approach" is really well thought out. From the point of view of the expert panel it definitely should not just be a buzzword. After getting acquainted with the design of the BSP Political Science, it seems it is slightly more discipline- than student-centred. However, it is a minor problem. The situation can be remedied quite easily, as already has been suggested above. Less clear remains the essence of so-called "student-led discussions". The SAR states that "seminars are primarily focused on student-led discussions and are based on student-led learning processes" (SAR, p. 199). However during conversations with both teachers and students, the expert panel was unable to get a clear understanding of the meaning of this concept. It did not appear that there was an understanding of clearly distinct forms of seminars, when the process is led by teachers and when the process is completely independently led by students.

During the on-site visit of 7 June, it was noted that some students expressed discomfort in choosing report and thesis topics related to feminism and/or LGBT issues. Worryingly, this discomfort was seemingly validated by dismissive remarks from several academic staff members who seem to have indicated that these were unworthy subjects of study. This attitude within the academic community can create a stifling environment for intellectual exploration and critical thinking, particularly in areas of study that are vital for understanding contemporary social dynamics and advocating for social justice. It also runs counter to the principles of academic freedom and inclusivity.

2.2.4. The internship is foreseen during the BSP Political Science. The SAR explains well the rationale to have this component of the BSP Political Science. Regulation on Principles and procedures for student internship placement are very well written and clear.

However, the interview during assessment visit with the students did not unequivocally confirm that implementation of this component of the BSP Political Science works smoothly. One respondent even remarked that "it wasn't anything special. It was just another course". The panel of experts would not evaluate this indication in any way, but would like to emphasise that after the internship, the students should say that it was, if not something "super", then at least "something different". Unfortunately, due to lack of time, it was not possible to delve into this aspect of the BSP Political Science, but in any case, the recommendation of the panel of experts would be to treat this component of the BSP Political Science as one of special importance.

#### 2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. According to analysis provided by the SAR "most of the choices relate to one of the two areas

of specialisation – "International politics"" and "Public policy and administration"" (SAR, p. 202). Consequently the thesis topics have largely been related to international and domestic political issues. The SAR provides a detailed list of the main topics confirming such a statement (SAR, p. 202). It also notes that those interests of students have largely and closely been linked to academic debates in Latvia, Europe and the world. All this evidence allows concluding that the the topics of students' final theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme.

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

#### **Conclusions:**

The content of the BSP Political Science is topical and the study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes. The content of the study courses / modules is interconnected. The BSP Political Science is rather "conservative" in comparison to the Education standard. While the Education standard says that the mandatory part of the programmes should be no less than 50 CP, this Programme has the mandatory part, which consists of 72 CP. The BSP Political Science also seems to be slightly more discipline- than student-centred. The topics of students' final theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme. From the perspective of diversity and inclusivity, however, some students expressed discomfort in choosing report and thesis topics related to feminism and/or LGBT issues.

The main learning outcomes of acquiring the skills and competences needed by graduates for professional activities are successfully implemented, yet enhancing the curriculum to better align with the practical realities and demands of the public sector could equip graduates more effectively.

#### **Strengths:**

- 1) The BSP Political Science is consistent, well designed. It complies with the Education standard.
- 2) The main learning outcomes of acquiring the skills and competences needed by graduates for professional activities are sufficiently successfully implemented.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- 1) The BSP Political Science seems to be slightly more discipline- than student-centered. The mandatory component of it substantially exceeds the Education Standard requirement. Opportunities for students to take Free Elective courses are critically restrained.
- 2) Some overlap in the study content between the modules of "Research Methods in Political Science" and "Research Methods in Social Sciences" has been detected.
- 3) Reports on dismissive attitudes towards topics related to critical approaches, feminism and/or LGBT issues among some members of the academic staff, discouraging students from choosing these subjects for their reports and theses.
- 4) The internship component of the course did not seem to be treated in practice as a special part of the course.

### **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

N/A

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

## Analysis

2.3.1. The BSP Political Science is implemented in the UL FSS premises and using the infrastructure and technical base of the faculty and the UL, as described in part 1.3. of this report. At this point studies are currently being implemented in the premises of FSS at Lauvas iela 4, however, after the relocation, in 2024, the study field will be housed in the new facilities – House of Letters in the UL Academic Centre in Torņakalns, sharing the premises with other UL faculties and research institutes of Latvia. At the FSS there are available auditoriums that are fully or partially equipped with projectors, computers and sound equipment. (SAR, p.55)

At the UL FSS Library the social sciences branch is located and is open 60 hours a week The library also provides an open repository, workspaces, the possibility to order the needed information resources and e-resources. (SAR p.146)

In the UL library there are available 13 699 titles (33 486 copies) available printed on the topics of political science, in the UL FSS library 3 992 titles in 6 032 copies. Of the mentioned numbers, the majority (3081/4341) of resources are in English and the majority (3827/5678) are books. Some resources are provided in Latvian, Russian and others. There are serials, periodicals and other types of publications available. In the last 5 years, 494 titles in 901 copies have been bought of which 253 titles in 366 copies are stored at the UL FSS library. The majority of resources are books and in English. (SAR, p.204-205) According to the UL strategic plan, the UL Library increases the share of e-resources and develops remote access to e-resources. In total 42 e-resource platforms are available (as mentioned in part 1.3.2. of this report), which are available from anywhere by logging in with their personal username and password. These resources are overlooked every year, by accessing the usability of subscribed databases. (SAR, p.62)

During the assessment visit, the students mentioned that all materials are easily accessible, especially online.

There are two main e-platforms used to carry out the study process: estudijas.lu.lv (based on Moodle) and edu.lu.lv., as well as a wide range of e-tools and software packages are offered to its employees and students. (More details in part 1.3.4. of this report)

Financial provision is controlled at the level of faculty. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management. (SAR, p.54)

UL provides all necessary resources and complies with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the BSP Political Science.

### 2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. Main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to all study programmes of the assessed study field.

The funding of BSP Political Science consists of both tuition fees and state funding for study places. The study fee for 2021./2022. was 2 300 EUR/ year and funding for the state funded budget places was 1 630 EUR/year. Since there were 58 students in state funded and 55 students in self-paid places, it is calculated that the total income would be 221 046 EUR/year and the total cost is calculated at 194 951 EUR/year (SAR, p.206-208) which is adequate and allows full implementation of the study process and allows finances for the development of the study programme.

The costs of the BSP Political Science consist of: Teaching staff costs 46 %; General staff 10 %; Other payments 1 %; Infrastructure expenditure 12 %; Property and services 2 %; Indirect costs 29 %. (SAR p.207)

The minimal number of students for rentability is 60 if all would be in self-paid places and 104 if in state funded places as calculated by cost of sensitivity analysis based on the students' number (SAR p.208). The minimal number of students at admission should be 25.

([https://www.lu.lv/studijas/studiju-celvedis/programmu-un-kursu-katalogi/programmu-mekletajs/?tx\\_lustudycatalogue\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx\\_lustudycatalogue\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=Course&tx\\_lustudycatalogue\\_pi1%5Bprogram%5D=29618&cHash=c371c939c092a1de3db30a5844cb0d06](https://www.lu.lv/studijas/studiju-celvedis/programmu-un-kursu-katalogi/programmu-mekletajs/?tx_lustudycatalogue_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_lustudycatalogue_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=Course&tx_lustudycatalogue_pi1%5Bprogram%5D=29618&cHash=c371c939c092a1de3db30a5844cb0d06)).

From the statistics provided for the study programme, the number of students is not constant and exceeds the minimal number of students. It is seen that state funded budget places are filled.

In conclusion, UL has funding available to the study programme, funding sources and the use of funding ensures full implementation of the study process.

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

Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the BSP Political Science. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyse the needed number of students to achieve a rentable study programme. The finances are balanced at the appropriate number of students. The study programme is rentable and the number of students exceeds the minimal numbers.

Strengths:

- 1) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 2) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.
- 3) The e-resources are easily accessible and plentiful.

Weaknesses:

None

## **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 resources are sufficient for the implementation of the BSP Political Science. The finances are balanced.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. Based on the SAR, and on findings from the on-site visit, the Expert Panel can confirm that there are faculty members with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the BSP Political Science, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning. The composition of faculty members meets and exceeds the requirements of legal acts. The BSP Political Science has seven professors and associate professors, while the minimum requirement is five (SAR, p. 209). The implementation of the BSP Political Science is also characterised by the extensive participation of doctoral students (six are doctoral students from the Department of Political Science and one from the University of Tartu). The BSP Political Science also has academic personnel from other faculties of the UL.



2.4.2. Based on the SAR, and on findings from the on-site visit, the Expert Panel can confirm that the BSP Political Science is managed well and that all challenges related to personnel changes are properly handled. Two retired professors were replaced with two new professors without significant effect for the BSP Political Science (SAR, p. 209). The extensive involvement of doctoral students (SAR, p. 210) creates the basis for the further successful functioning of the BSP Political Science.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. According to the plan of the BSP Political Science currently 23 faculty members are involved in teaching (Annex to SAR "Plan of the bachelor study programme Political science.pdf"). Almost all lecturers, except for two doctoral students and a practitioner from the Ministry of Environment, have publications in peer-reviewed publications (Annex to SAR List of publications.pdf ). The level of publications varies from publications in Latvian in local publications to articles in prestigious magazines and books published by international publishers. Since many of the BSP Political Science courses are taught by PhD students, it is natural that their publications are not numerous or not yet at a level that would have entered Scopus or other prestigious databases. Out of 23 teachers, experts managed to find 12 of them in the Scopus database. The level of the Index varies. 7 teachers have an index greater than one. The highest H-index of one of the professors is 7 but not all have scholar google profiles. The content of the publications corresponds to the specialisations of the teachers and makes a valuable contribution to the achievement of the BSP Political Science goals.

2.4.5. The mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the BSP Political Science has the form of regular meetings of the Department of Political Science (SAR, p. 211). In these meetings, all the most important aspects (e.g. curriculum development, links among study modules, approval of students' bachelor's thesis topics, etc.) of the programme are discussed and decided. This arrangement is sufficient because it ensures the achievement of the aims of the BSP Political Science and the interconnection of study courses within the programme. However, bearing in mind that the Department of Political Science held not one, but several study programs, it would be appropriate to consider the possibility of creating a specialised committee for BSP Political Science, which would take care of the affairs of this particular programme. This could go some way in also addressing the general lack of an EDI perspective in the teaching and management of the programme.

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

Conclusions:

FSS teaching staff possess adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the BSP Political Science, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning. The composition of faculty members meets and exceeds the requirements of legal acts, academic personnel from other faculties of the UL is involved in the BSP Political Science. The BSP Political Science is managed well and that all challenges related to personnel changes are properly handled. The content of the publications by the teaching staff corresponds to the specialisations and makes a valuable contribution to the achievement of the programme goals. The level of publications, however, varies from publications in Latvian in local publications to articles in prestigious magazines and books published by international publishers. A mechanism for mutual cooperation of the faculty members in the implementation of the BSP Political Science is present in the form of regular department meetings. Partnership with students is ensured by the involvement of students in the work of the faculty council.

### Strengths

- 1) The composition of faculty members meets the requirements of legal acts.
- 2) Changes in the composition of the teaching staff is managed effectively.
- 3) Extensive involvement of doctoral students in the implementation of the BSP Political Science.

### Weaknesses

- 1) Not all faculty members have published Scopus-level publications.
- 2) Absence of specialised Study Programme Committee.
- 3) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

## 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:** Fully compliant

The composition of teaching staff meets the requirements of legal acts. Some weaknesses have been identified, however they do not affect the compliance. For further improvement, it is suggested to aim for more Scopus-level publications.

## 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

Provided annex "Education standard POL BSP.pdf" affirms that "Political science" programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education". Some weaknesses have been identified in the previous chapters of this report, however this does not change the compliance.

- 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

Provided course descriptions "Kursu apraksti POL BSP.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages, although the programme is realised only in Latvian. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. Some weaknesses have been identified in the previous chapters of this report, however this does not change the compliance to the normatives.

- 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 diploma example available in annex "POL BSP diploma paraugs.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

- 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 attached annex "Study field declaration POI BSP.pdf" affirms that "Political Science" (code 43312) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex "Declaration \_Latvian language.pdf" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex “ Studiju ligumi.pdf” containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 “Rules to be included in the study agreement”.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in Rīga Stradiņš university “International Relations - European Studies” programme (code 43310) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

## **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

The BSP Political Science complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments. Some weaknesses have been identified in the previous chapters of this report, however this does not change the compliance.

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

The BSP Political Science covers relevant content and utilises effective study methods to achieve its aims and learning outcomes. The BSP Political Science has a larger mandatory part (72 CP) compared to the Education standard's requirement of at least 50 CP, indicating a slightly more conservative approach. While the programme is discipline-centred, it aligns with the study field and addresses relevant topics in students' final theses. However, there are concerns regarding

discomfort among some students in choosing topics related to critical approaches, feminism and/or LGBT issues. The main learning outcomes are successfully implemented, but the curriculum could be enhanced to better align with practical realities and demands of the public sector. The study provision is sufficient, with plans to move to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. Methodological and informative resources are accessible and expenses are appropriately planned. The faculty members are qualified and diverse, with involvement from academic personnel from other faculties. The programme is well-managed, and challenges related to personnel changes are handled effectively. The teaching staff's publications correspond to their specialisations and contribute to the programme's goals, although the level of publications varies. Regular department meetings facilitate cooperation among faculty members, and student partnership is ensured through involvement in the faculty council.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The BSP Political Science is consistent, well designed. It complies with the Education standard.
- 2) The main learning outcomes of acquiring the skills and competences needed by graduates for professional activities are sufficiently successfully implemented.
- 3) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 4) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.
- 5) The e-resources are easily accessible and plentiful.
- 6) The composition of faculty members meets the requirements of legal acts.
- 7) Changes in the composition of the teaching staff is managed effectively.
- 8) Extensive involvement of doctoral students in the implementation of the programme.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) The BSP Political Science seems to be slightly more discipline- than student-centered. The mandatory component of it substantially exceeds the Education Standard requirement. Opportunities for students to take Free Elective courses are critically restrained.
- 2) Not all course descriptions (e.g. Models of Democracy, Introduction to Latvian Legal System) are prepared keeping the right proportion between mandatory and additional literature.
- 3) Some overlap in the study content between the modules of "Research Methods in Political Science" and "Research Methods in Social Sciences" has been detected.
- 4) Reports on dismissive attitudes towards topics related to critical approaches, feminism and/or LGBT issues among some members of the academic staff, discouraging students from choosing these subjects for their reports and theses.
- 5) A lack of EDI perspectives and protocols was noted.
- 6) Not all faculty members have published Scopus-level publications and not all have Google scholar profiles.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Political Science"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Political Science"**

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

- 1) All members of the academic staff in this programme should have valid Google Scholar profiles. Future SARs should provide the option for checking citation scores of every single member of academic staff (hyperlinks to Google Scholar), as well as to report on the overall citation statistics on a programme basis.
- 2) Enable online access to summaries of defended BA theses in Latvian and English, to make students' academic work more visible.
- 3) Expand the use of anti-plagiarism software to all course papers.
- 4) The study programme should provide diversity and inclusivity training for all academic staff to ensure they understand the importance of these issues and can support students who wish to explore them in their academic work.
- 5) Enhance the importance of the internship component of the Study Programme.

### Long-term recommendations

- 2) Test for overlap in the study content and remove where feasible.
- 3) Introduce courses or integrate elements into existing courses that focus on understanding the workings of the public sector, interpretation of legal texts, production of policy-oriented documents, and conducting data analysis for public policy. This would enhance the relevance of the programme to the employment sector and better prepare graduates for roles in government and municipal sectors.
- 4) Consider revision of the Programme's design in order to make it more "liberal" by devoting a larger part of the Programme for Free Electives and provide students with the conditions not only to delve deeper into basics of political science, but also to go "out of box", consider critical perspectives, and make greater use of the fact that the Social Science Faculty is part of a larger entity of the University of Latvia.
- 5) Consider the possibility of creating a specialised committee for BSP Political Science, which would take care of the affairs of this particular programme.
- 6) Introduce EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

## II - "Cultural and Social Anthropology" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Cultural and Social Anthropology" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The academic bachelor study programme "Cultural and Social Anthropology (43314)" (BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology) aligns well with the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". Here are the reasons:

The name of the study field explicitly includes "anthropology". This inherently suggests that the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is a part of the broader study field. Anthropology is a key discipline in understanding human societies and cultures, which aligns with the other areas of study in this field: Sociology and Political Science.

The AIC Study Quality Commission has endorsed the change of study field to "Sociology, politics and

anthropology" and acknowledged the code change in the Latvian education classification (see self-assessment report, p.310). This decision, which considers the input of external experts, implies that a thorough assessment was conducted to ensure the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology compliance with the mentioned field of study.

The AIC Study Quality Commission has recognized that the content of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology corresponds with the programme group "Sociology and cultural studies", which includes anthropology. This further confirms the alignment of the programme with the field of study. The evaluation by the commission and external experts, ensuring that the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology content aligns with the anthropology field, provides additional assurance of compliance.

The objectives and tasks of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology further support its compliance with the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology".

The aim of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is to cultivate intermediate-level specialists in cultural and social anthropology. These specialists will be capable of understanding the fundamental principles of the anthropological field, conducting independent and collaborative anthropological research, and critically and systematically analysing social and cultural processes. These competencies align closely with the broader expectations within the fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology.

#### 2.1.2.

Title: Cultural and Social Anthropology

Code: 43314

Degree to be obtained: Bachelor of Social Sciences in Sociology and Cultural Studies

Aims of the study program: To prepare specialists in cultural and social anthropology with the ability to conduct practical anthropological research and analyze social and cultural processes critically.

Objectives of the study program: To acquire academic knowledge in cultural and social anthropology, develop research skills, and promote personal and professional growth.

Learning outcomes of the study program: Knowledge, skills, and competences related to anthropology theories, research methods, and ethnographic analysis.

Admission requirements of the study program: Secondary education.

Six elements of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology (title, code, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements) appear to be interrelated and aligned with each other. The title, code, and degree to be obtained reflect the field of study and its academic classification. The aims and objectives of the programme outline the intended outcomes and goals for the students, while the learning outcomes specify the knowledge, skills, and competences they will acquire upon completion. The admission requirements ensure that students meet the necessary qualifications for enrollment in the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.

However, the degree to be obtained — "Bachelor of Social Sciences in Sociology and Culture Studies" — does not explicitly mention "anthropology", which is a critical part of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. This discrepancy is a source of concern for current students and graduates, who fear that the absence of "anthropology" in the degree title may disadvantage them in further studies and job prospects (on-site visit on 7 July).

This issue is partly due to the classification of "social anthropology, historical anthropology" as a sub-branch of the science branch "Sociology and Social Work" under Latvia's Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 595. Current regulations also stipulate that for study programs ending with code "314," the degree awarded should be a "Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences in Sociology and Cultural Studies".

In conclusion, while the majority of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology components align and are reasonable, the degree awarded does not accurately reflect the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology focus on anthropology. This discrepancy warrants attention and potentially legislative

changes to address the concerns of students and graduates. In the interim, it may be beneficial to communicate clearly to students about this discrepancy and provide guidance on how they can articulate their anthropological expertise to future universities or employers.

Regarding the reasonableness and justification of the study programme elements:

Duration: The duration of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology, set at 3 years (6 semesters) with 120 credits, aligns with the recommended duration for a bachelor's degree programme. It allows sufficient time for students to cover the required coursework and develop a solid foundation in cultural and social anthropology.

Scope of implementation: The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is implemented as a full-time option, offering students a structured and immersive learning experience. The availability of different study programme implementation options, such as full-time studies in both Latvian and English languages, caters to the diverse needs and preferences of students.

Implementation language: The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is offered in both Latvian and English languages, enabling access to domestic and international students. The choice of implementation language enhances the internationalisation of the programme and facilitates the participation of foreign students.

Overall, the interrelation of the study programme elements indicates a coherent and comprehensive design, while the reasonableness and justification of the program's duration, scope of implementation, and implementation language demonstrate a student-centred approach that considers academic standards, internationalisation, and flexibility.

2.1.3. The most significant change in the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is the shift from a humanities bachelor's degree in anthropology to a social science bachelor's degree in sociology and cultural studies. This adjustment aligns the degree with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation 322 of 13 June 2017, "Regulations on Latvia's Education Classification," leading to changes in the classification of the study direction, degree, and code number. This change was approved by the Study Quality Commission of the Higher Education Quality Agency on 9 March 2022 (self-assessment report, p. 307)

The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology goals and missions have been updated in line with the recommendations from the previous accreditation commission and the latest methodological considerations. The new aims and tasks are more precise and focused, which is indicative of a BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology that has been optimised to better serve its students and to align more closely with the field of study (SAR, p.308-309).

2.1.4. BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has both economic and social justification. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology prepares specialists with knowledge in various areas of human activity, economic, political, kinship, religious, and other societal functions. Graduates find employment in various fields both in Latvia and abroad, indicating the wide applicability of the knowledge and skills acquired during the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology graduates have diverse career paths, working in private companies, research institutions, and other organisations. The average gross salary for BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology graduates was between 1070 and 1368 euros in 2021, demonstrating good economic outcomes for graduates. (SAR, p.313-314).

Despite a relatively small number of allocated budget places (24), the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is still able to attract students, showcasing a sustained level of demand for anthropology in Latvia and abroad. However, the number of students has decreased over time due to various factors, including a decrease in the number of students nationwide and the low number of state-allocated places (SAR, p. 315-317). The UL has implemented several measures to improve the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology and student outcomes, such as the introduction of a student-centred approach, the creation of an English version of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology,



and the introduction of a curator position to support students. These changes show a commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation to meet students' needs.

The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology faces a high dropout rate, attributed to the high study load, inability to balance it with work, and a high number of budget places. These issues need to be addressed to improve student retention. According to the SAR (p.317-318), there has been a fourfold increase in the number of foreign students from 6 in the 2015/2016 academic year to 24 in the 2021/2022 academic year. This increase in international enrollment underscores the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology appeal to a global audience, as well as its ability to provide an education that is recognized and valued outside of Latvia.

2.1.5. N/A

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

#### **Conclusions:**

The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is well-aligned with the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". It has a clear focus on anthropological studies and has been recognized as such by the AIC Study Quality Commission. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has shown adaptability and responsiveness to changes in the educational landscape, with significant adjustments made to align with Cabinet of Ministers regulations and to enhance the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology goals and missions.

While the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology demonstrates economic and social justifications, as evidenced by the diverse career paths and relatively high average salaries of its graduates, it faces challenges in student retention due to the high study load and limitations in the number of state-allocated places. Nonetheless, the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has shown commitment to addressing these issues and has implemented several measures to improve student outcomes.

However, a key point of concern is the discrepancy between the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology focus on anthropology and the degree awarded, which does not explicitly mention "anthropology". This issue has caused anxiety among students and graduates and warrants attention and possibly legislative changes.

#### **Strengths:**

- 1) Clear alignment of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology with the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology".
- 2) Adaptability and responsiveness to changes in the educational landscape and regulations.
- 3) Diverse career paths and relatively high average salaries of graduates.
- 4) Implementation of measures to improve student outcomes.
- 5) A significant increase in the number of foreign students, showcasing the programme's global appeal.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- 1) The degree awarded does not explicitly mention "anthropology", which is a critical part of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.
- 2) High dropout rate among students.
- 3) Decreasing number of students over time.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. According to the programme SAR 3.2 the content of the programme complies with Article 10

of the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations No. 240 "Regulations on State Academic Education Standards" of May 13, 2014. 25 are provided in the mandatory part of the programme to address theory and methodology and 30 credits to address the development of the discipline and contemporary themes. This is in line with discipline teaching standards.

The SAR 3.2 shows that the content of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is topical, the content of the study modules is interconnected and complementary, and that it corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes, as well as meets the needs of the industry, labour market and scientific trends. It is noteworthy that the degree title awarded at the end of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology (also previous section 2.1. of this BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology).

In specific, the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology comprises three parts: compulsory modules; restricted elective modules; freely elective modules. This allows students to gain significant knowledge in core aspects of anthropology, including classical and contemporary theories and debates, and to pursue specialisation topics, both thematic and ethnographically-focused. It is commendable that the mandatory modules also include interdisciplinary modules containing information on ethics and current research methods (e.g. internet etiquette). Of the mandatory modules, the necessity for quantitative methods is perhaps less rigorously evidenced within the scope of social and cultural anthropology approaches – perhaps this module could be offered as an elective or within the interdisciplinary menu (the low scores it has received in the evaluations [Annexes, Survey Analysis Table 8.3] could indicate issues of coherence vis-à-vis other modules, even though meetings indicated that this module benefits graduates' skill set). The limited elective offer is well thought out, with courses from Politics and Sociology that align with the interests of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology programme. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology includes a compulsory component on regional study, presumably of the Baltic region, and language training. It also includes a dissertation component. Elective components include practical research. These are all commendable aspects which hold great potential in delivering the core aspects of the strategy: high-quality learning, employability through the development of skills (particularly the bespoke “anthropology and career” course), raising the status and reputation of the discipline. Mandatory parts of the course in writing, research, and general academic conduct are also key in providing students with the support needed to make the best use of their field-specific study. The courses on ethnographic areas present strengths in SE Asia and the MENA regions (in addition to European studies) and this is important and commendable. More could be done in these courses to decolonize their content and delivery but they could potentially direct new reputational strengths for the study field, department, and/or faculty. Additional ethnographic areas could also be considered to strengthen international scope.

The integration of practical skills (SAR, p.321) is perhaps the most important shift in the reporting period, aligning also with the move of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology from the humanities to social sciences. There is ample information to conclude that this has been achieved well and the programme is now well positioned to claim and evidence social relevance and bid for further support and expansion.

#### 2.2.2. N/A

2.2.3. Implementation methods are well described and they provide evidence of alignment with strategic goals. Student-centred learning is given particular emphasis. In specific, the SAR evidences innovative forms of teaching and learning that include significant experiential components, like role-play, walks, visual material, study trips to industry-relevant sites (SAR, p.322). Communication with

employers, the national anthropological association, and other stakeholders is also evidenced. Students are provided ample opportunity for self-directed and practical work. They also have access to a bespoke anthropology-specific careers course. Employability appears to be a challenge, and implementation of recommendations from the Academic Development Grant findings looks promising. Rubric-informed grading is in place and the e-platform aids organisation. The translation of English textbooks in Latvian is a commendable initiative and potentially an initiative to emulate. The creation of student-facing edited collections on specific themes would also be helpful towards publicising the discipline and furthering its social impact. The institution of a curator is commendable and helps address student concerns in an effective way. Open channels of communication with employers exist in multiple ways and this offers employability prospects. It is good to see that while the pandemic has created opportunities for e-learning, this is approached with caution, and taking account of the challenges this might pose in the teaching of anthropology in particular.

2.2.4. N/A

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. The SAR (pp. 324-327) provides a detailed description of the thesis topics pursued (gender, economics, identity, body, performance, environment) in this BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. The range is wide and impressive. It plays to the expertise of staff and exhibits the wide variety of themes that the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology addresses as a whole. It is evident from this variety that students find the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology inspiring and are inspired to pursue independent study. Grading, gravitating towards the higher bands (i.e. 8 and above) year on year, (SAR, 327) shows that students are able to gain competence in the skills developed by the thesis work.

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

Conclusions:

The SAR shows that the content of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is topical, the content of the study modules is interconnected and complementary, and that it corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes, as well as meets the needs of the industry, labour market and scientific trends. However, the degree title awarded at the end of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.

Implementation methods are well described and they provide evidence of alignment with strategic goals. Student-centred learning is given particular emphasis. Rubric-informed grading is in place and the e-platform aids organisation. Positively, while the pandemic has created opportunities for e-learning, this is approached with caution, and taking account of the challenges this might pose in the teaching of anthropology in particular. The range of thesis topics pursued in this programme is wide and impressive. It is evident from this variety that students find the programme inspiring and are inspired to pursue independent study.

Strengths:

- 1) Compliance with national standards and regulations
- 2) Well balanced mandatory and elective component with great coherence through the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology

- 3) Student-centred approach aspiring to individualised teaching methods
- 4) The integration of practical skills is a most important shift in the reporting period, aligning also with the move of the programme from the humanities to social sciences. There is ample information to conclude that this has been achieved well and the programme is now well positioned to claim and evidence social relevance and bid for further support and expansion.
- 5) Ethnographic focus beyond the region (non-Baltic Europe, SE Asia, MENA) is being developed and this could contribute to the goal of international reputation.

**Weaknesses:**

- 1) The degree title awarded at the end of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.
- 2) Some modules could be spruced up, updated to address current theories and social debates / problems, and provide more critical perspectives on colonial and postcolonial legacies (e.g. ethnic communities, MENA region, gender and sexuality).
- 3) Ethnographic focus could be further expanded to aid international reputation.

**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

N/A

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

**Analysis**

2.3.1. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is implemented in the UL FSS premises and using the infrastructure and technical base of the faculty and the UL, as described in part 1.3. of this report. At this point studies are currently being implemented in the premises of FSS at Lauvas iela 4, however, after the relocation, in 2024, the study field will be housed in the new facilities – House of Letters in the UL Academic Centre in Torņakalns, sharing the premises with other UL faculties and research institutes of Latvia. At the faculty there are available auditoriums that are fully or partially equipped with projectors, computers and sound equipment (SAR, p.55).

At the UL FSS Library the social sciences branch is located and is open 60 hours a week. The library also provides an open repository, workspaces, the possibility to order the needed information resources and e-resources (SAR, p.328).

In the UL library there are available 1955 printed titles (4634 copies) on the topics of anthropology. Books are the majority (1819/3022). There are serials, periodicals and other types of publications available. In the last 5 years, 297 titles in 452 copies have been bought. As discussed in the assessment visit, many materials that are assigned as the anthropology field, are multidisciplinary and not only used in this study field. The academic staff give preference to English materials and e-resources.

In the assessment visit, the students mentioned that the resources are always very new and interesting, as well as always accessible.

According to the UL strategic plan, the UL Library increases the share of e-resources and develops remote access to e-resources. In total 42 e-resource platforms are available (as mentioned in part

1.3.2. of this report), which are available from anywhere by logging in with their personal username and password. These resources are overlooked every year, by accessing the usability of subscribed databases (SAR, p.62).

There are two main e-platforms used to carry out the study process: [studijas.lu.lv](http://studijas.lu.lv) (based on Moodle) and [edu.lu.lv](http://edu.lu.lv), as well as a wide range of e-tools and software packages are offered to its employees and students (more details in part 1.3.4. of this report).

Financial provision is controlled at the level of faculty. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management (SAR, p.54).

UL provides all necessary resources and complies with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme.

### 2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. Main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to all study programmes of the assessed study field.

The funding of this BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology consists of both tuition fees and state funding for study places (8 per year). The study fee for 2021./2022. was 2220 EUR/ year for EU/EEZ citizens and 2420 EUR/year for other citizens and funding for the state funded budget places was 1630 EUR/year. Since there were 27 students in state funded and 28 students in self-paid places, it is calculated that the total income would be 106 710 EUR/year and the total cost is calculated at 104 311 EUR/year (SAR p.330-334) where we can see that the funding can cover the costs adequately.

The costs of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology consist of: Teaching staff costs 54.75 %; General staff 11 %; Other payments 0.25 %; Infrastructure expenditure 10 %; Property and services 2 %; Indirect costs 22 %. (SAR p.331)

The minimal number of students for rentability of the Latvian programme is 20 if all would be in self-paid places and 36 if in state funded places as calculated by cost of sensitivity analysis based on the students' number. The minimal number of students for rentability of the English programme should be at least 23 (SAR p.332). The minimal number of students at admission should be 15. ([https://www.lu.lv/studijas/studiju-celvedis/programmu-un-kursu-katalogi/programmu-mekletajs/?tx\\_lustudycatalogue\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx\\_lustudycatalogue\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=Course&tx\\_lustudycatalogue\\_pi1%5Bprogram%5D=29639&cHash=afb43b490a60b1b2ee3d9d11b7b9e320](https://www.lu.lv/studijas/studiju-celvedis/programmu-un-kursu-katalogi/programmu-mekletajs/?tx_lustudycatalogue_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_lustudycatalogue_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=Course&tx_lustudycatalogue_pi1%5Bprogram%5D=29639&cHash=afb43b490a60b1b2ee3d9d11b7b9e320)) From the provided statistics of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology, the number of students is variable and exceeds the minimal number of students. It is seen that the minimal number of admissions is exceeded.

In conclusion, UL has funding available to the study programme, funding sources and the use of funding ensures full implementation of the study process.

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

Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyse the needed number of students to achieve a rentable BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. The finances are balanced at the appropriate number of students. The study programme is rentable and the number of students exceeds the minimal numbers.

Strengths:

- 1) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 2) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.
- 3) The number of students exceeds the minimal number required for rentability.
- 4) The e-resources are available and plentiful.

Weaknesses:

None

## 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 resources are sufficient for the implementation of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.  
The finances are balanced.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology engages 25 teaching staff (SAR, 335), the vast majority of which, across all levels, are research active (CV Annex). The staff hold the necessary qualifications for their teaching duties and national requirements are fulfilled. The way teaching is distributed across the staff members makes the best use of their strengths and evidences good distribution of resources (research visit meeting). The specific expertise in the field of anthropology is evident for a number of staff members and although in the minority in the faculty, a relatively small number of members is able to deliver a number of anthropology courses (e.g. introductory courses, classical and contemporary theories, political and economic anthropology), from the compulsory and elective lists (Study Plan Annex). The way teaching is distributed enables the achievement of the aims and the learning outcomes of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. Workload allocation is somewhat uneven, with core staff delivering as many as 8 or 6 courses across the programme, while a number of staff members deliver single courses. This is due to the cross-faculty connections of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology, which is a positive asset, however, it might also create challenges for integrating staff input across the development of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology, as there seems to be reliance on key staff members. A commendable aspect of the allocation is the fact that doctoral students are given opportunities to develop their autonomous teaching and have responsibilities over specific modules. Overall, teaching staff offers a wealth of collective knowledge on all key aspects of anthropology, theoretical approaches, and a considerable variety of expertise in ethnographic regions that would be developed into distinctive features of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology offer.

2.4.2. Over the reporting period of 10 years the SAR reports a 29% drop in lecturers (SAR, 335). This drop is reflected in a decrease to the percentage of permanent staff in higher grades (43% to 36%) and an increase in non-permanent staff in lower grades (6% to 16%), which is cost-effective. While not affecting the quality of the provision and indeed presenting a renewal of the offer (SAR, p. 336), these changes also point to increased precarity in the programme, which can potentially harm the reputation and public reputation of the discipline, especially given its newness as a disciplinary field in Latvian academia and society. For a BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology that was only

established in 2009 (SAR, p.335), and which has undergone a shift from the humanities to the social sciences, the results it has been able to deliver in terms of BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology resilience are impressive. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has been able to secure funds from national non-state sources, it has attracted a number of visiting staff, has been able to retain some of its graduates into academic positions, and has attracted highly competent staff members from reputable universities abroad. It has a healthy record of publications and boasts great initiatives that help consolidate the field, such as the Public Anthropology Centre (SAR, 336). While declining student numbers is a challenge with impact on staffing, the next reporting period presents an opportunity for the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology to be consolidated into the faculty and pursue strategies of public engagement and widening student participation nationally and internationally. A robust staff cohort will be crucial in this.

#### 2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. Staff CVs show an impressive record of work collectively, and boast many Q1 and Q2 publications as per strategic goals (CV Annex, Publications Annex). They also evidence research activity through conference participation for the vast majority of staff. It is also impressive that doctoral students are also research active through such conference participation mainly. This creates an impression that staff on the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology are an invaluable resource that should be consolidated and supported through career progression.

2.4.5. There are a number of initiatives aiding staff cooperation, some of which are formalised and others created ad hoc. An example of the latter is cooperation over changes necessitated by the pandemic, while examples of the former include discussions over the ethical policies of relating to and communicating with students (study visit meetings). This addresses the lack of formalised protocols around EDI that exists across the faculty (meetings during study visit), but addition of formalised procedures could strengthen this practice even more. Opportunities for training of staff are reported during the study visit and this knowledge gained appeared to be diffusing through the staff cohort. Staff collaborate in research projects and in authoring publications, which is commendable. The existence of mentoring schemes is also an important indicator of cooperation and interconnection. Interconnection appears to have improved since the last reporting period, with mechanisms put in place to increase discussions on course content and to follow up on student feedback in a collaborative way. This is encouraging. The reported staff student ratio of 2.08 (SAR, 338) is impressive and fulfils the goal of individualised teaching being pursued in the faculty. This could be an opportunity to develop reputational prestige as an alternative way of addressing low student numbers.

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

#### Conclusions:

The staff hold the necessary qualifications for their teaching duties and national requirements are fulfilled. The ways teaching is distributed across the staff members makes the best use of their strengths and evidences good distribution of resources. The way teaching is distributed enables the achievement of the aims and the learning outcomes of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. Workload allocation is somewhat uneven, creating challenges for integrating staff input across the development of the programme. Teaching staff offers a wealth of collective knowledge on all key aspects of anthropology, theoretical approaches, and a considerable variety of expertise in ethnographic regions, demonstrated through research activity and conference participation for the vast majority of staff. The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has been able to secure funds from national non-state sources, it has attracted a number of visiting staff, has been able to retain some

of its graduates into academic positions, and has attracted highly competent staff members from reputable universities abroad. It has a healthy record of publications and boasts great initiatives that help consolidate the field, such as the Public Anthropology Centre. The next reporting period presents an opportunity for the programme to be consolidated and pursue strategies of public engagement and widening student participation nationally and internationally. There are a number of initiatives aiding staff cooperation, some of which are formalised and others created ad hoc. The staff-student ratio is impressive and presents an opportunity to develop reputational prestige as an alternative way of addressing low student numbers.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Staff hold necessary qualifications and have required publication records
- 2) Expertise from across faculty and across other faculties is well utilised
- 3) Funding has been secured from a number of sources
- 4) The Public Anthropology Centre is a good initiative for consolidating the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology
- 5) Staff cooperation across teaching and research tasks is impressive
- 6) The staff student ratio is commendable and allows for the highest quality of teaching, which is evidenced in students' and graduates' comments on the course
- 7) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols is addressed effectively through department-level initiatives that are informal but instituted with enthusiasm and dedication by staff.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) Further collaboration within the faculty (political science and sociology) can be pursued based on the model of inter-departmental and cross-faculty collaborations

### 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:** Fully compliant

The qualification of UL-affiliated and visiting academic staff is fully compliant with the conditions and regulations. Further consolidation within the faculty and formalisation of EDI protocols could improve the programme further but do not affect the evaluation of this requirement.

### 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

Provided annex " Education standard CSA BSP.pdf" affirms that "Cultural and Social Anthropology" programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education"

- 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

Provided course descriptions "Study courses CSA BSP.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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 diploma example available in annex " KSA BSP diploma paraugs.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

- 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 attached annex " Study field declaration CSA BSP.pdf" affirms that the "Cultural and Social Anthropology" (code 43314) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex " Declaration \_Latvian language.pdf" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language,

the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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:** Fully compliant

Provided annex “Declaration\_English.pdf” states that the English language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the programme corresponds to at least B2 level of the Common European Framework.

- 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

Provided annex “ Studiju ligumi.pdf” containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 “Rules to be included in the study agreement”.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in UL “Asian studies” programme (code 43222) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

### **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

The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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

The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology aligns well with the study field of "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology" and has received recognition from the AIC Study Quality Commission for its focus on anthropological studies. It has demonstrated adaptability to changes in the educational landscape and made adjustments to meet regulations and enhance its goals.

The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology showcases economic and social justifications through diverse career paths of graduates. However, challenges exist in student retention due to the high study load and limited state-allocated places. Efforts have been made to address these issues and improve student outcomes.

One concern is the discrepancy between the programme's focus on anthropology and the degree awarded, causing anxiety among students and graduates. Legislative changes may be necessary to address this issue.

The BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology content is topical, interconnected, and aligned with its objectives, industry needs, the labour market, and scientific trends. However, the degree title does not reflect the focus on anthropology, potentially impacting the recognition and appreciation of the discipline.

Implementation methods are well-described, emphasising student-centred learning and utilising rubric-informed grading. While e-learning opportunities have been explored during the pandemic, caution is exercised in teaching anthropology. The wide range of thesis topics reflects students' inspiration and commitment to independent study.

The study provision is sufficient, with plans to move to new premises in the UL campus at Torņakalns. Methodological and informative resources are accessible, expenses are planned per student, and the study programme is financially viable with a higher number of students than required.

The staff possess necessary qualifications, and teaching duties are distributed effectively, leveraging their strengths and expertise. However, workload allocation can be uneven, posing challenges for programme development. The programme has attracted funds, visiting staff, retained graduates as academics, and recruited competent staff from reputable universities abroad. It has a strong record of publications and initiatives such as the Public Anthropology Centre.

Opportunities lie in consolidating the programme, pursuing public engagement and expanding student participation nationally and internationally. Staff cooperation initiatives exist, and the staff-student ratio is impressive, providing an avenue for building reputational prestige and addressing low student numbers.

**Strengths:**

- 1) Clear alignment of the study programme with the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology".
- 2) Adaptability and responsiveness to changes in the educational landscape and regulations.
- 3) Diverse career paths and relatively high average salaries of graduates.
- 4) Implementation of measures to improve student outcomes.
- 5) A significant increase in the number of foreign students, showcasing the programme's global appeal.
- 6) Compliance with national standards and regulation.
- 7) Well balanced mandatory and elective component with great coherence throughout the

programme.

8) Student-centred approach aspiring to individualised teaching methods.

9) The integration of practical skills is a most important shift in the reporting period, aligning also with the move of the programme from the humanities to social sciences. There is ample information to conclude that this has been achieved well and the programme is now well positioned to claim and evidence social relevance and bid for further support and expansion.

10) Ethnographic focus beyond the region (non-Baltic Europe, SE Asia, MENA) is being developed and this could contribute to the goal of international reputation.

11) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.

12) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.

13) The number of students exceeds the minimal number required for rentability.

14) The e-resources are available and plentiful.

Weaknesses:

1) The degree awarded does not explicitly mention "anthropology", which is a critical part of the BSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.

2) High dropout rate among students.

3) Decreasing number of students over time.

4) The degree title awarded at the end of the programme does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the study programme.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Cultural and Social Anthropology"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Excellent

## **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Cultural and Social Anthropology"**

### **Short-term recommendations**

1) Communicate clearly to current and prospective students about the degree title issue and how they can articulate their anthropological expertise to future universities or employers despite the degree title.

2) All members of the academic staff should have valid Google Scholar profiles. Future SARs should provide the option for checking citation scores of every single member of academic staff (hyperlinks to Google Scholar), as well as to report on the overall citation statistics.

3) Enable online access to summaries of defended BA theses in Latvian and English, to make students' academic work more visible.

4) Expand the use of anti-plagiarism software to all course papers.

### **Long-term recommendations**

1) Continue advocacy efforts to amend the legislation that will allow for the inclusion of "Anthropology" in the degree title. This is a long-term goal that requires sustained efforts and engagement with various stakeholders.

- |  |
|--|
| 2) Some modules could be updated to address current theories and social debates / problems, and provide more critical perspectives on colonial and postcolonial legacies (e.g. ethnic communities, MENA region, gender and sexuality). |
| 3) Ethnographic focus could be further expanded to aid international reputation.   |
| 4) Introduce formal EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.  |

## II - "Sociology" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Sociology" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The goal of the academic bachelor study programme, "Sociology (43314)" (BSP Sociology) is to prepare specialists with a comprehensive knowledge of sociology and its subfields, and equip them with the necessary skills and competencies to apply this knowledge in professional activities within governmental, non-governmental, and private sectors. This aligns with the expectations of the broader field of sociology, which seeks to understand social behaviour and society, and apply this understanding in various social contexts.

The tasks of the BSP Sociology further align it with the study field. These include learning about the key concepts and theoretical aspects of sociology, understanding and applying both quantitative and qualitative research methods, nurturing individual work and teamwork skills, and developing analytical thinking and research skills. These tasks are all central to the study of sociology and are typically expected of students in this field.

The outcomes of the BSP Sociology include knowledge of key sociological theories and concepts, understanding of the historical development of sociological theories, proficiency in quantitative and qualitative research methods, and the ability to apply this knowledge to identify, analyse, and address social problems. These outcomes are consistent with what is expected in the field of sociology and align the BSP Sociology with the study field.

Finally, the title of the programme, "Sociology (43314)", directly reflects the degree to be earned, which is a social science degree in sociology. This further reinforces the programme's alignment with the study field.

In conclusion, the BSP Sociology is highly compliant with the study field of sociology. Its goals, tasks, outcomes, and the degree title all align with the expectations and scope of the broader field of sociology. The BSP Sociology provides a comprehensive sociological education that aligns with the expectations of the broader study field.

2.1.2. The BSP Sociology appears to have a coherent structure where its title, code, degree to be obtained, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are all interrelated and justified:

The title "Sociology" and the code "43314" are congruent and accurately represent the focus of the study programme. They reflect the field of sociology and align with the classification of sectors and subsectors of science in Latvia.

The degree to be obtained, "Bachelor of Social Sciences in Sociology and Culture Studies", clearly reflects the academic focus of the programme. It aligns with the goals of the programme, which is to prepare specialists in the field of sociology who are capable of professional work in various sectors.

The aims and objectives of the BSP Sociology are well-defined and aligned with the field of

sociology. The BSP Sociology aims to nurture a range of skills among students, including analytical thinking, time planning, and the pursuit of independent research projects, all of which are crucial in the field of sociology.

The learning outcomes are well-defined and demonstrate a clear path from theoretical knowledge acquisition to practical application, which is crucial for professional work in sociology.

The admission requirements, which include a secondary education and a centralised exam in certain subjects, are reasonable and justifiable. They ensure that students have the necessary foundational knowledge to succeed in the BSP Sociology.

The duration of the BSP Sociology is three years (six semesters), which is typical for a bachelor's degree programme and aligns with the Bologna Process recommendations. The scope of the programme (120 CP or 180 ECTS) is also in line with typical bachelor's degree programmes, providing students with a comprehensive education in sociology.

The BSP Sociology is taught in Latvian, which is appropriate given that it is a national university in Latvia.

In conclusion, while the BSP Sociology overall appears to be well-structured and justified in its design and content, the UL should address the discrepancy in the degree title across different platforms to avoid potential confusion for prospective students.

2.1.3. The corrections made to the study program's parameters within the assessment of the study field are analysed, justified, and would be supported.

The decision to change the code of the study programme from 43310 to 43314 aligns with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation 322, "Regulations on Latvia's education classification," adopted on June 13, 2017. This change is part of the reassessment of the field of studies, indicating a systematic review and update of the study programme parameters.

Furthermore, there are plans to change the name of the degree earned by students from "social science bachelor's degree in sociology" to "social science bachelor's degree in sociology and culture studies." This modification aims to satisfy the requirements outlined in Article 12 of Cabinet of Ministers Regulation 240, "Regulations on the state academic standard," adopted on May 13, 2014, as well as Cabinet of Ministers Regulation 322, "Regulations on Latvia's education classification," adopted on June 13, 2017 (Self-assessment report, p.159). The justification for this change is to accurately reflect the content and focus of the study programme.

The planned corrections align with regulatory standards and demonstrate a proactive approach to adapting the study programme to meet the evolving requirements and expectations within the field of study.

2.1.4. The BSP Sociology aligns with the strategic plans of the UL and the FSS. The BSP Sociology prepares graduates for roles in state and non-governmental organisations, international institutions, and structures related to Europe and the European Union, reflecting the current market needs in these areas.

Graduates of the BSP Sociology are highly sought after in the labour market. Evidence from the recent on-site assessment visit to the UL revealed that there is currently a shortage of sociology graduates to fill the open positions available, particularly in state offices like the Central Statistical Bureau (6 July visit). This demand for graduates speaks to the relevance and effectiveness of the programme in preparing students for roles that are in high demand in the workforce.

Feedback from employers consistently indicates that graduates of the BSP Sociology are well-prepared both theoretically and practically and are able to work independently after a short training period. Furthermore, employers have suggested that a degree in Sociology from this programme provides a competitive advantage in the job market, all other factors being equal (6 July visit).

The BSP Sociology is unique in Latvia in that it is the only one at this level and with this content that is taught in Latvian. The BSP Sociology has a good balance between theoretical and methodological

courses, research internship courses, and a focus on areas of social development that are specific to Latvia. This makes the BSP Sociology highly competitive within Latvia.

The BSP Sociology faces challenges due to demographic trends and insufficient financing for higher education. Some students drop out due to personal reasons or because they feel the content of the programme does not align with their expectations. On the other hand, the BSP Sociology has seen a positive trend with students who had previously dropped out expressing an interest in restarting their studies.

Despite the strong academic foundation and robust job market for graduates, both the bachelor's and master's programs in Sociology at the UL face a significant challenge in terms of recognition and understanding of the field. The issue has been highlighted by both students and graduates who often find themselves needing to explain their field of study to others. This lack of understanding and visibility can limit the appeal of the programme to prospective students.

A contributing factor to this lack of visibility is the limited media presence of sociologists. In the contemporary media landscape, discussions and analyses of topical societal issues are often dominated by experts from the fields of political science, anthropology, and communication. There are very few sociologists among these high-profile opinion leaders.

The limited media presence of sociologists was confirmed during the on-site assessment visit on 7 July. According to academic staff, public appearances and media engagement are currently low on their list of priorities, given the high workload associated with teaching, research, and project proposal writing.

To address this issue, it is recommended that the BSP Sociology and the wider field provide incentives for teaching staff to engage more with the public and media. This could involve writing opinion pieces, commenting on topical issues in the media, or participating in public debates and forums. By doing so, sociologists could help popularise their field, raise its profile, and increase its visibility. This would not only enhance the recognition and understanding of sociology among the general public but also likely increase the interest of prospective students in sociology programmes.

2.1.5. N/A

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

Conclusions:

The BSP Sociology at the UL has a strong alignment with the field of sociology and strategic plans of the university. It effectively prepares students for in-demand roles in various sectors. However, challenges persist, including student retention issues, and a lack of public recognition and visibility of the field, exacerbated by a limited media presence of sociologists. To address these issues, it is recommended that incentives be provided for teaching staff to increase their engagement with the public and media to raise the field's profile.

Strengths:

- 1) The BSP Sociology aligns well with the field of sociology, demonstrating a clear and coherent structure where its title, code, degree, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are all interrelated and justified.
- 2) The BSP Sociology is aligned with the strategic plans of the University of Latvia and the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The programme prepares students for roles in high demand areas such as state and non-governmental organisations, international institutions, and structures related to Europe and the European Union.

- 3) Feedback from employers indicates that graduates are well-prepared both theoretically and practically to enter the workforce.

4) The BSP Sociology is unique in Latvia as the only one at this level taught in Latvian and provides a balance between theoretical and methodological courses, research internship courses, and a focus on areas of social development specific to Latvia.

Weaknesses:

1) The BSP Sociology faces challenges in student retention due to issues such as demographic trends, insufficient financing for higher education, and students feeling the content of the programme does not align with their expectations.

Despite a strong job market for graduates, both the bachelor's and master's programmes face a significant challenge in terms of public recognition and understanding of the field, with students often finding themselves needing to explain their field of study to others.

2) There is a limited media presence of sociologists, which contributes to the lack of visibility of the field. This is in part due to academic staff prioritising teaching, research, and project proposal writing over public appearances and media engagement.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The programme's content and structure is rooted in the requirements of Cabinet of Ministers Regulation 240, "Regulations on the state academic education standard," adopted on May 13, 2014. The content of the study programme aligns nicely with key objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes. Internships and field trips foster and expand the network of relevant external stakeholders (annex titled Principles and procedures for student internship placement"). One could attest this statement by analysing the annexes provided by the UL (Plan of the study programme "Sociology"). Study courses have been clearly mapped out, as well as the overall study plan.

The BSP Sociology is divided into mandatory courses and limited electives. There are three components to the bachelor's degree programme Sociology (SAR, p. 165). The document enumerates Section A, which relates to mandatory courses and leads to 66 CP. This consists of general basic courses at the University of Latvia (10 CP), basic courses related to the sector (54 CP). The courses include introduction to studies and specialisation (6 CP), courses related to social theory (12 CP), sociological research methods (12 CP), courses related to the subsectors of sociology (12 CP), an independent research project (annual paper 2 CP and bachelor's thesis 10 CP), and courses related to the legally required courses related to environmental protection and civil defence (2 CP). Section B consists of mandatory electives and leads to 52 CP. Students can choose Section B courses from a list. Most of these relate to subsectors of sociology. A course that leads to 2 CP relates to internships at companies. Section C consists of free electives and leads to 2 CP.

Students can choose courses from the UL offer in accordance with their own interests and their ability to register for such courses (provided that there is no requirement for prior knowledge or any other limitation).

The courses on offer make up a good mix of both theoretical and empirical concepts necessary to acquire BA in sociology. There are numerous areas covered within the BSP Sociology such as: Economic Sociology, Voluntary Work Management, Sociology of Consumption, Family Sociology, etc. This allows students to expand their horizons and facilitates their specialisation. Therefore, this ensures that the needs of the industry and labour market are met. Finally, the BSP Sociology is a good stepping stone for further academic development at higher levels of education. Some courses are taught in English which is good from the perspective of both domestic and foreign students. During the assessment visit in interviews with representatives of employers it was discernible that undergraduates with sociological backgrounds are desirable in the labour market, both in the private and public sector. There is a positive blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods that



students have to master in the course of their studies.

The feedback received during the on-site visit on 6-7 July from students, graduates, and employers revealed a strong interest in diversifying and expanding the data analysis skills taught in the curriculum. While the use of statistical software like SPSS is essential for social science research, there was an expressed desire for the inclusion of other data analysis tools such as Excel and programming languages. This would equip students with a broader range of skills and competencies, enabling them to undertake more complex and varied data analysis tasks, which is increasingly important in both academic and professional settings. This feedback suggests an opportunity for curriculum development to meet these evolving educational needs and expectations.

#### 2.2.2. N/A

2.2.3. BSP Sociology involves oral, written and combined study and grading methods. The study process involves a diversity of ways in which students gain and strengthen knowledge, including introductory lectures, interactive lectures, summary lectures and problem-related lectures (SAR, p. 167-168).

Students in upper years of studies are engaged in peer teaching, which ensures building up connections and strengthens the community spirit. Examination procedures and grading are linked to specific learning outcomes in the course descriptions, which is observable from the available syllabuses.

This BSP Sociology dedicates much attention to acquiring practical and research skills. This starts in the first semester and continues in the form of courses about sociological research methods during the second and third semester.

During their third semester of studies, students are expected to write an annual paper, which is part of Section A of the BSP Sociology. This attests to the fact that students are encouraged to brush up their skill set. Academic advisors are assigned to students who help them out in finalising their research.

When triangulating the SAR and interviews with students during the assessment visit it is possible to arrive at a conclusion that the BSP Sociology has increased opportunities to involve senior students in research projects. It is said that the financing comes from the: LU SZF Institute for Social and Political Research (LU SZF SPPI), the Latvian Science Council (LZP), the applied research projects (FLPP), and the national research programme (VPP). PhD students are also engaged in teaching at the undergraduate level (SAR, p. 169).

Apart from everything mentioned above, the study programme has a rather poor statistics with regard to incoming academic mobility both on behalf of students, as well as a rather poor statistics with regard to incoming and outgoing mobility of the members of the academic staff as stated in the annexes "Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of students of the UL study field Sociology, Political science, Anthropology" and "Statistics on outgoing and incoming mobility of lecturers of the UL study field Sociology, Political science, Anthropology". Steady progress on this indicator might significantly improve student-centred learning by facilitating best-practices dissemination.

Therefore, the paragraphs listed above underline that this programme puts student-centred learning at the forefront.

2.2.4. Section B of BSP Sociology includes the course SociR009 "Internship in the use of sociological information in governance and organisations". Internships at companies are part of this course. The programme's management provides a document in the annex titled "Principles and procedures for student internship placement".

Internships are aimed at developing practical skills in the use of sociological information in governance, organisations, public relations and marketing. Internships earn 2 CP, which correspond to 72 work hours at the place of the internship. It is logical to offer internships at the BA level to

enhance their practical skills at a point when still not all of them are employed. In that way, their social capital can expand (SAR, p. 169-170). That information has been validated during the visit and corresponding interviews.

#### 2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. The self-assessment report states: "During the sixth semester of studies, a Section A course, Academic research, writing and presentation, is taken by all students so that they are better prepared for writing the thesis and other academic papers such as lectures, presentations and course projects". (SAR, p. 171).

There is a detailed description on the chronological order of steps necessary to defend the final thesis.

Some of the best evaluated theses have interesting and relevant topics, which attests to the viability of the programme under assessment. Among them are: "The Experience of Students in on-site and Distanced Higher Education in Latvia", "The Perspective of Teachers: Prevention Youth Suicide at Schools in Latvia", "The Migration of Latvian Ethnic Returning: Motivations and Integration", "The Remigration Experience of Remigrating Families with Foreign Spouses", "The Corps of European Solidarity: Growth Opportunities for Young People in Latvia", "The Importance of Community Funds in Strengthening Co-operation: A Study of the Fund in the Alūksne and Ape Administrative Districts" (SAR, p. 172).

Similarly to the recommendation for the MA in Sociology, the future self-assessment report should provide access to those theses, in order to underline the principle of transparency. Finally, all theses should have a short summary in English.

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

#### Conclusions:

The courses on offer make up a good mix of both theoretical and empirical concepts, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods, necessary to acquire BSP Sociology. The needs of the industry and labour market are met, however, students, graduates, and employers revealed a strong interest in diversifying and expanding the data analysis skills taught in the curriculum. The BSP Sociology is a good stepping stone for further academic development at higher levels of education, as the students in senior years of studies are engaged in peer teaching and have the opportunities to participate in research projects. This programme dedicates much attention to acquiring practical and research skills, and involves oral, written and combined study and grading methods. English is fully integrated into the academic activities of the BSP Sociology.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Comprehensive list of obligatory and elective courses, with many interesting and useful electives.
- 2) Student-centred learning based on the involvement of students in research projects and on the obligation to write an annual paper in the third semester, all of which facilitates monitoring students' progress and advances their development.
- 3) Available internship for students with high motivation to boost their practical skills.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) Very low incoming and outgoing academic mobility both on behalf of students, as well as on behalf of members of the academic staff.
- 2) Limited data analysis skills. The curriculum predominantly focuses on SPSS for data analysis, while students, graduates, and employers expressed a need for expanded skills, including Excel and

programming languages.

### **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

N/A

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The BSP Sociology is implemented in the UL FSS premises and using the infrastructure and technical base of the faculty and the UL, as described in part 1.3. of this report. At this point studies are currently being implemented in the premises of FSS at Lauvas iela 4, however, after the relocation, in 2024, the study field will be housed in the new facilities – House of Letters in the UL Academic Centre in Torņakalns, sharing the premises with other UL faculties and research institutes of Latvia. At the faculty there are available auditoriums that are fully or partially equipped with projectors, computers and sound equipment (SAR, p.55). The resources at hand are fully in line with achieving the goals of the and ensuring a high-quality study process. This applies to rooms, technologies, and software that are needed in the study process.

The FSS library, where the social science collection is held, is open for 60 hours per week to serve the interests of students. Users have free access to the collection. The library is in three rooms with 544 m2 of floor space. The library has 84 workstations, including 18 with computers (SAR, p. 173).

In the UL library there are available 12 032 titles (25 668 copies) available printed on the topics of sociology, in the UL FSS library 5 026 titles in 8 162 copies. Of the mentioned numbers, the majority (6718/10935) of resources are in English and the majority (11327/21377) are books. Some resources are provided in Latvian, Russian and others. There are serials, periodicals and other types of publications available. In the last 5 years, 1 419 titles in 2 052 copies have been bought of which 715 titles in 900 copies are stored at the UL FSS library. The majority of resources are books and in English. (SAR, p.60-61) According to the UL strategic plan, the UL Library increases the share of e-resources and develops remote access to e-resources. In total 42 e-resource platforms are available (as mentioned in part 1.3.2. of this report), which are available from anywhere by logging in with their personal username and password. These resources are overlooked every year, by accessing the usability of subscribed databases (SAR, p.62).

Faculty members use the electronic Moodle E-environment to distribute study materials and to receive, examine and analyze work that students have submitted. Moodle supplements the UL information system (LUIS), ensuring the entry of grades (SAR, p. 174).

Financial provision is controlled at the level of faculty. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management. (SAR p.54)

UL FSS has appropriate rooms for the study process. Most faculty members in the bachelor's degree programme Sociology have elected posts at the UL FSS, and they have high-quality offices and adequate support. Guest instructors have access to workspaces that are provided by the UL FSS. They can spend time there, prepare for their classes and offer individual consultations to students. This was also confirmed during the study visit to the facilities.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. Main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to BSP Sociology of the assessed study field.

The funding of this study programme consists of both tuition fees and state funding for study places. A national subsidy from the Ministry of Education and Science, which in 2021/2022 was EUR 1,630 for full-time studies. Tuition fees taking into account all of the factors stated above, which in 2021/2022 has been EUR 2,300 for full-time studies per year. In the academic year 2021/2022 there were 81 students in the programme (76 full-time students with either state subsidy or LU scholarship and 5 students paying their tuition). The total revenue amounted to 120 710 EUR.

On the other hand, the total annual costs of the programme are 132 759 EUR. The programme's estimated cost structure is the following: Faculty members (53%); General personnel (11%); Other costs (0.2%); Infrastructure (10%); Property and services (1.8%); Indirect costs (24%).

Sensitivity analysis based on students' numbers shows that if the programme is to be profitable and students have a high-quality study process the number of tuition-paying students in the programme should be at least 48( p. 176).

All of the aforementioned numbers show that the programme's management needs to increase awareness of the programme's qualities among the targeted population, in order to make it more financially viable. Declining number of students constitutes a major challenge ahead.

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

Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the BSP Sociology. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyse the needed number of students to achieve a rentable study programme. The finances are currently a bit strained due to the falling number of students where costs exceed revenues.

Strengths:

- 1) The FSS has had a Young Sociologist School to facilitate a greater understanding among young people about sociology, to inform them about career opportunities in the field and thus to attract a greater number of students (SAR, p. 177).
- 2) Cooperation with other programmes and departments at the UL.
- 3) E-study environment and the use of Moodle which economises on time and eases coordination.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Declining number of students and its negative impact on financial sustainability, which requires a well-developed strategy on how to tackle it in the coming period.

### **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 resources are sufficient for the implementation of the programme. The finances are balanced. Some weakness have been identified, however it do not affect the compliance.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. The qualification of the teaching staff is fully compliant with regulations and with the needs of the students. The teaching staff is involved in research, projects and internationalisation activities. Currently, according to the SAR, “BSP Sociology has three professors (2 professors from the Sociology department and 1 professor from the Political science department), four associate professors and two docents” (SAR, 3.4.1.), which is enough for an average of 80 students a year (according to annex: Student statistics in the bachelor study programme “Sociology”). Most commendably, the HEI ensures interlinkage between teaching and research, as “faculty members are also .. researchers, .. take part in the national-level research programmes and various international organisations, write internationally recognised academic publications and serve as experts who analyse social processes at the national level” (SAR of the BSP Sociology, 3.4.1.)

All personnel involved in teaching have a Master's degree, and most have PhD degrees. According to the declaration of the study field, the BSP Sociology complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. All of the above indicates that the teaching staff qualifications enable the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. The on-site interviews revealed one particular issue, however, that potentially may cause challenges in achievement of the study programme, namely, a lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols for staff.

During the on-site visit interviews, the management of the BSP Sociology expressed that visiting teaching staff is being supported for the purposes of internationalisation and research and teaching quality.

2.4.2. According to the position expressed by the BSP Sociology management during the on-site visit of the panel, the UL is flexible in accommodating the schedules of the teaching staff to ensure their continuous contribution to the BSP Sociology, including long-term absences (e.g., sabbaticals), conferences, and teaching visits to other HEIs. The SAR of the BSP Sociology admits that a decline in student numbers and the related decrease in teaching workload of the staff was a challenge that the department decided to overcome by mitigating it with research: “All faculty members at the department for whom that is the basic job were employed part time and merged their work as instructors with research” (SAR of the BSP Sociology,, 3.4.2.), by electing them as senior researchers or researchers at the FFS ASPRI (SAR of the BSP Sociology,, 3.4.2.). Such a solution is understandable, it contributes to the research goals specified in the Mission of the UL, and does not negatively affect the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements specified in regulatory enactments.

The purpose of this is to keep the teaching staff involved with the BSP Sociology. During the on-site assessment visit meeting, the students and graduates testify that in most cases the changes in the teaching staff do not affect them negatively, and generally underscore the low turnover rate of senior teaching staff as a strength and legacy of the BSP Sociology.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. According to the Plan of the study programme “Sociology”, currently 28 staff are involved in teaching within the BSP Sociology. Of those, 5 have a Scopus H index higher than 1, with professors Mežinska (7), Reinholde (4), Tisenkopfs (13) particularly standing out. 7 teaching staff have no Scopus presence, however, admittedly, 1 of them has published a respected publication with Palgrave. 3 staff without Scopus presence have published internationally, with 4 staff only having published in Latvia. The overemphasis on local publishing, as well as publishing in under-ambitious

outlets, is potentially hindering the streamlining of the research to reach the Development plan goal of scientific excellence for the study field, which is to “Ensure international visibility of research and international recognition of study programmes”, which feeds into the UL strategic goal “The university as an internationally recognised science centre” (Study field annexes, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology study Field Development Plan, Development plan.pdf). The management of the study field expressed an awareness of the issue during the on-site interview.

Still, overall, the number of publications seems adequate to support the study programme's quality and implementation in the study field. It is important to point out that not all of the teaching staff have Google Scholar profiles, and the introduction of such profiles across the board would significantly simplify quantitative mapping of staff outputs.

2.4.5. During the on-site visit, the management of the study field and the BSP Sociology informed the panel that a mechanism for mutual cooperation of the FSS members involved in the implementation of the BSP Sociology is present in the form of regular meetings of the Department. This approach is consistent with the Self assessment report, which states that “collaboration occurs at meetings of the Department of Sociological Studies, where there are regular discussions about various aspects of the study programme, including the preparation of new courses to include in the curriculum, achievements and problems in the process, the academic calendar, topics for annual papers and the bachelor's degree thesis, analysis of study processes and learning outcomes, and aspects of the regeneration of academic personnel.” (SAR of the BSP Sociology, 3.4.5.) The SAR also states that the purpose of such meetings is to ensure the interconnection of study courses within the programme, as well as across BSP and MSP Sociology, as well as with the DSP Social sciences (SAR of the BSP Sociology,, 3.4.5.). The students and alumni of the programme during the on-site interviews pointed out that the overlap between BSP and MSP Sociology is not ideal for the graduates of BSP Sociology, as the curriculum is repetitive, therefore, it is positive that the Department has a mechanism specifically dedicated to this issue.

Some members of the teaching staff have joint publications, which testifies to cooperation. As per the on-site visit interviews, interconnection of study courses within the study programme is being monitored by the programme management by accessing the online course system and by reacting to students' complaints regarding overlaps or inadequacies.

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

### **Conclusions:**

The qualification of the teaching staff is fully compliant with regulations and with the needs of the students. The teaching staff is involved in research, projects and internationalisation activities. Visiting teaching staff is being supported for the purposes of internationalisation and research and teaching quality. UL is flexible in accommodating the schedules of the teaching staff to ensure their continuous contribution to the programme, including long-term absences (e.g., sabbaticals), conferences, and teaching visits to other HEIs. Several senior teaching staff have an excellent publishing record, still, some teaching staff have no Scopus presence at all. Still, overall, the number of publications seems adequate to support the study program's quality and implementation in the study field. It is important to point out that not all of the teaching staff have Google Scholar profiles.

### **Strengths:**

1) Several of the teaching staff that the BSP Sociology employs are well-published and visible researchers.

### **Weaknesses:**

1) Insufficient Scopus and Google Scholar presence for staff.

- 2) In some cases there is overemphasis on local publishing.
- 3) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

## 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:** Fully compliant

The formal requirements of the qualification of the academic staff have been fulfilled. Some minor weaknesses have been identified, such as insufficient Scopus and Google Scholar presence for staff, sporadic overemphasis on local publishing, and lack of EDI training protocols, but these do not affect the evaluation of this requirement.

## 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

Provided annex "Education standard SOC BSP.pdf" affirms that "Sociology" programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education"

- 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

Provided course descriptions " Kursu apraksti SOC BSP.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages, although the programme is realized only in Latvian. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex " SOC BSP diploma pielikums.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

- 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 attached annex “ Study field declaration SOC BSP.pdf” affirms that “Sociology” (code 43314) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex “ Declaration \_Latvian language.pdf” affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex “ Studiju ligumi.pdf” containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 “Rules to be included in the study agreement”.

- 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



Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies “Sociology of Organisations and Public Administration” (code 43314) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

### **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

The study programme complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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

The BSP Sociology aligns well with the field of sociology and university strategic plans, equipping students with valuable skills for various sectors. The programme offers a balanced mix of theoretical and empirical concepts, qualitative and quantitative methods, and meets industry and labour market needs. However, stakeholders express a desire for expanded data analysis skills in the curriculum. The programme provides opportunities for academic development, peer teaching, and research projects. It emphasises practical and research skills, utilises diverse grading methods, and integrates English into academic activities.

The study provision is sufficient, though current finances are strained due to declining student numbers. Methodological and informative resources are accessible, and expenses are planned per student. Analysis of study fees and student numbers helps ensure a viable programme. However, revenue currently falls short of costs.

Teaching staff qualifications comply with regulations and student needs. They engage in research, projects, and internationalisation activities. Support is provided for visiting teaching staff and accommodating their schedules. Although not all staff have a strong Scopus and Google Scholar presence, overall, the number of publications is adequate, especially among senior teaching staff,

who have excellent publishing records. Challenges exist regarding the degree title discrepancy, student retention, and limited public recognition. To address these, it is recommended to rectify the degree title and incentivise teaching staff to engage with the public and media.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The BSP Sociology aligns well with the field of sociology, the strategic plans of the University of Latvia and the Faculty of Social Sciences.
- 2) The programme prepares students for roles in high demand areas such as state and non-governmental organisations, international institutions, and structures related to Europe and the European Union.
- 3) Feedback from employers indicates that graduates are well-prepared both theoretically and practically to enter the workforce.
- 4) The programme is unique in Latvia as the only one at this level taught in Latvian and provides a balance between theoretical and methodological courses, quantitative and qualitative-oriented courses, research internship courses, and a focus on areas of social development specific to Latvia.
- 5) Comprehensive list of obligatory and elective courses, with many interesting and useful electives.
- 6) Student-centred learning based on the involvement of students in research projects and on the obligation to write an annual paper in the third semester, all of which facilitates monitoring students' progress.
- 7) The Young Sociologist School is a good tool to attract a greater number of students.
- 8) Interesting topics of MA theses which are relevant for the purpose of development of Latvian society.
- 9) Cooperation with other programmes and departments at the UL.
- 10) E-study environment and the use of Moodle which economises on time and eases coordination.
- 11) Several of the teaching staff that the programme employs are well-published and visible researchers.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a discrepancy in the degree title listed in the self-assessment report and the one stated on the university's website, which can cause confusion for prospective students.
- 2) Despite a strong job market for graduates, both the bachelor's and master's programmes face a significant challenge in terms of public recognition and understanding of the field, with students often finding themselves needing to explain their field of study to others.
- 3) There is a limited media presence of sociologists, which contributes to the lack of visibility of the field. This is in part due to academic staff prioritising teaching, research, and project proposal writing over public appearances and media engagement.
- 4) Very low incoming and outgoing academic mobility both on behalf of students, as well as on behalf of members of the academic staff.
- 5) Limited data analysis skills. The curriculum predominantly focuses on SPSS for data analysis, while students, graduates, and employers expressed a need for expanded skills, including Excel and programming languages.
- 6) Declining number of students and its negative impact on financial sustainability.
- 7) Insufficient Scopus and Google Scholar presence for staff.
- 8) In some cases there is overemphasis on local publishing.

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

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## 2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Sociology"

### Short-term recommendations

- |  |
|--|
| 1) All members of the academic staff should have valid Google Scholar profiles. Future self-assessment report has to provide the option for checking citation scores of every single member of academic staff (hyperlinks to Google Scholar), as well as to report on the overall citation statistics on a programme basis |
| 2) Enable online access to summaries of defended BA theses in Latvian and English, to make students' academic work more visible  |
| 3) Expand the use of anti-plagiarism software to all course papers   |

### Long-term recommendations

- |  |
|--|
| 1) Improve financial sustainability by attracting more students into the programme   |
| 2) The overemphasis on local publishing should be balanced out with more internationally visible outputs.  |
| 3) The study field and the study programme should develop a long-term strategy for enhancing public recognition and understanding of sociology. This could involve more public outreach initiatives, partnerships with media organizations, regular public forums or discussions, and continued incentives for teaching staff to engage with the public and media. |
| 4) Enhance the curriculum by including more comprehensive data analysis skills. In the short term, incorporate Excel training, and in the long term, consider adding coursework on programming languages relevant to data analysis like Python or R.   |
| 5) Introduce EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.   |

## II - "Diplomacy" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Diplomacy" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The master's study programme in Diplomacy 45312 complies with the study field under assessment. The title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualification or degree and professional qualification of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. This conclusion is based on thorough and comprehensive reading of SAR, as well as interviews with relevant stakeholders. The key annex for this conclusion is titled "Compliance of the master's study programme "Diplomacy" with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education".

There were some updates pertaining to this programme since the last assessment in 2013. The document states the following: „There have been changes in two parameters of the master's study programme in Diplomacy 45312 (hereinafter – MSP Diplomacy). First, the code of the study programme (45312) has changed in accordance with the changes in the Latvian education classification pursuant to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 322 of 13.06.2017 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education". The MSP Diplomacy code has changed from 45310 to 45312. Second, the awarded degree has changed from a master's degree of social sciences in

diplomacy, to a master's degree of social sciences in political science." (SAR, p. 130).

In addition, the MSP Diplomacy comes with a newly stated goal, in addition to the goals which had already been stipulated prior to the last assessment procedure. There is a goal to implement MSP Diplomacy in accordance with the requirements of Latvian diplomacy and regional priorities (EU, NATO, USA, Russia) (SAR, p. 132).

2.1.2. The code (45312) of the MSP Diplomacy is based on Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 322, "Regulations on Latvia's education classification," where the first digits of the code, 45, refer to the academic level of the master's degree. The diploma issued upon the completion of the MSP Diplomacy grants Master's degree of Social Sciences in Political Science (MSP Diplomacy Annexes, Sample of the diploma and its supplement to be issued for completing the study programme, Diploma DIPL MSP.pdf), which corresponds to other indicators of the programme.

According to SAR, the programme has three connections to the "Sociology, political science, anthropology" study field. First, one of the subfields of political science – international politics – is examined in depth within the study programme. Second, MSP Diplomacy offers many courses, the content of which fully correspond to the subfield of international politics. Third, the studies within the framework of the MSP Diplomacy are aimed at acquiring in-depth knowledge, skills and competence in international relations, foreign policy and diplomacy. (SAR of MSP Diplomacy, 3.1.2.)

Upon conducting an analysis of the study courses provided in the Programme Annexes, including "Multilateral diplomacy and international organisations", "Development stages of diplomacy", "Current topics in EU politics", "Latvia in world politics", "Decision-making in foreign policy", "Public diplomacy", "Intercultural communication in diplomacy", "Current issues of international relations", "Theories of international politics", "USA and Europe: Comparative politics, institutions and society", „Digital political communication“, "US foreign policy: Past, present, future", "Policy of Russia in the CIS and Baltic states", "Crises and their management in international politics", "Current issues of contemporary diplomacy", "National security challenges and solutions", "Strategy and tactics of political negotiations", "Protocol and etiquette in the era of diplomatic transformation", "Policy of international economic relations", "International relations and media", courses listed in: Annexes of MSP Diplomacy, Study courses DIPL MSP.pdf), as well as examining the Parameters, the panel is in agreement with SAR, as the learning outcomes of the courses, the objectives, and the admission requirements of the programme). the contents of MSP Diplomacy correspond to international politics, one of the subfields of political science. Parameters demonstrate a synchronisation with the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027 goals.

One of its strengths is the synergy with BSP in Political Science, also implemented at the UL.

Altogether, the programme obliges students to acquire 60 credit points (SAR of MSP Diplomacy, p. 133), which is justified. The duration of the MSP Diplomacy is 2 years of full-time regular studies. Part-time regular and part-time extramural studies are not offered. The duration of studies enables students to examine the theoretical and empirical aspects of international relations, foreign policy and diplomacy during their studies. Students can fully devote the fourth study semester to writing the master's thesis (SAR, p. 134). The programme is available in Latvian, which is reasonable and justified given the mission of the HEI, still, during the on-site visit the academic staff and students underscored the high level of integration of the English language into the programme, with many course readings and all guest lectures provided in English and all staff having a sufficient command of English.

In total, the code, the degree that is to be obtained, the goals and the missions, the learning outcomes and the enrolment requirements are organically linked and mutually integrated. The duration of two years is appropriate.

However, the MSP Diplomacy lacks at least one course comprising quantitative and qualitative methods of research.

2.1.3. The corrections made are understandable and justifiable. Hereby, we refer to the scope and the full title of the diploma obtained after degree completion (SAR, p. 134).

2.1.4.

The general conclusion about the economic and social justification of MSP Diplomacy is that the programme is necessary, based on the needs of public administration for highly qualified employees with in-depth knowledge in international relations, foreign policy and diplomacy. A large number of respondents work in the relevant field. 71% of graduates employed in a field related to the study programme work in public administration and it is noteworthy to mention that the programme is synched with the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027, with the intention to facilitate foreign investments to Latvia, as well as to contribute to the country's improved international standing. Interviews with diplomacy graduates and students showed that they are very employable and have a good package of horizontal skills (SAR, p. 135-136). Interviews with graduates and representatives of employers highlighted the need for the specific skill set incorporated in this programme, especially the capacity to analyse, write and disseminate information pertaining to international economic and security developments, as well as Latvia's place in the broader European and international context. Furthermore, Latvia's ambition to lure foreign direct investments rests on qualifications offered by this programme. Finally, the declining number of students might jeopardise long-term viability of the MSP Diplomacy.

2.1.5. N/A

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

Conclusions:

Generally, the MSP Diplomacy complies with the requirements and imperatives of the given study field. There is definitely enough economic and social justification for the existence and continuation of this programme.

Strengths:

- 1) Expanded list of elective courses since the last assessment procedure has taken place.
- 3) The synergy with BSP in Political Science, also implemented at the UL.
- 4) Synchronisation with the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027 goals.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Declining number of students which jeopardises long-term viability of MSP Diplomacy
- 2) Insufficient number of methodological courses comprising quantitative and qualitative methods.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The MSP Diplomacy conforms to the Article 20 of CM Regulation No. 240 of 13.05.2014 "Regulations on the state standard of the academic education". The mandatory part of the master's study programme, except for the development of the master's thesis, includes the study of the theoretical knowledge in the selected field of science or its subfield. It also complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 titled "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education".

In terms of structure, the MSP Diplomacy consists of 3 parts: mandatory part A in the amount of 56 CP, including the master's thesis in the amount of 20 CP, part B consisting of restricted elective

courses in the amount of 22 CP and part C formed by free elective courses in the amount of 2 CP. By coordinating the choice with the MSP Diplomacy director, students can select courses from other programmes implemented at UL, and these courses can be considered as equal to Part B of the MSP Diplomacy (SAR, p. 139-140). This is also observable from three annexes: "Plan of the study programme "Diplomacy", Study courses DIPL MSP. and Mapping of the study courses DIPL MSP.xlsx, The list of courses is comprehensive, interconnected and complementary. It complies with standards that one would expect to find in similar programmes at comparable universities. Based on the feedback from employers the programme ensures necessary skills, which are necessary for work in domestic and international organisations. Former graduates also confirmed that content aligns with the needs of the labour market and scientific trends to a very high degree.

The reviewer identified some weaknesses in several courses represented in the study plan. The course "The politics of international economic relations" would have to be moved into the mandatory part A of the MSP Diplomacy. It is impossible to arrive at a deeper understanding of the most pressing issues in contemporary international relations without providing students with essentials on key international economic institutions, actors and processes. The second modification refers to the expansion of methodological courses available to students. Students should be able to listen to a course covering key quantitative and qualitative methods in IR. Finally, syllabuses should refrain from overambitious approaches with more than 5-6 compulsory titles. One should take special care to keep the number of required readings per course with the allocated number of ECTS points.

The feedback received from both students and employers during the on-site meetings on July 6th and 7th suggests that the curriculum of the diplomacy programme at the UL could better align with the practical needs of the field. Employers expressed a desire for greater emphasis on the writing of short, non-academic texts, a critical skill in the practice of diplomacy where clear, concise, and effective communication is key. This sentiment was echoed by students who had anticipated a stronger focus on public speaking and interpersonal communication skills in the MSP Diplomacy.

2.2.2. The programme is mostly in line with similar programmes at other European universities, taking into account the course list and the overall study plan that should cover International Relations as a subfield (e.g. there are available courses such as Multilateral Diplomacy and International Organizations and Contemporary Issues in International relations). Additionally, some courses put emphasis on Latvian political and international context (Latvia in World Politics and Policy process in Latvia). Therefore, the programme straddles well between what is *de rigueur* internationally and what is appropriate for the Latvian context.

This can be confirmed by looking at the list of new courses which have been added to the study plan. Those courses are: "US foreign policy: Past, present, future", "National security challenges and solutions", "International relations and media", "Digital political communication" and "Political risk management" have been added to the MSP Diplomacy. Taking into account the increasing salience of Russia's foreign policy, the course "Policy of Russia in the CIS and Baltic states" has been increased from 2 to 4 credit points (SAR, p. 145). The list of topics is being modified according to the achievements and findings of the relevant field. The courses are delivered by very qualified academic staff. Some courses need to offer more up-to-date literature since some of their bibliographical units become obsolete with the passing of time (e.g. Contemporary issues in international relations or The politics of international economic relations). One final seal of approval for the fulfilment of this criterion is the newly obtained Jean Monnet Chair by Professor Daunis Auers, which was unfortunately not mentioned in the SAR, but it was elaborated into detail in an interview with him and other academic staff. Both Professors Auers and Toms Rostoks represent respectable academic staff who put great effort into ensuring that the programme is well-aligned with the latest achievements in the field and subfield.

2.2.3. Students are engaged in a myriad of individual and group assignments through four consecutive semesters. This ensures constant verification of the fulfilment of study field and subfield goals, as well as of the programmes societal and scientific mission.

All MSP Diplomacy courses are available on the Moodle platform, where information is provided on the course content, the learning outcomes of the course and their connection with the programme's learning outcomes, as well as requirements (SAR, p. 143). In interviews with students it has been confirmed that the platform is being used and that it facilitates learning.

In most of the offered courses students have to independently carry out small research assignments such as presentations, essays, and reports, which allow students to take the initiative in choosing the topics they want to study more thoroughly. Generally, the MSP Diplomacy fulfils the minimum criteria necessary for the programme's re-accreditation with regard to this criterion. Nevertheless, in the future, the MSP Diplomacy has to put even more emphasis on organising workshops, simulations of how international institutions work, as well as how various negotiations are being conducted as forms of student-centered learning. The emphasis on the previously mentioned collective and individual assignments re-creates real-life context, which allows graduates to adapt to challenging situations in a more effective way.

2.2.4. N/A

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. From 2016 to 2021, 45 master's theses have been successfully defended, and none of the master's theses was focused on the analysis of domestic policy issues (SAR, p. 145). The MSP Diplomacy management claims that a broad range of topics has been covered in the aforementioned theses. Nevertheless, next self-assessment report should provide detailed titles of MA theses, as well as direct hyperlink access to their summaries in English and Latvian. Furthermore, topics chosen by students for their final theses prove that the programme is based on the achievements and findings of the relevant field of science ( SAR, p. 145) .

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

Conclusions:

The MSP Diplomacy fulfils all of the required criteria in this category. There are many interesting and useful courses on offer to enrolled students. Teaching seems to be student-centred to a sufficient degree, but there is some room to grow as well. This refers primarily to the following issues: some courses need to incorporate newer literature in their syllabuses, and a greater emphasis on key practical skills is preferable.

Strengths:

- 1) Comprehensive list of complementary courses pertained to the study field and MSP Diplomacy orientation.
- 2) Some members of the academic staff have respectable international visibility and academic reputation.
- 3) Newly obtained Jean Monnet Chair.
- 4) Moodle platform is fully integrated into the programme.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Some courses have rather obsolete reading list on the syllabuses or are too demanding in terms of the number of compulsory reading materials.
- 2) Both students and employers in the diplomacy programme have indicated a need for greater emphasis on key practical skills, such as public speaking, interpersonal communication, and the

writing of short, non-academic texts.

### **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 MSP Diplomacy is consistent, well designed. It complies with the Education standard. Some weaknesses which have been identified (e.g. too much literature covering course topics or sometimes literature which is not always up-to-date) do not affect the positive view of the programme in general, as well as its valuable contribution to the Latvian society and international research community.

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

#### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The MSP Diplomacy is implemented in the UL FSS premises and using the infrastructure and technical base of the faculty and the UL, as described in part 1.3. of this report. At this point studies are currently being implemented in the premises of FSS at Lauvas iela 4, however, after the relocation, in 2024, the study field will be housed in the new facilities – House of Letters in the UL Academic Centre in Torņakalns, sharing the premises with other UL faculties and research institutes of Latvia. At the faculty there are available auditoriums that are fully or partially equipped with projectors, computers and sound equipment. (SAR p.55)

At the UL FSS Library the social sciences branch is located and is open 60 hours a week. The library also provides an open repository, workspaces, the possibility to order the needed information resources and e-resources. (SAR p.146)

In the UL library there are available 5326 titles (15 643 titles) available printed on the topics of diplomacy, foreign policy and international relations, in the UL FSS library 1523 titles in 2689 copies. Of the mentioned numbers, the majority (3173/8308) of resources are in English and the majority (4775/9014) are books. Some resources are provided in Latvian, Russian and others. There are serials, periodicals and other types of publications available. In the last 5 years, 388 titles in 1119 copies have been bought of which 109 titles in 414 copies are stored at the UL FSS library. The majority of resources are books and in English. (SAR p.147-148) According to the UL strategic plan, the UL Library increases the share of e-resources and develops remote access to e-resources. In total 42 e-resource platforms are available (as mentioned in part 1.3.2. of this report), which are available from anywhere by logging in with their personal username and password. These resources are overlooked every year, by accessing the usability of subscribed databases. (SAR p.62)

During the assessment visit, it was mentioned that there are sufficient materials, especially the e-resources, that are plentiful and easily accessible.

There are two main e-platforms used to carry out the study process: *estudijas.lu.lv* (based on Moodle) and *edu.lu.lv*, as well as a wide range of e-tools and software packages are offered to its employees and students. (More details in part 1.3.4. of this report)

Financial provision is controlled at the level of faculty. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management. (SAR p.54)

UL provides all necessary resources and complies with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the MSP Diplomacy.



### 2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. Main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to all study programmes of the assessed study field.

As there are no state funded budget places in MSP Diplomacy, then main income is tuition fees. The study fee for 2021./2022. was 2350 EUR/ year. Since there are 20 study places each year, it is calculated that the total income would be 47 000 EUR/year and the total cost is calculated at 46 564 EUR/year (SAR p.148-149) which is adequate and allows full implementation of the study process.

The costs of the MSP Diplomacy consist of: Teaching staff costs 50 %; General staff 10 %; Other payments 1 %; Infrastructure expenditure 11 %; Property and services 2 %; Indirect costs 26 %. (SAR p.149)

The minimal number of students for rentability is 20 for both courses or 10 per study year as calculated by cost of sensitivity analysis based on the students' number (SAR p.150). From the provided statistics of the study programme, the number of students is variable every year. It is seen that in the assessment period, not once all the study places have been filled. The largest group formed is in 2021./2022. with 14 students. The total number of students has varied between 18 and 36 which is rentable, however should be assessed with caution in the future not to face the risk of non-profitability.

MSP Diplomacy students can apply for the Diplomacy Scholarship established by American Latvians, Dagnija and Kaspars Krēsliņš, in 2019, which is open exclusively to the students of MSP Diplomacy. The scholarship was created with the aim of supporting the growth of Latvian diplomacy specialists. Each year, the scholarship is awarded to 1 or 2 students, and the total amount of support within the year is approximately 3,000 EUR. (SAR p.151)

In conclusion, UL has funding available to the study programme, funding sources and the use of funding ensures full implementation of the study process, however the number of students per programme is very close to the minimal number of study programme and should be assessed regularly not to face non-profitability.

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

Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the MSP Diplomacy. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyze the needed number of students to achieve a rentable MSP Diplomacy. The finances are balanced at the appropriate number of students. The MSP Diplomacy is rentable and the number of students exceeds the minimal numbers, however the number of students per programme is very close to the minimal number needed to ensure financial sustainability the given of MSP Diplomacy and should be monitored regularly

Strengths:

- 1) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 2) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Declining number of students.

## **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 resources are sufficient for the implementation of the MSP Diplomacy. The finances are balanced. Minor weakness has been identified, however it does not affect the compliance.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. The SAR (p. 152-152) and its Annexes: CV's (CV ENG.pdf) and List of publications (List of publications.pdf) informed the expert panel that 21 teaching staff members are involved in the implementation of the MSP Diplomacy. Thirteen of them have doctoral degrees. Three of them are elected professors and two of them are elected associated professors. All of them carry out research, the results of which are integrated into the study process. This component of the teaching staff meets minimum requirements of legal acts (i.e. requirements set out in the third paragraph of the first part of Section 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, namely, a minimum of 5 professors and associate professors participate in the implementation of the study programmes). In addition to elected staff fifteen adjunct lecturers are also involved in the implementation of the MSP Diplomacy. 8 of them have doctoral degrees (SAR, p. 151). The rest of them have master degrees. According to the SAR doctoral students and professionals from state institutions are also involved in the implementation of the programme.

At first glance, one gets the impression that a large number of adjunct lecturers may pose certain risks to the successful achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study program and the relevant study courses. However, no obvious evidence of this could be found. During the interviews, students, graduates and employers did not make any critical remarks about the teachers' qualifications. Therefore, after the site visit and analysis of the SAR, teaching staff CV's and the list of publications it was possible to conclude that the teaching staff has sufficient qualifications to and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning. The diverse composition of the teaching staff (academics plus professionals) is appropriate for achieving knowledge- and skills-oriented learning outcomes. The on-site interviews revealed one particular issue, however, that potentially may cause challenges in achievement of the study programme, namely, a lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols for staff.

2.4.2. Although SAR states that "since the beginning of the master's study program in 2012, there have been minimal changes in both the composition of the teaching staff and the course offering" (p. 152), the further text does not confirm this. The MSP Diplomacy basically went through a generational renewal of the teaching staff. The number of professors has fallen from 6 in 2013 to 3 in 2022. The participation of doctoral candidates in the teaching process has increased since 2013 (from 5 in 2013 to 8 in 2022). Despite this, MSP Diplomacy has continued to be successful, remaining attractive to students and positively regarded by employers. This was confirmed during interviews with the aforementioned respondents. Therefore, the panel of experts can confirm that the Program was managed well and that sufficiently significant changes in the composition of faculty members were properly managed. The composition of teaching staff met the minimum requirements of regulatory enactments.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. According to the plan of the MSP Diplomacy (Annex: Study plan DIPL MSP.pdf) currently 18 teachers are involved in teaching. Almost all instructors, except for four industry professionals, have publications in peer-reviewed publications. The level of publications varies from publications in Latvian in local publications to articles in prestigious magazines and books published by international publishers. All involved industry professionals have more than five years of practical experience. Out of 18 teachers, experts managed to find 10 of them in the Scopus database. The level of the Index varies. Six teachers have an index greater than one. The highest h-index of one of the professors is 7. The content of the publications corresponds to the specialisations of the teachers and makes a valuable contribution to the achievement of the MSP Diplomacy goals.

2.4.5. The mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the MSP Diplomacy has the form of regular meetings of the Department of Political Science (SAR, p. 154-155). In these meetings, all the most important aspects (e.g. curriculum development, links among study modules, approval of students' master's thesis topics, etc.) of the programme are discussed and decided. This arrangement is sufficient because it ensures the achievement of the aims of the MSP Diplomacy and the interconnection of study courses within the programme. However, bearing in mind that the Department of Political Science held not one, but several study programs, it would be appropriate to consider the possibility of creating a specialised committee for MSP Diplomacy, which would take care of the affairs of this particular programme.

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

#### **Conclusions:**

Teaching staff with adequate qualifications are employed to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the MSP Diplomacy, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning. The composition of faculty members meets the requirements of legal acts. Doctoral students and professionals from state institutions are also involved in the implementation of the MSP Diplomacy. The MSP Diplomacy is managed well and that rather significant changes in composition of the faculty members were properly handled. Almost all instructors, except for four industry professionals, have publications in peer-reviewed publications. Mutual cooperation of the faculty members is ensured in the form of regular Department meetings.

#### **Strengths**

- 1) The composition of faculty members meets the requirements of legal acts.
- 2) Changes in the composition of the teaching staff are managed effectively.
- 3) Involvement of a number of adjunct lecturers with practical knowledge in the implementation of the Programme.

#### **Weaknesses**

- 1) Not all members of the teaching staff are present in Scopus.
- 2) Not all adjunct lecturers have a doctoral degree.
- 3) Absence of specialised Study Programme Committee
- 4) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

### **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:** Fully compliant

The composition of the teaching staff meets the requirements of legal acts. Some weaknesses have been identified, however they do not affect the compliance. For further improvement, it is suggested to aim for more Scopus-level publications.

## 2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Provided annex "Education standard DIPL MSP.pdf" affirms that "Diplomacy" programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education".

- 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 - 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

Provided course descriptions "Kursu apraksti DIPL MSP.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages, although the programme is realized only in Latvian. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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 diploma example available in annex "DIPL MSP diploma paraugs.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued".

- 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 attached annex "Study field declaration DIPL MSP.pdf" affirms that "Diplomacy" (code 45312) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex "Declaration\_Latvian language.pdf" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex "Studiju ligumi.pdf" containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 "Rules to be included in the study agreement".

- 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

Provided annex "Study continuation agreements.pdf" affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in Rīga Stradiņš university Masters study programmes implemented if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

- 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

Provided annex "Study continuation agreements.pdf" states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act)

of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

### **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

The MSP Diplomacy complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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

Conclusions:

The MSP Diplomacy meets the requirements of the study field and has sufficient economic and social justification. It offers interesting and useful courses, although improvements can be made in certain areas. Some academic staff lack Google Scholar profiles, limiting their visibility, and certain courses need to update their literature.

The study provision is adequate, with plans to relocate to new premises. Methodological and informative resources are accessible, and expenses are planned per student. The study programme is financially viable, exceeding minimal student numbers, but close to the threshold for long-term sustainability. Qualified faculty members are employed, including doctoral students and professionals from state institutions. The programme is well-managed and effectively handles faculty composition changes. Most instructors have publications, except for a few industry professionals. Regular department meetings ensure faculty cooperation.

Strengths:

- 1) The list of elective courses has been expanded since the last assessment procedure.
- 2) There is synergy with BSP in Political Science, also implemented at the UL.
- 3) Regular surveys of students and former graduates are conducted to ensure feedback on the study programme.
- 4) Relatively high satisfaction with the implemented study programme, expressed both on behalf of currently enrolled students, as well as graduates.
- 5) Synchronisation with the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027 goals.
- 6) Some members of the academic staff have respectable international visibility and academic reputation.

Newly obtained Jean Monnet Chair.

- 7) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 8) The new premises in Torņakalns will open more access to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.
- 9) The composition of faculty members meets the requirements of legal acts.
- 10) Changes in the composition of the teaching staff are managed effectively.
- 11) Involvement of a number of adjunct lecturers with practical knowledge in the implementation of

the Programme.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Declining number of students jeopardises long-term viability of this programme.
- 2) Insufficient number of methodological courses, especially quantitative courses.
- 3) Some courses have rather obsolete reading list on the syllabuses or are too demanding in terms of the number of compulsory reading materials.
- 4) Both students and employers in the diplomacy programme have indicated a need for greater emphasis on key practical skills, such as public speaking, interpersonal communication, and the writing of short, non-academic texts.
- 5) Not all faculty members are present in Scopus and Google scholar.
- 6) Not all adjunct lecturers have a doctoral degree.
- 7) Absence of specialised Study Programme Committee
- 8) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

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

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Diplomacy"**

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

- |   |
|---|
| 1) All members of the academic staff should have valid Google Scholar profiles.   |
| 2) The Scopus presence of the academic staff should be increased.   |
| 3) Update and monitor reading lists on the syllabuses of the courses, edit the courses that are too demanding in terms of the number of compulsory reading materials. |
| 4) Increase the availability of methodological courses, especially quantitative courses.  |

#### **Long-term recommendations**

- |   |
|---|
| 1) Within possibility, attract more students to the study programme to ensure profitability.  |
| 2) Adjust the curriculum to include more coursework focusing on practical diplomatic skills, such as public speaking, interpersonal communication, and the writing of short, non-academic texts. This could involve dedicated courses, workshops, or the incorporation of these skills into existing courses. |
| 3) Introduce EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.  |
| 4) Consider the possibility of creating a specialised committee for MSP Diplomacy Science, which would take care of the affairs of this particular programme.   |
| 5) Within possibility, motivate adjunct lecturers to obtain doctoral degrees.   |

## **II - "Political Science" ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Political Science" ASSESSMENT**

## 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

### Analysis

2.1.1. As per the Parameters, the goal of the Political Science (45312) (MSP Political Science) programme is to prepare “professionals with an in-depth knowledge of political science and its sub-disciplines. It gives the necessary skills and competences to apply this knowledge to their professional activities in the national, municipal, non-governmental and private sectors.” (Parameters of the study programme). The goal corresponds to the Mission of the HEI, which states “UL contributes to global science, higher education, knowledge, technology transfer and innovation, and ensures the growth of Latvian democracy and culture, the development of the Latvian language and the prosperity of the national economy.” (SAR of the Study field, 1.1.), and the formulation reaffirms the compliance of the MSP Political Science with the study field Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology and aligns with the expectations of the broader field of political science. (NB! The “Study program goal (in English)” of the “Parameters” section of the programme reads “BSP Political Science”, not “MSP Political Science”).

During the on-site interview the panel established that the management of the MSP Political Science demonstrates an excellent level of awareness of the legacy, systemic constraints (state financing, decreasing number of local students due to birth rates, competition), strengths, challenges and the future development of the programme in line with the UL mission and the vision for social sciences programmes on the national level. The SAR of the MSP Political Science clearly defines the goals and the development of the programme.

2.1.2. According to the MSP Political Science SAR, the title of the master’s degree programme “Political Science” “confirms to the programme’s content and its leading parameters – the code, the degree that is to be obtained, the goals and the missions, the learning outcomes and the enrolment requirements, all of which are organically linked and mutually integrated.” (SAR of MSP Political Science, 3.1.2.) Upon conducting an analysis of the study courses provided in the Programme Annexes, the panel is in agreement with SAR, as the learning outcomes of the courses (incl. Political Philosophy, Advanced topics in EU politics, Theories of international politics, Contemporary issues in international relations, Anti-corruption policy and public-sector ethics, et.al.) are relevant to the field, the degree, the aims, the objectives, and the admission requirements of the programme (courses listed in: Annexes of MSP Political Science, Study courses POL MSP.pdf).

The official UL website states admission requirements of the programme to be a “Bachelor's degree or second-level professional higher education, or equivalent higher education”. Additionally, for applicants “who have obtained a bachelor's degree in other branches of science (not in political science), during the master's study programme must additionally take the course “Basic questions of political theory” (2 credits).” (Maģistra līmeņa studijas, Politikas zinātne, uzņemšanas nosacījumi, <https://www.lu.lv/studijas/fakultates/socialo-zinatnu-fakultate/magistra-limena-studijas/politikas-zinatne/>).

The code (45312) of the MSP Political Science is based on Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 322, “Regulations on Latvia’s education classification,” where the first digits of the code, 45, refer to the academic level of the master’s degree. (SAR of MSP Political Science, 3.1.2.) The diploma issued upon the completion of the MSP Political Science grants Master’s degree of Social Sciences in Political Science (MSP Political Science Annexes, SAMPLE DIPLOMA TEMPLATE TRANSLATION, Diploma POL MSP.pdf), which corresponds to other indicators of the programme.

Therefore, the panel concludes that the code, the degree, the aims, the objectives and the learning outcomes of the programme, as well as the admission requirements are interrelated.

The duration of the full time studies within the programme is 2 years, and 80 CP are provided. This is in line with the national standard, as per Compliance of the master’s study programme “Political science” with the state education standard (MSP Political Science Annexes, Education standard POL



MSP.pdf).

The programme is available in Latvian, which is reasonable and justified given the mission of the HEI, still, during the on-site visit the academic staff and students underscored the high level of integration of the English language into the programme, with many course readings and all guest lectures provided in English and all staff having a sufficient command of English. This, according to the students, allows for a successful integration of incoming students from abroad into the programme.

2.1.3. According to MSP Political Science SAR 3.1.1, the programme code has been adjusted to be in accordance with the changes in the Latvian education classification pursuant to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 322 of 13.06.2017 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education" from 45310 to 45312. The admission requirements have also been specified, as the programme accredited in 2013 required "1) Entrance examination – interview of applicants; 2) Additional condition: Curriculum vitae (CV)". (SAR of MSP Political Science, 3.1.1,)

Whereas the updates admission requirements have introduced a more objective and transparent procedure: "Entrance exam (1 x 1000 = 1000), the minimum number of points in the entrance exam for admission is 400; those who have obtained a bachelor's degree or a second-level professional higher education in political science can participate in the competition with the following evaluation formula: average weighted grade (60 x 10 = 600) + total (or average) grade of the final exams (40 x 10 = 400)", with the Additional condition of Curriculum vitae reserved only for applicants from other branches of science (not in Political Science) (Maģistra līmeņa studijas, Politikas zinātne, uzņemšanas nosacījumi, <https://www.lu.lv/studijas/fakultates/socialo-zinatnu-fakultate/magistra-limena-studijas/politikas-zinatne/>),

According to the information provided by the MSP Political Science management during the assessment visit, the management analyzed, justified, and supported the changes recommended in the previous rounds of programme assessment. The implemented minor changes are well justified.

2.1.4. The general conclusion on the economic and social justification of MSP Political Science is that the programme is necessary, based on the needs of public administration for highly qualified employees with in-depth knowledge in domestic politics, international relations and foreign policy. SAR states that "The demand for employees by the state and local government institutions has increased. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of employees in the general government sector in Latvia has increased by approximately 3 percent". (SAR of the MSP Political Science, 3.1.3.)

The interviews during the on-site visit show that the graduates of the programme enjoy high employability. All interviewed MA level students have been employed right after graduation by state institutions (incl. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, SAR 3.1.3. additionally reports State Chancellery and Riga City Council as employers), and the private sector (public relations companies as well as media were mentioned), if they wished to find employment. During the on-site meeting with the employers, they underscored the good preparedness of the MSP Political Science graduates for work situations and the high applicability of the knowledge obtained during the course of the programme. During the interviews, none of the students or graduates mentioned any difficulty in finding employment upon graduation from the programme.

According to a graduate survey reported in the SAR, "50% rather agreed, and 45% fully agreed with the statement that they were satisfied with the fact that they chose to acquire MSP Political Science" (SAR of the MSP Political Science, 3.1.3.). Conversations with graduates during the on-site visit reveal satisfaction with the programme and sufficient skillsets for work.

2.1.5. N/A

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

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

Conclusions:

The MSP Political Science is fully compliant with the study field of "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". SAR of the MSP Political Science clearly defines the goals, the legacy and the development of the programme. The management of the MSP Political Science demonstrates an excellent level of awareness. The MSP Political Science comprises 2 years of full-time studies, which is sufficient and in line with state legislative regulation. English is fully embedded in the programme, as witnessed by the readings and student linguistic capabilities. The MSP Political Science is in line with national requirements, including the credit points granted, mandatory and elective courses, admission requirements, and learning outcomes. Graduates express high levels of satisfaction with the programme and good prospects for employment.

Strengths:

- 1) The SAR of the MSP Political Science clearly defines the goals, the legacy and the development of the programme.
- 2) The management of the MSP Political Science demonstrates an excellent level of awareness of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, as well as the position of the programme within the mission of the UL and the national vision.
- 3) The MSP Political Science provides strong internalisation opportunities, including incoming and outgoing student and staff mobility.

Weaknesses:

- 1) NB! The "Study program goal (in English)" of the ""Parameters" section of the programme reads "BSP Political Science", not ""MSP Political Science".

## 2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

2.2.1. The first impression that is made when getting acquainted with the MSP Political Science is its universality and comprehensiveness. The MSP Political Science fully justifies its name, as its content consists of courses/modules reflecting all directions of political science. Therefore, students actually have every opportunity to familiarise themselves with Comparative Politics and Political Theory, and with Public Administration and with International Politics, and accordingly choose the most interesting topic for themselves and prepare their Master Thesis accordingly. The MSP Political Science also includes relevant courses, which are designed to cover quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The MSP Political Science fully complies with national regulations (Annex: Education standard POL MSP.pdf). Such programmes are required to have at least 24 CP for mandatory courses, and at least 20 CP to prepare the Master Thesis. However, as in the case of the BPS Political Science, the mandatory part of this MSP Political Science is not limited to the minimum requirement. Instead of 24 CP, it states that the mandatory part consists of 36 CP. However, such "conservatism" is partially amortised by a solid offer of electives, which open the possibility for students to specialise in the desired subfield of political science. E.g. those MA students, who wish to specialise in International Relations could choose elective modules such as "Foreign policy decision making", "Russian Policy towards the CIS and the Baltic States", "Contemporary issues in international relations", "Political Negotiations Strategy and Tactics". For those who would like to specialise in Public Administration are offered electives as "Project management in politics", "Development planning", "Quality Management Systems". The same conclusion is valid for those who would like to specialise in

Comparative Politics. That makes content of the MSP Political Science topical, open for needs of the industry, labor market, helps to achieve objectives of the programme, and reflects current scientific trends. This is an undoubted advantage of the Programme, which was also confirmed by the students and graduates during the interviews.

As stipulated in the standard, 20 CP are allocated to the preparation of the Master Thesis, and the entire 4th semester is dedicated to their preparation. However, it is very positive that actually students have to start thinking about Master Thesis earlier. Judging from the course description, students are obliged to submit their research proposal to the Department of Political Science already by the end of the second semester. And at the beginning of the fourth semester students present draft parts of their MA thesis at the MA conference to obtain feedback from advisors and peers. However, it is not entirely clear how the preparation of the MA Thesis is supervised/facilitated during the third semester, as no forms of settlement or progress presentation are foreseen.

During the on-site visit on July 7th, feedback from students and graduates of the MSP Political Science who had transitioned from the bachelor's level highlighted an issue with the curriculum. These individuals expressed that a substantial portion of their master's level coursework was repetitive, covering similar content to what they had already encountered during their bachelor's studies. This redundancy created a perception that they were not gaining significant new value from the master's programme. On the other hand, students who had entered the master's programme from other fields of study did not report such issues; for them, the curriculum content was appropriately challenging and novel. This situation suggests a need for curriculum differentiation to ensure that all students, regardless of their prior exposure to the field, find the master's programme enriching and valuable.

2.2.2. The fact that the awarding of a Master degree is based on the achievements and findings of the field of political science can be confirmed after familiarising oneself with the provided course descriptions (Annex Study courses POL MSP.pdf ). Basically, students are offered to study the latest literature and publications in prestigious journals (e.g. Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Analysis, International Security, International Journal of Administration & Society, International Journal of Project Management, etc). Although, of course, older books are also used. However, this is natural. Sometimes previously published classical texts (e.g. Allison, G., Zelikow, P. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd edition. Longman, 1999) are also needed.

2.2.3. The study implementation methods of the MSP Political Science beyond doubt contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the MSP Political Science. Various methods of acquiring and consolidating knowledge are used in the studies. According to the Self-assessment Report "employers are involved in the implementation and development of study courses (they are invited to conduct particular seminars, sometimes the classes are organised as experience exchange visits to workplaces, etc.)" (SAR, p. 225). The fact that practitioners, professionals from various institutions are invited to teach individual lectures or entire study courses should be regarded as a strength of the MSP Political Science.

However, after the interviews during assessment visit with managers, students and graduates of the MSP Political Science there are certain doubts whether the so-called "student-centred approach" is really well thought out. From the point of view of the expert panel it definitely shouldn't just be a buzzword. The Self-assessment report states that "in updating the study programmes and the study courses thereof, the student-centred approach is implemented, paying special attention to the meaningful formulation of learning outcomes, thus promoting the dialogue between lecturers and students about the study content, organisational forms and methods." (SAR, p. 226). However during conversations with both teachers and students, the expert panel was unable to get a clear understanding of the meaning of this concept. It did not appear that there was an understanding of clearly distinct forms of seminars, when the process is led by teachers and when the process is

completely independently led by students. The expert panel would like to recommend paying additional attention to this aspect and take a closer look at the specific teaching method of "problem based learning", when students can really be real masters of their learning process. This is extremely important to have it on the MA studies level.

2.2.4. The internship is not offered in this MSP Political Science.

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. According to analysis provided by the Self-assessment report "most frequently, master's theses have corresponded to the subfield of comparative politics (38 master's theses), slightly less interest was occasioned by international politics (30 master's theses), 18 master's theses were defended on the topics pertaining to public administration" (SAR, p. 227). This evidence allows concluding that the the topics of students' final theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the MSP Political Science.

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

#### Conclusions:

The MSP Political Science fully complies with national regulations. The MSP Political Science is universal and comprehensive, as its content consists of courses/modules reflecting all directions of political science and covers both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The possibility for the students to specialise in the desired subfield of political science is an undoubted advantage. Students submit their master's thesis proposals at the end of the second semester, and at the beginning of the fourth semester students present draft parts to obtain feedback from advisors and peers. However, it is not entirely clear how the preparation of the thesis is supervised/facilitated during the third semester. Students are offered to study the latest literature and publications in prestigious journals, as well as classic books of the discipline. Various methods of acquiring and consolidating knowledge are used in the studies, which contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes. It should be noted that during conversations with both teachers and students, the expert panel was unable to get a clear understanding of the meaning of the "student-centred approach" concept mentioned in the SAR. Also, a substantial portion of their master's level coursework was reported to be repetitive, covering similar content to bachelor's studies. Students who had entered the master's programme from other fields of study, however, did not report such issues. Perhaps a slight curriculum differentiation could be in order.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Universality and comprehensiveness of the MSP Political Science.
- 2) Solid offer of elective courses.
- 3) Involvement of practitioners and professionals from various institutions.

#### Weaknesses

- 1) The so-called "student-centered approach" is not really well thought out.
- 2) The MSP Political Science does not provide any credit points to encourage students to start preparing the MA Thesis earlier — during the second and third semesters.
- 3) Lack of differentiation in curriculum content for students transitioning from the Political Science bachelor's programme to the master's programme, leading to a perception of redundancy and limited value.

## **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 MSP Political Science is consistent, well designed. It complies with the Education standard. For further improvement, it is suggested to aim for more sophisticated "student-centred approach".

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

#### **Analysis**

##### 2.3.1.

The MSP Political Science is implemented in the UL FSS premises and using the infrastructure and technical base of the faculty and the UL, as described in part 1.3. of this report. At this point studies are currently being implemented in the premises of FSS at Lauvas iela 4, however, after the relocation, in 2024, the study field will be housed in the new facilities – House of Letters in the UL Academic Centre in Torņakalns, sharing the premises with other UL faculties and research institutes of Latvia. At the faculty there are available auditoriums that are fully or partially equipped with projectors, computers and sound equipment. (SAR p.55)

At the UL FSS Library the social sciences branch is located and is open 60 hours a week. The library also provides an open repository, workspaces, the possibility to order the needed information resources and e-resources. (SAR p.146)

In the UL library there are available 13 699 titles (33 486 copies) available printed on the topics of political science, in the UL FSS library 3 992 titles in 6 032 copies. Of the mentioned numbers, the majority (3081/4341) of resources are in English and the majority (3827/5678) are books. Some resources are provided in Latvian, Russian and others. There are serials, periodicals and other types of publications available. In the last 5 years, 494 titles in 901 copies have been bought of which 253 titles in 366 copies are stored at the UL FSS library. The majority of resources are books and in English. (SAR p.204-205) According to the UL strategic plan, the UL Library increases the share of e-resources and develops remote access to e-resources. In total 42 e-resource platforms are available (as mentioned in part 1.3.2. of this report), which are available from anywhere by logging in with their personal username and password. These resources are overlooked every year, by accessing the usability of subscribed databases. (SAR p.62)

As mentioned by the students during the assessment visit, the materials are sufficient and accessible.

There are two main e-platforms used to carry out the study process: [studijas.lu.lv](https://studijas.lu.lv) (based on Moodle) and [edu.lu.lv](https://edu.lu.lv), as well as a wide range of e-tools and software packages are offered to its employees and students. (More details in part 1.3.4. of this report)

Financial provision is controlled at the level of faculty. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management. (SAR p.54)

UL provides all necessary resources and complies with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the MSP Political Science.

##### 2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. Main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to all MSP

Political Science of the assessed study field.

The funding of this study programme consists of both tuition fees and state funding for study places (20 per year). The study fee for 2021./2022. was 2 350 EUR/ year and funding for the state funded budget places was 2 445 EUR/year. Since there were 32 students in state funded and 6 students in self-paid places, it is calculated that the total income would be 87 450 EUR/year and the total cost is calculated at 88 008 EUR/year (SAR p.228-231) where we can see that the costs exceed the funding by little, however since all years the student number is sufficient, the lost should balance out between years.

The costs of the study programme consist of: Teaching staff costs 51 %; General staff 10 %; Other payments 0.2 %; Infrastructure expenditure 11 %; Property and services 1.8 %; Indirect costs 26 %. (SAR p.229)

The minimal number of students for rentability is 36 if all would be in self-paid places and 38 if in state funded places as calculated by cost of sensitivity analysis based on the students' number (SAR p.230). The minimal number of students at admission should be 25.

From the provided statistics of the study programme, the number of students is variable and exceeds the minimal number of students (exceeding the number 40 every year). It is seen that state funded budget places are filled.

In conclusion, UL has funding available to the study programme, funding sources and the use of funding ensures full implementation of the study process.

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

Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the MSP Political Science. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyze the needed number of students to achieve a rentable study programme. The finances are balanced at the appropriate number of students. The study programme is rentable and the number of students exceeds the minimal numbers.

Strengths:

- 1) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 2) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.
- 3) The number of students exceeds the minimal number required for rentability.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The costs exceed the funding by little.

### **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 resources are sufficient for the implementation of the MSP Political Science. The finances are balanced. Minor weaknesses have been found, however they do not pose a threat for the

rentability.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. The SAR (p. 231-233) and its Annexes: CV's (CV ENG.pdf) and List of publications (List of publications.pdf) informed the expert panel that 17 teaching staff members are involved in the implementation of the MSP Political Science. Twelve of them have doctoral degrees. Three of them are elected professors and five of them are elected associated professors. All of them carry out research, the results of which are integrated into the study process. This component of the teaching staff meets and exceeds the requirements of legal acts (i.e. requirements set out in the third paragraph of the first part of Section 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, namely, a minimum of 5 professors and associate professors participate in the implementation of the Master programmes). In addition to "pure academics", a number of experienced industry professionals (SAR, p. 231-232) are also involved in the implementation of the MSP Political Science. All the professionals of the sector have at least a master's degree and at least 10 years of work experience. After analysis of the SAR, teaching staff CV's and the list of publications it was possible to conclude that the teaching staff has adequate qualifications to and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning. The diverse composition of the teaching staff (academics plus professionals) is appropriate for achieving knowledge- and skills-oriented learning outcomes. The on-site interviews revealed one particular issue, however, that potentially may cause challenges in achievement of the study programme, namely, a lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols for staff.

2.4.2. Based on the Self-assessment report, and on findings from the on-site visit, the Expert Panel can confirm that the MSP Political Science is managed well and that rather numerous changes in composition of the faculty members were properly handled. As the SAR states, "Since the previous accreditation <...> Three professors have retired <...>. However, several new teaching staff members have been recruited for the implementation of the programme, enabling improvement of the existing courses, and, furthermore, introducing the changes in the offer of courses according to transformations in society and the labour market" (SAR, p. 232). The expert panel didn't find any evidence that these changes mismatched with requirements of regulatory enactments or negatively affected the quality of MSP Political Science. The fact that the programme managers managed to increase the number of participating professionals from two to five (SAR, p. 233) should be considered as a positive development.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. According to the plan of the MSP Political Science, currently 17 teachers are involved in teaching (Annex: Study plan POL MSP.pdf). Almost all instructors, except for four industry professionals, have publications in peer-reviewed publications. The level of publications varies from publications in Latvian in local publications to articles in prestigious magazines and books published by international publishers (Annex: List of publications.pdf). Out of 17 teachers, we managed to find 13 of them in the Scopus database. The level of the Index varies. Six teachers have an index greater than one. The highest h-index of one of the professors is 7. The content of the publications corresponds to the specialisations of the teachers and makes a valuable contribution to the achievement of the programme goals. All the professionals of the sector have at least a master's degree and at least 10 years of work experience (SAR, p. 232).

2.4.5. The mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the MSP

Political Science has the form of regular meetings of the Department of Political Science (SAR, p. 234). In these meetings, all the most important aspects (e.g. curriculum development, links among study modules, approval of students' master's thesis topics, etc.) of the programme are discussed and decided. This arrangement is sufficient because it ensures the achievement of the aims of the MSP Political Science and the interconnection of study courses within the programme. However, bearing in mind that the Department of Political Science held not one, but several study programs, it would be appropriate to consider the possibility of creating a specialised committee for MSP Political Science, which would take care of the affairs of this particular programme.

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

#### **Conclusions:**

The composition of faculty members meets and exceeds the requirements of legal acts. Almost all instructors, except for four industry professionals, have publications in peer-reviewed publications. The content of the publications corresponds to the specialisations of the teachers and makes a valuable contribution to the achievement of the programme goals. Regular meetings of the Department serve as a mechanism for mutual cooperation of the faculty members. students are involved in the work of the faculty council.

#### **Strengths**

- 1) The composition of the teaching staff meets the requirements of legal acts.
- 2) Changes in the composition of the teaching staff is managed effectively.
- 3) Involvement of a number of experienced industry professionals in the implementation of the Programme.

#### **Weaknesses**

- 1) Not all faculty members are present in Scopus.
- 2) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

### **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:** Fully compliant

The composition of the teaching staff meets the requirements of legal acts. Some weaknesses have been identified, however they do not affect the compliance. For further improvement, it is suggested to aim for more Scopus-level publications.

## **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

Provided annex "Education standard POL MSP.pdf" affirms that "Political science" programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education".



- 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

Provided course descriptions “ Kursu apraksti POL MSP.pdf” are available in both Latvian and English languages, although the programme is realized only in Latvian. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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 diploma example available in annex “ POL MSP diploma pielikums.pdf” is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 “Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued”.

- 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 attached annex “Study field declaration POL MSP.pdf” affirms that “Political Science” (code 43312) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex “Declaration\_Latvian language.pdf” affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex “ Studiju ligumi.pdf” containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 “Rules to be included in the study agreement”.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in Rīga Stradiņš university “Political Science” Masters programme if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

**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

The MSP Political Science complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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

Conclusions:

The MSP Political Science fully complies with national regulations and is universal and comprehensive, covering all directions of political science with both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Students can specialise in their desired subfield, which is advantageous. Master's thesis proposals are submitted at the end of the second semester, and draft parts are presented in the fourth semester for feedback. However, the supervision of thesis preparation during the third semester needs clarification. The curriculum includes the latest literature from prestigious journals and classic books, and various teaching methods contribute to achieving the learning outcomes. The meaning of the "student-centred approach" concept mentioned in the SAR is unclear, and some coursework repetition was reported at the master's level, particularly for students from the same bachelor's field, suggesting a need for curriculum differentiation.

The study provision is sufficient, with studies currently held at the faculty building and plans to move to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. Methodological and informative resources are accessible and adequate for students, with expenses planned per student. A study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyse the required student count for a viable programme, and the finances are balanced accordingly. The study programme is profitable, and the number of students exceeds the minimum requirement.

The faculty composition meets and exceeds legal requirements, with almost all instructors having publications in peer-reviewed journals that align with their specialisations, contributing to the programme's goals. Regular department meetings foster faculty cooperation, and students are involved in the faculty council's work.

Strengths:

- 1) The SAR of the study programme clearly defines the goals, the legacy and the development of the programme.
- 2) The management of the programme demonstrates an excellent level of awareness, as well as the position of the programme within the mission of the UL and the national vision.
- 3) The programme provides strong internalisation opportunities, including incoming and outgoing student and staff mobility.
- 4) The programme is universal and comprehensive.
- 5) Full compliance with national regulations (state education standard).
- 6) A solid selection of elective courses is available.
- 7) Practitioners and professionals from various institutions are involved in the programme.
- 8) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 9) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to a more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.
- 10) The number of students exceeds the minimal number required for rentability.
- 11) The composition of faculty members meets the requirements of legal acts.
- 12) Changes in the composition of the teaching staff is managed effectively.
- 13) Involvement of a number of experienced industry professionals in the implementation of the Programme.

Weaknesses:

- 1) NB! The "Study program goal (in English)" of the ""Parameters" section of the programme reads "BSP Political Science", not "MSP Political Science".
- 2) The so-called "student-centred approach" is not really well thought out.
- 3) The MSP Political Science does not provide any credit points to encourage students to start preparing the MA Thesis earlier — during the second and third semesters.
- 4) Lack of differentiation in curriculum content for students transitioning from the Political Science bachelor's programme to the master's programme leads to a perception of redundancy and limited value.
- 5) Not all faculty members are present in Scopus.
- 6) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Political Science"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Political Science"**

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

- |  |
|--|
| 1) All members of the academic staff should have valid Google Scholar profiles.  |
| 2) Consider introducing a Master Thesis seminar in 2nd-4th semesters in order to facilitate preparation of the MA Thesis by assessing progress and giving additional impetus for students to proceed with Thesis preparation consistently. |
| 3) Change "BSP Political Science" to "MSP Political Science" within the "Study program goal (in English)" of the ""Parameters" section of the programme.   |

#### **Long-term recommendations**

- |  |
|--|
| 1) Revise and tailor the curriculum for students transitioning from the bachelor's programme to provide new and advanced knowledge and skills. This may involve incorporating more specialised and advanced courses, focusing on areas of political science that were not extensively covered at the bachelor's level. Regular assessment and feedback from students in the master's programme can help identify areas where curriculum differentiation is most needed and guide ongoing improvements. |
| 2) Rethink the concepts of "student-centred approach" and "student-led education" and take a closer look at the specific teaching method of "problem based learning", when students can really be real masters of their learning process.  |
| 3) Introduce EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.   |

## **II - "Cultural and Social Anthropology" ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Cultural and Social Anthropology" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

2.1.1. The very title of the study field explicitly includes "Anthropology". This inherently suggests that the study programme "Cultural and Social Anthropology" 45314 (MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology) is part of the broader study field. Anthropology is a key discipline in understanding human societies and cultures, which aligns with the other areas of study in this field: Sociology and Political Science.

On March 9, 2022, the AIC Study Quality Commission approved a change in the study field to "Sociology, Political Studies, and Anthropology," and a change in the code in the Latvian education classification. This decision, which considered the input of external experts, implies that a thorough assessment was conducted to ensure the study programme's compliance with the mentioned field of study. The experts also concluded that the content of the study programme aligns with the sector of anthropology. This further confirms the alignment of the programme with the study field.

The goal of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is to prepare higher-level anthropology specialists who can orient themselves in the history and modern approaches of anthropology, independently plan and conduct practical anthropological research, and critically and systematically analyse social and cultural processes. These competencies align closely with the broader expectations within the fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology.

The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology outcomes include in-depth knowledge of anthropological approaches, theories, and concepts; skills to apply anthropological theories and conduct anthropological research; and competences to understand and interpret data, demonstrate an ethical approach and professionalism, and conduct research in an ethically responsible manner. These outcomes further align the programme with the broader study field, as they incorporate key aspects of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology.

In conclusion, the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is well-aligned with the study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology title, its goals, outcomes, and the AIC Study Quality Commission's decision all suggest a high degree of compliance with the study field. The programme provides a comprehensive anthropological education that is in line with the expectations and scope of the broader study field.

2.1.2. Title and Code: The title "Cultural and Social Anthropology" and the code "45314" are well-matched and accurately reflect the focus of the study programme on the field of anthropology.

Degree to be Obtained: The degree to be obtained, "Master of Social Sciences in Sociology and Culture Studies," does not explicitly mention "anthropology," which is a central part of the study programme. This discrepancy between the programme's content and the degree title can cause confusion and potential disadvantage for students in their future studies and career prospects. This issue appears to be linked to the classification of "social anthropology, historical anthropology" as a sub-branch of the science branch "Sociology and Social Work" under Latvia's Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 595, which also stipulates the degree titles for study programmes ending with certain codes.

Aims, Objectives, Learning Outcomes, and Admission Requirements: These elements are well aligned with each other and with the field of anthropology. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology aims to prepare high-level specialists in cultural and social anthropology, with objectives and learning outcomes designed to support this aim.

Duration and Scope: The duration of the study programme is two years (four semesters) for a total of 80 credits. This aligns with the Bologna Process recommendations and is linked to the content of the preceding three-year bachelor's degree programme. The scope and duration are thus reasonable and justified.

Implementation Language: The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is offered in both Latvian and English, which is appropriate given the international scope of anthropology as a discipline and the potential for students from various linguistic backgrounds to enroll in the programme.

In conclusion, while most elements of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology are interrelated and

justified, the degree to be obtained does not accurately reflect the study programme's focus on anthropology. This discrepancy warrants attention, and potentially legislative changes, to better represent the programme's content and address the concerns of students and graduates. In the interim, it may be beneficial to communicate clearly to students about this discrepancy and provide guidance on how they can articulate their anthropological expertise to future universities or employers.

2.1.3. The degree was shifted from a humanities master's degree in anthropology to a social science master's degree. This change aligns with the programme groups defined in the Cabinet of Ministers (MK) Regulation No 322, "Regulations on Latvia's Education Classification". This decision was supported by the Study Quality Commission of the Higher Education Quality Agency and was also analysed by external experts in accordance with MK Regulation No 793 (Self-assessment report, p.273-275).

The goals and missions of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology were updated and made more precise in accordance with recommendations from the previous accreditation commission and the latest methodological ideas. The new goals are focused on training top-level social anthropology specialists who can critically and systematically analyse social and cultural processes. The missions have also been updated to be more student-focused and to strengthen various skills including academic thinking, writing, and communication skills.

2.1.4. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology equips students with a breadth of knowledge that enables them to work in various sectors both in Latvia and abroad. The skills gained through this programme, such as intercultural communication and a holistic understanding of societal diversity, are highly transferable and valuable in the contemporary global society. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology alignment with the increasing global interest in anthropology further underscores its relevance and justification.

The number of students in the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has decreased over time, which could be attributed to a nationwide decrease in student numbers and a decrease in government-subsidised slots. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has implemented strategies to attract more students, such as offering the course in both Latvian and English, and this has led to an increase in foreign students over the years. However, the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology faces a high dropout rate, mostly due to the intense workload of the programme and the challenges of balancing studies with full-time jobs and family responsibilities.

The graduates of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology have found employment in various sectors, including academic research, state and NGO structures, and private companies. They have reported that their education has been beneficial to their careers. The average wage of the graduates ranges between EUR 1,219 and EUR 1,540, indicating good economic outcomes (Self-assessment report, p.279-280). The majority of graduates have continued their education, demonstrating the program's role in promoting lifelong learning.

The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has a strong economic and social justification, and its graduates have achieved good employment outcomes. However, the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology needs to address challenges related to student retention and the alignment of the degree title with the content of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.

2.1.5. N/A

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

Conclusions:

The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is generally well-aligned with its broader field of study, "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology". The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology successfully prepares specialists with in-depth knowledge in anthropology, equipping them with the necessary skills for a wide range of professional opportunities in various sectors both in Latvia and abroad. The programme's goals, outcomes, and overall structure are consistent with the expectations of the broader field.

However, there is a notable discrepancy between the programme's focus on anthropology and the title of the degree to be obtained, "Master of Social Sciences in Sociology and Culture Studies". This discrepancy can potentially disadvantage students in their future academic and professional endeavors. Despite this, the programme has managed to maintain a steady flow of students, attract foreign students, and ensure good employment outcomes for its graduates.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is comprehensive, covering a broad range of anthropological concepts and skills.
- 2) The programme is aligned with the broader study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology".
- 3) Graduates have found employment in various sectors, both in Latvia and abroad.
- 4) The programme has a clear and well-articulated set of goals and outcomes, which align closely with the broader expectations of the field.
- 5) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has successfully attracted foreign students, indicating its international relevance and appeal.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) The title of the degree to be obtained does not accurately reflect the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology focus on anthropology, which could potentially disadvantage students in their future studies and career prospects.
- 2) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has experienced a decrease in student numbers over time, which is a trend that needs to be addressed.
- 3) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology faces a high dropout rate, with many students citing the intense workload and challenges of balancing studies with full-time work and family responsibilities.
- 4) Despite efforts to support students, such as the introduction of a student curator, there remain significant challenges in managing student workload and retention, as indicated by the high dropout rate.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The SAR (p285) states that the content of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology complies with Article 10 of Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 240, "Regulations on the state academic education standard," as adopted on 13 May 2014. The programme has 30 credits of theoretical and research-relevant modules (SAR, 285) which make the content topical. The theoretical content covered (postmodernism, ethics, methods) links well to the contemporary issues explored (boundaries, agency and postcolonialism) testifying to the fact that the study modules is interconnected and complementary, and that it corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes. The content meets the needs of the industry and national labour market, as evidenced by meetings during the study visit with alumni and employers. It also corresponds to scientific trends in the teaching of anthropology internationally. Thus, the content of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology complies with national regulations relating to credits required, methods of delivery, and standard for qualification.

It is noteworthy that the degree title awarded at the end of the programme does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the study programme (also previous section, 2.1.4 and 2.1 conclusions). The expert panel heard from staff and students that the shift in the degree title, which saw specific mention of “anthropology” being dropped in 2022 is in fact detrimental to the discipline as a whole, and the international reputation of anthropology graduates from Latvia, as it damages career prospects, fails to reflect their competences accurately, and does a disservice to the standing of the discipline in the country (potentially clashing with the UL’s overall strategic goal of service to the fatherland).

In terms of content, the programme comprises both compulsory modules (50 CP) and elective modules (30 CP), as stated in the SAR (285-86). This allows students to gain significant knowledge in core aspects of anthropology, with emphasis on contemporary theories and debates, and to pursue specialisation topics, both thematic and ethnographically-focused. It is good to see that the module “experience, self and ability to act” (SAR, 285) has been rendered more aptly as “experience, self and agency” (Study Plan CSA). The programme is particularly strong on the ethnography of Europe and the Baltic region, and on current themes of relevance such as consumption, post-socialism, and agency. It also includes a strong fieldwork practice component (SAR, 286). Elective components present strengths in SE Asia and the MENA regions (in addition to European studies) and this is important and commendable. More could be done in these courses to decolonize their content and delivery.

The shift of emphasis from training for particular careers to the goal of acquiring more core skills of social relevance (SAR, pp. 274-275) is perhaps the most important shift in the reporting period. There is ample information to conclude that the skills gained allow students to pursue successful careers in national and international government (Ministries, UN) as well as the business and civil society sectors. It is notable that alumni were by far the most enthusiastic about the education they received and appreciative of the personal development and professional possibilities the course had given them. In discussions with staff and students, the experts also heard of a number of good teaching practices, addressing student welfare and pastoral support, that can well be diffused to other parts of the faculty.

2.2.2. As stated above (2.2.1), the degree title awarded at the end of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology (study visit meetings). The expert panel was particularly concerned about the implications of dropping specific mention of “anthropology” in degree titles awarded after 2022 (study visit meetings). As stated above, this is potentially detrimental to the discipline as a whole, and the international reputation of anthropology graduates from Latvia, as it damages career prospects, fails to reflect their competences accurately, and does a disservice to the standing of the discipline in the country. In turn, this potentially also clashes with the UL’s overall strategic goal of service to the fatherland.

In specific, the current degree title is only partially reflective of the course content: it reflects only the part of the course that includes elements of sociology and cultural studies; these elements are largely included in the elective list and not the core list of modules (Study plan annex). Conversely, the core list of modules, which is the central pillar of the learning outcomes and skillset of the programme, is anthropological in orientation and approach, and differs from both sociological and cultural studies approaches in methodological and analytic terms respectively (ethnographic participant observation methods and analysis of socio-cultural phenomena from culturally-sensitive perspectives).

2.2.3. Implementation methods are well described and they evidence alignment with strategic goals



(SAR, 288-289). Student-centred learning is given particular emphasis and this was borne out by meetings with current and former students (study visit meetings). Employability prospects are well identified and pursued in strategic ways, the meetings making mention of the UN Refugee Agency, national Ministries, academia, business, the media, and civil society (meetings with staff, students, and alumni). The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology internationalisation is also commendable, with a number of students having pursued this course from abroad and some eager to return for further study in Latvia, while others are building careers abroad (meeting with alumni).

The modules taught on the course cover substantial ground in theoretical approaches (general and postmodern theory) and methodologies (fieldwork practice and ethics) as well as key issues of regional relevance (borders, postsocialism) and global significance (consumption) (SAR, 287-288). The thesis also provides scope for self-study and ample possibilities to pursue areas of specific interest (SAR, 290). The optional offer combines regional expertise in several areas, with particular strengths in Europe and the Baltics, complemented by humanities-oriented approaches to East Asia and MENA regions (study plan annex). Thematically, there is a wide spread of topics from medical and business anthropology to ethnomusicology and a good emphasis on gender and diversity. Methodologically, there are also additional offers to core methods offered in compulsory courses, such as narrative and discourse analytic methods. All these courses offer skills that also align and complement the needs of other programmes in the faculty, creating synergies between humanities and social sciences that can be further explored.

Student-centred learning is a core mission of the programme and takes place both formally (through designated focal points and mentorship) and informally through open door policies and staff availability (field visit meetings). This was made clear to the expert panel in the meetings and in addition to what is included in the SAR (p288).

2.2.4. N/A

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. The SAR provides a detailed description of the thesis topics pursued in MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology (SAR, 290-292). The range is wide and impressive, including gender, identity, materiality, medicine and media. It plays to the expertise of staff and exhibits the wide variety of themes that the programme addresses as a whole. It is evident from this variety that students find the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology inspiring and are inspired to pursue independent study (meeting with students and alumni). Grading shows that students are able to gain competence in the skills developed by the thesis work with the majority of marks (31 of 52) in the higher ranges (8-10) (SAR, 291-292).

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

Conclusions:

The content of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is topical, the content of the study modules is interconnected and complementary, and it corresponds to the objectives of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology comprises both compulsory modules and elective modules. This allows students to gain significant knowledge in core aspects of anthropology, with emphasis on contemporary theories and debates, and to pursue specialisation topics, both thematic and ethnographically-focused. More could be done in these courses to decolonize their content and delivery. Student-centred learning is a core mission of the programme and takes place both formally (through designated focal points and mentorship) and informally through open door policies and staff availability.

The degree title awarded at the end of the programme does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the study programme. The expert panel was particularly concerned about the implications of dropping specific mention of “anthropology” in degree titles awarded after 2022.

**Strengths:**

- 1) Compliance with national standards and regulations.
- 2) Excellent programme content with a variety of topics addressed.
- 3) Implementation methods foster enthusiasm in students for the course, desire for further study.
- 4) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology provides students with a competitive edge in the labour market in important sectors such as international organisations, industry, and civil society.
- 5) Student-centred approach aspiring to individualised teaching methods.
- 6) Ethnographic focus beyond the region (non-Baltic Europe, SE Asia, MENA) is being developed and this could contribute to the goal of international reputation.

**Weaknesses:**

- 1) The degree title awarded at the end of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology does not indicate a focus on anthropology which potentially impacts in a negative feedback loop on the recognition and appreciation of the discipline in the national society and in the international recognition of the study programme.
- 2) Some modules could be spruced up, updated to address current theories and social debates / problems, and provide more critical perspectives on colonial and postcolonial legacies (e.g. ethnic communities, MENA region, gender and sexuality).
- 3) Ethnographic focus could be further expanded to aid international reputation.

**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 MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is consistent, well designed. It complies with the Education standard. The biggest weakness is the degree title, outside the gift of UL, and weaknesses on sprucing up modules and expanding ethnographic focus are for improvement and do not affect the evaluation of this requirement

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

**Analysis**

**2.3.1.**

The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is implemented in the UL FSS premises and using the infrastructure and technical base of the faculty and the UL, as described in part 1.3. of this report. At this point studies are currently being implemented in the premises of FSS at Lauvas iela 4, however, after the relocation, in 2024, the study field will be housed in the new facilities – House of Letters in the UL Academic Centre in Torņakalns, sharing the premises with other UL faculties and research institutes of Latvia. At the faculty there are available auditoriums that are fully or partially equipped with projectors, computers and sound equipment. (SAR p.55)

At the UL FSS Library the social sciences branch is located and is open 60 hours a week The library

also provides an open repository, workspaces, the possibility to order the needed information resources and e-resources. (SAR p.328)

In the UL library there are available 1955 titles (4634 copies) available printed on the topics of anthropology. Books are the majority (1819/3022). There are serials, periodicals and other types of publications available. In the last 5 years, 297 titles in 452 copies have been bought. As discussed during the meeting with the academic staff and management of this study programme, the preferred materials are in English. Many materials in the title of anthropology are from other study field, and might not add the number up correctly.

During the meeting with students, it was mentioned that the materials are sufficient and available. The preferred variant of materials are online and in English, the sources are actual and new.

According to the UL strategic plan, the UL Library increases the share of e-resources and develops remote access to e-resources. In total 42 e-resource platforms are available (as mentioned in part 1.3.2. of this report), which are available from anywhere by logging in with their personal username and password. These resources are overlooked every year, by accessing the usability of subscribed databases. (SAR p.62)

There are two main e-platforms used to carry out the study process: [studijas.lu.lv](http://studijas.lu.lv) (based on Moodle) and [edu.lu.lv](http://edu.lu.lv), as well as a wide range of e-tools and software packages are offered to its employees and students. (More details in part 1.3.4. of this report)

Financial provision is controlled at the level of faculty. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management. (SAR p.54)

UL provides all necessary resources and complies with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme.

### 2.3.2. N/A

### 2.3.3.

Main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to all study programmes of the assessed study field.

The funding of this study programme consists of both tuition fees and state funding for study places (5 per year). The study fee for 2021./2022. was 2220 EUR/ year for EU/EEZ citizens and 2600 EUR/year for other citizens and funding for the state funded budget places was 2445 EUR/year. Since there were 13 students in state funded and 15 students in self-paid places, it is calculated that the total income would be 59 850 EUR/year and the total cost is calculated at 69 273 EUR/year (SAR p.294 -298) where we can see that the cost exceed the funding by 13.6% of the income. As discussed in the assessment visit, these calculations are not correct, because they do not represent the both streams together very well. As informed by both the dean and the study programme director, the programme does not fear non-profitability, the finances are balanced within the faculty. The director also informed, that since the transfer to this faculty, the economic situation has become even better, since the salaries are higher.

The costs of the study programme in Latvian consist of: Faculty members 59 %; General personnel 12 %; Other costs 0.2 %; Infrastructure 8 %; Property and services 1.5%; Indirect costs 19.3 % (SAR p.295) and in English: Faculty members 51.8 %; General personnel 10 %; Other costs 0.2%; Infrastructure 11 %; Property and services 2%; Indirect costs 25 % (SAR p.296-297)

The minimal number of students for rentability of the Latvian programme is 17 if all would be in self-paid places and 20 if in state funded places as calculated by cost of sensitivity analysis based on the students' number (SAR p.296). The minimal number of students for rentability of the English programme should be at least 19.(SAR p.297) The minimal number of students at admission should be

7.

([https://www.lu.lv/studijas/studiju-celvedis/programmu-un-kursu-katalogi/programmu-mekletajs/?tx\\_l](https://www.lu.lv/studijas/studiju-celvedis/programmu-un-kursu-katalogi/programmu-mekletajs/?tx_l)

ustudycatalogue\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx\_lustudycatalogue\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=Course&tx\_lustudycatalogue\_pi1%5Bprogram%5D=29639&cHash=afb43b490a60b1b2ee3d9d11b7b9e320)

From the provided statistics of the study programme, the number of students is variable and exceeds the minimal number of students. It is seen that the minimal number of admissions is exceeded.

In conclusion, UL exceeds the minimal requirements of student numbers, however there is a large gap between the funding and costs that should be monitored closely in the future so as not to face any non-profitability threats.

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

Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Tornakalns. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyze the needed number of students to achieve a rentable study programme. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology costs exceed the incoming funding that should be monitored closely in the future not to face any non-profitability threats.

Strengths:

- 1) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases.
- 2) The new premises in Tornakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.
- 3) The materials are plentiful and accessible.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology costs exceed the incoming funding.

### **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 resources are sufficient for the implementation of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology. The finances are balanced. A weaknesses have been found, however they do not pose a threat for rentability.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology engages 24 teaching staff, the vast majority of which, across all levels, are research active. The staff hold the necessary qualifications for their teaching duties and national requirements are fulfilled. The ways teaching is distributed across the staff members makes the best use of their strengths and evidences good distribution of resources across the faculty as well as across the humanities faculty. The specific expertise in the field of anthropology is evident for a number of staff members and although in the minority in the faculty, a

relatively small number of members is able to deliver a number of anthropology courses, from the compulsory and elective lists. The way teaching is distributed enables the achievement of the aims and the learning outcomes of the study programme. Workload allocation is somewhat uneven, with core staff delivering as many as 8 or 6 courses across the programme, while a number of staff members, working across programmes deliver single courses. This creates reliance on key staff members. Overall, the teaching staff offers a wealth of collective knowledge on all key aspects of anthropology, theoretical approaches, and a considerable variety of expertise in ethnographic regions. The programme is well poised to capitalise on its regional expertise (European and Baltic ethnography) and develop into a leading thematic programme globally.

2.4.2. The SAR indicates that a drop in student numbers has also led to a decrease in overall staff numbers. A strategy of consolidation of the programme within the faculty over the next reporting period would require greater resilience and stability, able to withstand long-term trends aiming at the expansion of the field over a number of years rather than short-term fluctuations in student numbers, as the trends do not show a definite straightforward pattern (SAR, 281-282). The 15% decline in teaching staff is accounted for in the SAR (p300) through an increase in permanent staff and loss of more precarious posts, which is indeed a positive move towards greater employment stability. Over the years the faculty makeup has seen high-calibre staff either visit or permanently settle in the department from prestigious universities globally – a deliberate strategy aided by specifically targeted funds, which in turn produced high-calibre students moving abroad (SAR, p300). This is a commendable initiative that could continue to be fostered to create a reputation for Latvian anthropology. Towards this end, the Wenner Gren project has been impressive in fostering anthropological teaching in the Baltic region and has had visible effects in improving the capacity of UL staff (SAR, p299).

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. Staff CVs show an impressive record of work collectively, and boast many Q1 and Q2 publications as per strategic goals. They also evidence research activity through conference participation for the vast majority of staff. This creates an impression that staff on the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology are an invaluable resource that should be consolidated and supported through career progression.

2.4.5. The anthropology programmes have been unique in clearly evidencing exemplary collaboration between teaching staff on the delivery of teaching at all levels, based on a number of expert meetings during assessment visit. This has a clear positive effect on students and is largely to account for the great student satisfaction with the course. Department staff meet regularly, both officially and unofficially, they involve students in some of these meetings, they have mentorship schemes for junior faculty, they discuss a broad range of issues that cover both teaching and research, and they actively discuss and monitor links between courses. Their teaching coordination covers both content and ethics, and ensures a robust course development. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is aided in this by enjoying a near 1-to-1 student faculty ratio (SAR, p302) that fully corresponds to the student-focused teaching strategy.

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

Conclusions:

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology complies with the requirements. The staff hold the necessary qualifications

for their teaching duties, offering a wealth of collective knowledge on all key aspects of anthropology, theoretical approaches, and a considerable variety of expertise in ethnographic regions. Workload allocation is somewhat uneven, with core staff delivering as many as 8 or 6 courses across the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology, while a number of staff members, working across programmes deliver single courses. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology fully corresponds to the student-focused teaching strategy due to vast coordination and feedback.

**Strengths:**

- 1) Great satisfaction amongst students.
- 2) Unified and coordinated curriculum.
- 3) Rigorous content.
- 4) Strategic attraction of funds and projects.
- 5) Impressive staff student ratio.

**Weaknesses:**

- 1) Title change of degree poses great risks for an otherwise healthy and vibrant MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.
- 2) Consolidation within faculty not fully achieved yet.
- 3) Some electives could benefit from more critical perspectives (e.g. those based in the Oriental studies field).

## **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:** Fully compliant

The qualification of UL-affiliated and visiting academic staff is fully compliant with the conditions and regulations.

## **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

Provided annex " Education standard CSA MSP.pdf" affirms that "Cultural and Social Anthropology" programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education".

- 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

Provided course descriptions “Study courses CSA MSP.pdf” are available in both Latvian and English languages. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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 diploma example available in annex “ KSA MSP diploma pielikums.pdf” is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 “Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued”

- 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 attached annex “ Study field declaration CSA MSP.pdf” affirms that the “Cultural and Social Anthropology” (code 45314) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex “ Declaration \_Latvian language.pdf” affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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:** Fully compliant

Provided annex “Declaration\_English.pdf” states that the English language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the programme corresponds to at least B2 level of the Common European Framework.

- 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

Provided annex “ Studiju ligumi.pdf” containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 “Rules to be included in the study agreement”.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in the UL “Oriental studies” programme (code 45222) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

### **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

The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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



### Conclusions:

The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology aligns well with its field of study, preparing specialists with extensive knowledge in anthropology and providing them with valuable skills for diverse professional opportunities both in Latvia and abroad. The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology goals, outcomes, and structure meet the expectations of the broader field. The programme attracts students, including international ones, and ensures favourable employment outcomes for graduates. However, there is a notable discrepancy between the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology focus on anthropology and the degree title obtained, "Master of Social Sciences in Sociology and Culture Studies." This mismatch may hinder students in their academic and professional pursuits, and negatively impact the recognition and appreciation of the degree within the national and international contexts.

The study content is relevant and interconnected, supporting the programme's objectives and achieving learning outcomes. It offers compulsory and elective modules, enabling students to gain essential knowledge in anthropology, emphasising contemporary theories and debates, and pursuing specialised topics. However, there is room for improvement in decolonizing the content and delivery of these courses.

The study provision is sufficient, currently conducted at the faculty building and soon to be relocated to new premises at the UL campus in Torņakalns. Methodological and informative resources are accessible and satisfactory, although the predominance of Russian materials requires clarification. The study expenses are planned per student, and the study fee and student number sensitivity graph aid in analysing the necessary student count for a financially viable programme. Close monitoring is necessary to ensure profitability and avoid financial risks.

The teaching staff members possess the required qualifications and offer a wealth of collective knowledge in anthropology, theoretical approaches, and expertise in ethnographic regions. Workload allocation appears somewhat uneven, with core staff teaching multiple courses while others from different programmes teach only one. Despite this, the programme effectively implements a student-focused teaching strategy through designated focal points, mentorship, open-door policies, staff availability. coordination and feedback mechanisms.

### Strengths:

- 1) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology is rigorous, comprehensive, covering a broad range of anthropological concepts and skills in a unified and coordinated curriculum.
- 2) The programme is aligned with the broader study field "Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology".
- 3) Graduates have found employment in various sectors, both in Latvia and abroad, providing students with a competitive edge in the labour market in important sectors such as international organisations, industry, and civil society.
- 4) The programme has a clear and well-articulated set of goals and outcomes, which align closely with the broader expectations of the field.
- 5) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has successfully attracted foreign students, indicating its international relevance and appeal.
- 6) Compliance with national standards and regulations is ensured.
- 7) Implementation methods foster enthusiasm and desire for further study in students.
- 8) Student-centred approach is evident, with student-teacher ratio aspiring to individualised teaching methods.
- 9) Ethnographic focus beyond the region (non-Baltic Europe, SE Asia, MENA) is being developed and this could contribute to the goal of international reputation.
- 10) UL strives for digitalisation of informative provision and offers many databases with plentiful and accessible materials.
- 11) The new premises in Torņakalns will open a larger accessibility to libraries, science institutions

etc., as well as to more modern and appealing infrastructure and location.

12) Strategic attraction of funds and projects is taking place.

Weaknesses:

1) The title of the degree to be obtained does not accurately reflect the MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology focus on anthropology, which could potentially disadvantage students in their future studies and career prospects, posing great risks for an otherwise healthy and vibrant MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology.

2) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology has experienced a decrease in student numbers over time, which is a trend that needs to be addressed.

3) The MSP Cultural and Social Anthropology faces a high dropout rate, with many students citing the intense workload and challenges of balancing studies with full-time work and family responsibilities.

4) Some modules are not updated to address current theories and social debates / problems, and provide more critical perspectives on colonial and postcolonial legacies (e.g. ethnic communities, MENA region, gender and sexuality).

5) Ethnographic focus is not expanded enough.

6) Consolidation within faculty not fully achieved yet.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Cultural and Social Anthropology"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Cultural and Social Anthropology"**

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

1) Communicate with current and potential students about the discrepancy between the programme's focus and the degree title. Explain the reason for this discrepancy and offer guidance on how they can articulate their anthropological expertise in future academic and professional settings.

#### **Long-term recommendations**

1) Improve financial sustainability by attracting more students into the programme.

2) Look for solutions to address the high drop-out rate.

3) Some modules could be spruced up, updated to address current theories and social debates / problems, and provide more critical perspectives on colonial and postcolonial legacies (e.g. ethnic communities, MENA region, gender and sexuality).

4) Ethnographic focus could be further expanded to aid international reputation.

5) Consolidation within faculty should be further pursued.

6) Work with relevant regulatory bodies to advocate for a change in the degree title to better reflect the focus on anthropology. This may involve engaging with the Cabinet of Ministers and other stakeholders to amend the relevant legislation.

## II - "Sociology" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Sociology" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The academic master study programme "Sociology (45314)" (MSP Sociology) demonstrates high compliance with the sociology, political studies, anthropology field of study.

The goal of the MSP Sociology is to prepare highly qualified professionals capable of independent work in research, management of a research group, for doctoral studies, and for relevant professional activity in the state, municipal, non-state, and private sectors. This goal aligns with the expectations of the broader field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology.

The tasks of the MSP Sociology include training highly qualified specialists in the field of sociology to serve the needs of Latvia's society and sustainable development, ensuring learning about the latest achievements and innovative approaches in sociology and its subsectors, the theory of sociology, and social science research methods. It also aims to develop scholarly research and analytical skills among students, facilitating their ability to work on scholarly and applied projects and engage with complex or unpredictable circumstances. These tasks align with the broader field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology, as they involve training students to apply sociological theories and methods to understand and address social issues.

The expected results of the MSP Sociology include demonstrating a highly specialized knowledge and understanding of major and recent theories in sociology, demonstrating a comprehensive and thorough knowledge of social science research methods, applying critical thinking and a scientific approach to the analysis and study of social life, independently applying sociological theories and social science research methods to conduct research and create new knowledge, independently directing the development and specialization of own competencies in sociology and related fields and taking responsibility for the management and results of group work. These outcomes align with what is expected in the field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology, as they involve gaining a deep understanding of sociological theories and methods, conducting independent sociological research, and developing critical thinking and analytical skills.

In conclusion, the MSP Sociology is highly compliant with the study field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology. Its goals, tasks, and expected outcomes align with the expectations and scope of the broader field. The MSP Sociology provides a comprehensive education that aligns with the expectations of the broader study field.

2.1.2. The MSP Sociology at the UL displays a coherent structure and strong alignment with the field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology.

The title of the study programme, "Sociology", and the code, "45314", are both aligned with the field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology. The first two digits of the code indicate that the programme confers a master's degree, which typically follows a bachelor's or professional bachelor's degree. The last three digits of the code pertain to the thematic group "Social sciences, commercial sciences, and the law", the thematic area "Social and human behavior science", and the programme group "Sociology and cultural studies". This accurately reflects the focus of the MSP Sociology.

Upon successful completion of the MSP Sociology, students earn a master's degree in sociology and cultural studies, reflecting the academic focus of the MSP Sociology.

The goal of the MSP Sociology is to prepare highly qualified professionals for independent work in research, management of a research group, doctoral studies, as well as relevant professional activity in the state, municipal, non-state, and private sectors. This goal aligns with the broader field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology.

The tasks of the MSP Sociology include training highly qualified specialists in the field of sociology to

serve the needs of Latvia's society and sustainable development, ensuring learning about the latest achievements and innovative approaches in sociology and its subsectors, and developing scholarly research and analytical skills among students. These tasks align with the expectations and requirements of the broader field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology.

The learning outcomes of the MSP Sociology are designed to check whether students have achieved them or not. They include demonstrating a highly specialized knowledge and understanding of major and recent theories in sociology, demonstrating expanded and in-depth knowledge about social science research methods, and applying critical thinking and a scientific approach to the analysis and study of social life. These outcomes are consistent with what is expected in the field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology.

The admission requirements for the MSP Sociology, which include holding a bachelor's degree, a second-level professional degree or comparable higher education, are reasonable and justifiable. They ensure that students have the necessary foundational knowledge to succeed in the MSP Sociology.

The duration of the MSP Sociology is two years, which is typical for a master's degree programme. The scope of the programme (80 CP or 120 ECTS) provides students with a comprehensive education in sociology. The programme is implemented in the national language, which is appropriate given that it is a national university in Latvia.

In conclusion, the MSP Sociology is well-structured, with its title, code, degree to be obtained, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements all being interrelated and justified. The duration and scope of the programme, as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.

2.1.3. It can be assessed that the corrections made to the MSP Sociology parameters within the assessment of the study field are analyzed, justified, and would be supported.

The change in the code of the master's degree programme Sociology (MSP Sociology) is in accordance with the amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Regulation 322, "Regulations on Latvia's education classification," issued on June 13, 2017 (Self-assessment report, p. 102).

Under the new rules, the code of the master's degree programme Sociology needs to be changed from 45310 to 45314. This adjustment aligns with the regulatory requirements and ensures compliance with the updated education classification.

Additionally, the name of the degree has been changed to "academic master's degree in sociology and cultural studies." This modification reflects the enhanced recognisability of social and cultural anthropology within the educational framework. Despite social anthropology being listed as a sub-sector of sociology in Latvia's education classification, the academic study programme is being developed independently to acknowledge its distinct focus and development.

The rationale behind these corrections demonstrates a thorough analysis of the regulatory framework and the need to align the study programme with current requirements. By adapting the code and name of the master's degree programme, the study field can accurately represent the field of study and facilitate its independent development.

2.1.4. The MSP Sociology at the UL is economically and socially justified. However, it faces some significant challenges that impact the dynamics of student numbers and the visibility of the field.

The MSP Sociology trains highly qualified professionals who are prepared for independent work in research, management of research groups, and for relevant professional activities in various sectors. These professionals are crucial for the functioning of society and contribute to its sustainable development. The economic justification for the programme is evident in the high demand for sociology graduates in the labour market, particularly in state offices like the Central Statistical Bureau, which have more open positions than there are graduates available to fill them. Employers have noted that all things being equal, a degree in Sociology would be an advantage (July 7th

assessment visit).

Despite the high demand for sociology graduates in the labour market (July 6th assessment visit, discussion with employers), both the bachelor's and master's programs in Sociology face a significant challenge in attracting and retaining students. One major issue is the lack of recognition and understanding of sociology among the general public. Students and graduates often find themselves having to explain their field of study to others, which can limit the appeal of the programme to prospective students (July 7th assessment visit, discussion with students).

Despite the aforementioned challenges, graduates of the programme have a high employment rate. This is a strong indication of the programme's effectiveness in preparing students for the workforce. Feedback from employers (during July 6th assessment visit) indicates that graduates are well-prepared both theoretically and practically and are able to work independently after a short training period.

In conclusion, the Sociology study programme has strong economic and social justifications and the graduates are in high demand in the labour market. However, efforts should be made to raise the public profile of sociology to attract more students to the programme and meet the demand for qualified professionals in this field.

2.1.5. N/A

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

Conclusions:

The MSP Sociology at the UL demonstrates a high level of compliance with the field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology. The MSP Sociology goals, tasks, and expected outcomes align well with the expectations of these broader fields, demonstrating its relevance and applicability. The structure of the MSP Sociology is coherent and well-aligned with the study field. The title, code, degree conferred, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are all interrelated and justified. The programme's duration, scope, and language of implementation are also reasonable and justified.

The MSP Sociology is economically and socially justified, with graduates in high demand in the labour market. However, there are significant challenges related to public recognition of the field of sociology, which impacts student numbers and visibility.

Strengths:

- 1) The MSP Sociology aligns well with the field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology, demonstrating a clear and coherent structure.
- 2) The programme prepares students for roles in high-demand areas such as state and non-governmental organizations, research groups, and doctoral studies.
- 3) The high employment rate of graduates indicates the effectiveness of the programme in preparing students for the workforce.

Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a lack of public recognition and understanding of the field of sociology, leading to challenges in attracting and retaining students.
- 2) Despite the high demand for sociology graduates, the number of students in the programme does not meet the market needs, particularly in state offices.
- 3) There is a need for greater visibility of the sociology field in the public sphere. This could be addressed by incentivizing teaching staff to engage more with the public and the media.

## 2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

2.2.1. The MSP Sociology offers a wide variety of interesting and relevant courses which forms a good basis for the development of students' skills. The MSP Sociology is compliant with the most important regulatory provisions of the Latvian state, such as Cabinet of Ministers Reg 240, "Regulations on the state academic education standard," as adopted on 13 May 2014 (Protocol No 28 18.) The programme's management provided a document titled Education standard SOC MSP.pdf, which testifies to the programme's coherence and fulfilment of its objectives.

The MSP Sociology leads to 80 KP (120 ECTS), with mandatory (Section A) courses amounting to 50 KP (75 ECTS), with 30 KP (45 ECTS) applying to theoretical courses and 20 KP (30 ECTS) applying to the master's thesis, mandatory elective (Section B) courses amounting to 28 KP, and free (Section C) courses leading to 2 KP.

Study plan SOC MSP.pdf and Study courses SOC MSP.pdf underline the social and scientific importance of the programmes and its overall utility.

The content of the mandatory (Section A) portion of the master's degree programme ensures learning outcomes that include in-depth learning about theoretical ideas, as well as the development of research abilities and skills in the field of sociology. Similarly, the content of the mandatory elective part (Section B) has been developed in accordance with the planned goals and missions. Some courses are devoted to in-depth learning about research methods (Discourse analysis; Multidimensional analysis in sociology) so as to develop scholarly research and analytical skills among students, also preparing students for independent scholarly and research work in the field of sociology and in corresponding areas of professional work (SAR, p. 109). Overall, students and graduates praised a rather good balance between quantitative and qualitative-oriented courses. The programme's goal have been further boosted by a track-record of satisfactory cooperation with other programmes and departments at the UL.

Graduates of this MSP Sociology have been employed across a large variety of public sector institutions, as well as private sector entities (Kantar, SKDS, Latvijas Fakti, Norstat) (SAR, p. 106). It is worthwhile to mention that the programme aligns its goals with the goals stipulated in the Latvian National Development Plan 2021-2027 and Latvia's sustainable development strategy 2030 (LIAS 2030). In an interview with students, employers and graduates it was visible that there is a need for sociology graduates in the Latvian labour market.

The feedback received during the on-site visit on June 6th and 7th from students, graduates, and employers revealed a strong interest in diversifying and expanding the data analysis skills taught in the curriculum. While the use of statistical software like SPSS is essential for social science research, there was an expressed desire for the inclusion of other data analysis tools such as Excel and programming languages. This would equip students with a broader range of skills and competencies, enabling them to undertake more complex and varied data analysis tasks, which is increasingly important in both academic and professional settings. This feedback suggests an opportunity for curriculum development to meet these evolving educational needs and expectations.

### 2.2.2.

The content of the courses is based on theoretical ideas in the field of sociology, the latest trends in the social sciences and specifically sociological research methods, achievements related to empirical research, as well as critical analysis of social problems.

There are several courses on offer, which underline this conclusion, such as: "Sustainable Development" ; "Migration and Integration" and "Analysis of EU Social Policy", which focus on the most pressing challenges facing Latvian society (SAR, p. 110-111). They incorporate valuable theoretical and empirical insights in order to better comprehend and tackle all of them. However, this section requires more elaboration on this point in the future. The description is rather short and

a more concise description is needed.

### 2.2.3.

The MSP Sociology under assessment offers multiple courses which combine several different methods of grading students and allow for the verification of stated learning outcomes. Requirements related to earning credits, information about the testing forms that are to be used, and grades are provided in the course description for each course. These are available in the LU Information System (LUIS) and the E-studies environment. Grading criteria are presented to students during the first lectures of each course. Moodle platform allows for transparent reporting on the progression of each student along the expected study path (SAR, p. 113).

Teaching staff uses both individually-tailored and group-related assignments, as well as classical oral and written examinations. However, some course syllabuses would profit from being more specific on the particular methods used for obtaining the final grade. E.g. Contemporary Social Theories lists independent work and the completion of seminar tasks but remains vague on the general content of those tasks. In addition, the Contemporary Social Problems and Social Transformations course lists multiple books pertaining to each lecture and seminar. However, there are no specific pages chosen to narrow down the subject of discussion and lectures. Enumerating more than 10 academic books for a given course goes beyond the normally expected burden on behalf of students, which have to be compatible with allocated ECTS points per course (SAR, p. 111).

It is commendable that the study programme comprises guest lecturers. Guests are invited from various companies. During the 2020/2021 academic year, these included the Machine Learning Lab, AskFM, the Data School, the Rait Group, and If Insurance. Employers are also involved in offering and improving courses. As stated by programme management, Marie Curie grant made it possible to partner with the private sector in this course, and this provided support to young researchers as part of the SUSPLACE (Sustainable Place Shaping) project (SAR, p. 112). There were several educational field trips in 2018 and 2020 to visit farmers in Latvia who use sustainable methods.

Overall, the programme provides opportunities for field trips, invites guest lectures, incentivises open discussions within seminar classes and offers project-based learning together in cooperation with external stakeholders (e.g. St Luke Association, Latvian Platform for Developmental Cooperation and Green Freedom).

The MSP Sociology management states that: „Students are involved in research initiated by academic personnel and take part in social activities in society, thus gaining important experience in terms of putting what they have learned to practice.“ However, there is very little said about that in the self-assessment report and this should be corrected in the future and this should be addressed in the future SAR.

During the on-site visit on July 7th, feedback from students and graduates of the MSP Sociology who had transitioned from the bachelor's level highlighted an issue with the curriculum. These individuals expressed that a substantial portion of their master's level coursework was repetitive, covering similar content to what they had already encountered during their bachelor's studies. This redundancy created a perception that they were not gaining significant new value from the master's programme. On the other hand, students who had entered the master's programme from other fields of study did not report such issues; for them, the curriculum content was appropriately challenging and novel. This situation suggests a need for curriculum differentiation to ensure that all students, regardless of their prior exposure to the field, find the master's programme enriching and valuable.

### 2.2.4. N/A

#### 2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. The self-assessment report provides a list of relevant topics for the development of the field and which are in line with the MSP Sociology. They include topics such as: „Professional education communities in Latvia’s education system“, „Risk perception in real estate insurance“, „Creative blocks as a social phenomenon in an urban environment“, „Professional education communities in Latvia’s education system“, „Support for Re-migrants in Cēsis, Valmiera and Smiltene“, „Experiences of young people who have attained maturity about being abandoned during childhood (SAR, p. 116)“. However, for the sake of transparency, the future report should include hyperlinks to MA theses defended during the assessment period.

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

#### Conclusions:

The MSP Sociology offers a wide variety of interesting and relevant courses which forms a good basis for the development of students’ skills and is compliant with the regulatory provisions. Some coursework repetition was reported at the master's level, particularly for students from the same bachelor's field, suggesting a need for curriculum differentiation.

The courses combine several different methods of grading students and conveniently allow for the verification of stated learning outcomes via online platforms such as LUIS and moodle. Graduates of this programme have been well employed across a large variety of public sector institutions, as well as private sector entities. Students, graduates, and employers revealed a strong interest in diversifying and expanding the data analysis skills taught in the curriculum. Several courses focus on the most pressing challenges facing Latvian society, however, the description would benefit from more elaboration. Teaching staff uses both individually-tailored and group-related assignments, as well as classical oral and written examinations. However, some course syllabuses would profit from being more specific on the particular methods used for obtaining the final grade. The study programme commendably employs guest lecturers, including professionals from various companies.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Very comprehensive list of interesting and mostly well-designed courses which are important for the fulfilment of stated learning outcomes.
- 2) Interesting topics of MA theses which are relevant for the purpose of development of Latvian society.
- 3) Cooperation with external stakeholders and opportunities for project-based learning.
- 4) E-study environment and the use of Moodle which economizes on time and eases coordination.
- 5) Good balance between quantitative and qualitative-oriented courses.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) No internship partnerships with partner institutions in order to provide students with relevant experience and to facilitate the process of writing the final thesis.
- 2) Declining number of students and its negative impact on financial sustainability.
- 3) Lack of differentiation in curriculum content for students transitioning from the Sociology bachelor's programme to the master's programme, leading to a perception of redundancy and limited value.
- 5) Limited data analysis skills. The curriculum predominantly focuses on SPSS for data analysis, while students, graduates, and employers expressed a need for expanded skills, including Excel and programming languages.

### **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 MSP Sociology in Sociology is consistent and well designed. It complies with the Education standards. However, there are some recommendations to be addressed before the next assessment. The MSP Sociology needs to foster internship partnerships and improve on differentiation in curriculum content for students who transition from BSP to MA in Sociology. It would also be advisable to develop new workshops or courses covering data skills such as programming in R or advanced data analysis in Excel.

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

### **Analysis**

#### 2.3.1.

The MSP Sociology is implemented in the UL FSS premises and using the infrastructure and technical base of the faculty and the UL, as described in part 1.3. of this report. At this point studies are currently being implemented in the premises of FSS at Lauvas iela 4, however, after the relocation, in 2024, the study field will be housed in the new facilities – House of Letters in the UL Academic Centre in Torņakalns, sharing the premises with other UL faculties and research institutes of Latvia. At the faculty there are available auditoriums that are fully or partially equipped with projectors, computers and sound equipment. (SAR p.55) The resources at hand are fully in line with achieving the goals of the MSP Sociology and ensuring a high-quality study process. This applies to rooms, technologies, and software that are needed in the study process.

The FSS library, where the social science collection is held, is open for 60 hours per week to serve the interests of students. Users have free access to the collection. The library is in three rooms with 544 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space. The library has 84 workstations, including 18 with computers (SAR, p. 116).

In the UL library there are available 12 032 titles (25 668 copies) available printed on the topics of sociology, in the UL FSS library 5 026 titles in 8 162 copies. Of the mentioned numbers, the majority (6718/10935) of resources are in English and the majority (11327/21377) are books. Some resources are provided in Latvian, Russian and others. There are serials, periodicals and other types of publications available. In the last 5 years, 1 419 titles in 2 052 copies have been bought of which 715 titles in 900 copies are stored at the UL FSS library. The majority of resources are books and in English. (SAR p.60-61) According to the UL strategic plan, the UL Library increases the share of e-resources and develops remote access to e-resources. In total 42 e-resource platforms are available (as mentioned in part 1.3.2. of this report), which are available from anywhere by logging in with their personal username and password. These resources are overlooked every year, by accessing the usability of subscribed databases. (SAR p.62)

Faculty members use the electronic Moodle E-environment to distribute study materials and to receive, examine and analyze work that students have submitted. Moodle supplements the LU information system (LUIS), ensuring the entry of grades (SAR, p. 118).

Financial provision is controlled at the level of faculty. The dean of the faculty and the executive director are responsible for the rational use of financial resources and for operational financial management. (SAR p.54)

The UL FSS has appropriate rooms for the study process. Most faculty members in KSA MSP have elected posts at the UL FSS, and they have high-quality offices and adequate support. Guest instructors have access to workspaces that are provided by the UL FSS.

### 2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. The funding was described on pages 119-120 of the SAR. UL uses the following resources for the master's degree programme "Sociology" As well as the main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to BSP Sociology of the assessed study field.

The funding of this study programme consists of both tuition fees and state funding for study places. A national budget subsidy from the Ministry of Education and Science, which was EUR 2,445 120 during the 2021/2022 academic year for full-time studies. Tuition fees that are based on all of the factors mentioned in the section about finances, with the tuition fee during the 2021/2022 academic year being EUR 2,350 per year for full-time studies. In the academic year 2021/2022 there were 16 full time students in the programme (full-time students with state subsidy). The total revenue was 39120. (SAR p.119-120)

On the other hand, the total annual costs of the programme are 41 883 EUR. The programme's estimated cost structure is the following: Faculty members (53%); General personnel (11%); Other costs (0.2%); Infrastructure (10%); Property and services (1.8%); Indirect costs (24%).

Sensitivity analysis based on student' numbers shows that if the programme is to be profitable and students have a high-quality study process with the current national subsidy and tuition fee, the number of students in the programme (in all courses) should be at least 19. If only students with subsidies were in the programme, there would have to be 19 of them. The programme would be profitable with at least 16 students who receive studies and at least three who pay their own tuition. All of the aforementioned numbers show that the programme's management needs to increase awareness of their programme's qualities through marketing (especially online tools) among the targeted population, in order to make it more financially viable.

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

### Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the MSP Sociology. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalns. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyse the needed number of students to achieve a rentable study programme. The finances are currently a bit strained due to the falling number of students where costs exceed revenues.

### Strengths:

- 1) The MSP Sociology has access to all the necessary facilities at the UL (library organisation is very advanced).
- 2) Reading materials and their accessibility is very good.
- 3) Moodle E-environment facilitates collection and dissemination of important information.

### Weaknesses:

- 1) The MSP Sociology could have long-term problems due to declining number of students.

## **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 resources are sufficient for the implementation of the programme. Minor weaknesses have been found, however they do not pose a threat for the rentability. Before the next assessment cycle the MSP Sociology management has to devise a strategy on how to attract greater number of students, both domestic and foreign.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. The qualification of the teaching staff is fully compliant with regulations and with the needs of the students. The teaching staff is involved in research, projects and internationalisation activities. Currently, according to the SAR, “Elected academic personnel mostly teach courses in the MSP Sociology, with professionals from the sector being added to the mix in some courses. All faculty members hold a doctorate, with three professors, six associate professors, four docents, one researcher with a doctorate and two professionals from the sector with a doctorate” (SAR of the MSP Sociology, 3.4.1.). This is an ample amount for an average of 15 students across both study years (Annexes of the Study Programme, Student statistics in the master's study programme “Sociology”, Statistics SOC MSP.pdf). According to the declaration of the study field, the programme complies with the requirements specified in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Annexes of the Study Programme, HEAD OF STUDY FIELD DECLARATION, Study field declaration SOC MSP.pdf). During the on-site visit interviews, the management of the MSP Sociology expressed that visiting teaching staff is being supported for the purposes of internationalisation and research and teaching quality.

All of the above indicates that the teaching staff qualifications enable the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the MSP Sociology and the relevant study courses. The on-site interviews revealed one particular issue, however, that potentially may cause challenges in achievement of the MSP Sociology, namely, a lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols for staff, which could potentially create risks for achievement of learning outcomes.

2.4.2. The SAR states that significant changes in composition of the teaching staff have occurred during the reporting period, and that has also contributed to updates in study content: “Three professors (two of them from the Department of Sociology) have retired, while three new instructors have been hired (two of them in the Department of Sociology). Two docents have become associate professors. This indicates a balanced, successful and gradual replacement of generations, which ensures high quality and the sustainability of the MSP Sociology.” (SAR of the MSP Sociology, 3.4.2.) According to the position expressed by the MSP Sociology management during the on-site visit of the panel, the UL is flexible in accommodating the schedules of the teaching staff to ensure their continuous contribution to the MSP Sociology, including long-term absences (e.g., sabbaticals), conferences, and teaching visits to other HEIs. The SAR of the MSP Sociology. The measures described lead to conclude that the changes in the composition of the MSP Sociology teaching staff do not negatively affect the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements specified in regulatory enactments. During the on-site interviews it was established that there are currently no protocols for staff burnout protection, which can form a potential risk for the UL of sudden changes in teaching staff composition. The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the high intensity of work of academic personnel have demonstrated the need to provide support to the university community, including teaching staff. It would be beneficial for the quality of the implementation of the study programme to consider staff burnout protection and wellness measures on the HEI and SF management level.

#### 2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. According to the Plan of the study programme “Sociology”, currently 9 staff are involved in teaching within the MSP Sociology. Of those, 3 have a Scopus H index higher than 1, with professors Tisenkopfs (13) and Mieriņa (6) particularly standing out. 1 of the teaching staff has no Scopus presence currently, but has 1 international publication. The overemphasis on local publishing, as well as publishing in under-ambitious outlets, is potentially hindering the streamlining of the research to reach the Development plan goal of scientific excellence for the study field, which is to “Ensure international visibility of research and international recognition of study programmes”, which feeds into the UL strategic goal “The university as an internationally recognised science centre” (Study field annexes, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology study Field Development Plan, Development plan.pdf). The management of the study field expressed an awareness of the issue during the on-site interview.

Still, overall, the number of publications seems adequate to support the study programme's quality and implementation in the study field.

2.4.5. According to the interviews during the on-site visit, teaching staff cooperation is being ensured via faculty meetings, and networks including collegial mutual support are in place to ensure the implementation of the MSP Sociology. This is consistent with SAR, which states: “Partnerships among faculty members are based on meetings at the Department of Sociology Studies, including ongoing discussions about teaching achievements and problems, confirmation of the academic calendar, approval of topics for master's theses, and analysis of the study process and the learning outcomes.” (SAR of the MSP Sociology, 3.4.5.) It should be noted the purpose of such meetings is to ensure the interconnection of study courses within the MSP Sociology, as well as across BSP and MSP Sociology, as well as with the DSP Social sciences (SAR of the BSP Sociology,, 3.4.5.). The students and alumni of the programme during the on-site interviews pointed out that the overlap between BSP and MSP Sociology is not ideal for the graduates of BSP Sociology, as the curriculum is repetitive, therefore, it is positive that the Department has a mechanism specifically dedicated to this issue.

SAR demonstrates that cross-cutting horizontal cooperation mechanisms contributing to interdisciplinarity are being implemented: “Co-operation among sectors is facilitated by involving instructors from the Department of Political Science, the Department of Communications Studies and the Department of Anthropology in the programme. This ensures an interdisciplinary approach in the field of sociology, ensuring the inter-sectoral co-operation and knowledge sector contact areas” (SAR of the MSP Sociology, 3.4.1.).

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

#### Conclusions:

The qualification of the teaching staff is fully compliant with regulations and with the needs of the students. The teaching staff is involved in research, projects and internationalisation activities. UL is flexible in accommodating the schedules of the teaching staff to ensure their continuous contribution to the programme, including long-term absences (e.g., sabbaticals), conferences, and teaching visits to other HEIs. Senior teaching and academic staff involved in the programme have good publishing records and international scientific visibility. Cross-cutting horizontal cooperation mechanisms contributing to interdisciplinarity are being implemented.

#### Strengths:

- 1) A strong teaching core, involving internationally acclaimed researchers.
- 2) Vertical and horizontal cross-cutting mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff

ensures information exchange and contributes to interdisciplinarity.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Insufficient staff burnout protection.
- 2) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

### **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:** Fully compliant

The qualification of UL-affiliated and visiting academic staff is fully compliant with the conditions and regulations. Minor weaknesses have been identified, including lack of staff burnout protection and EDI training, but they do not influence the implementation.

## **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

Provided annex " Education standard SOC MSP.pdf" affirms that "Sociology" programme complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 240 "Regulations on the State Standard of Academic Education"

- 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

Provided course descriptions " Study courses SOC MSP.pdf" are available in both Latvian and English languages, although the programme is realized only in Latvian. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex " SOC MSP diploma pielikums.pdf" is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 "Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by

the State shall be issued”.

- 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 attached annex “ SStudy field declaration SOC MSP.pdf” affirms that “Sociology” (code 45314) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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

Provided annex “ Declaration \_Latvian language.pdf” affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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

Provided annex “ Studiju ligumi.pdf” containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 “Rules to be included in the study agreement”.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies “Sociology of Organisations and Public Administration” programme (code 47314) if the implementation of the study program is terminated.

- 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

Provided annex “ Study continuation agreements.pdf” states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

**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

The study programme complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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

Conclusions:

The MSP Sociology aligns well with the fields of sociology, political studies, and anthropology, demonstrating high compliance. Its goals, tasks, and expected outcomes are coherent and relevant to these fields. The programme's structure, including title, code, degree conferred, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements, are well-interrelated and justified. The MSP Sociology duration, scope, and language of implementation are reasonable.

Graduates of the MSP Sociology are in high demand in the labour market in both public and private sectors, and the study programme is economically and socially justified. However, challenges related to public recognition of sociology impact student numbers and visibility.

The MSP Sociology offers a diverse range of interesting and relevant courses, providing a solid foundation for students' skill development and compliance with regulations. Still, there is a need for curriculum differentiation to address coursework repetition at the master's level, reported by the students from the same bachelor's field. There is also an expressed interest from students,

graduates, and employers in expanding data analysis skills taught in the curriculum.

Courses employ various grading methods and utilise online platforms such as LUIS and Moodle for verifying learning outcomes. Teaching staff use individually-tailored and group-related assignments, as well as oral and written examinations. Some course syllabuses would require improvements, e.g., should provide more specific information on grading methods.

The study provision is sufficient, with studies currently held at the faculty building and plans to relocate to new premises at the UL campus in Torņakalns. Methodological and informative resources are accessible and adequate. Expenses are planned per student, but the falling number of students has strained finances, where costs exceed revenues.

The teaching staff's qualifications comply with regulations and student needs. They engage in research, projects, and internationalisation activities. The UL accommodates teaching staff schedules for their continuous contribution to the programme, including long-term absences, conferences, and teaching visits to other HEIs. Senior teaching and academic staff involved in the programme have good publishing records and international scientific visibility. Guest lecturers, including professionals from various companies, contribute to the programme.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The MSP Sociology aligns well with the field of sociology, political studies, and anthropology, demonstrating a clear and coherent structure.
- 2) The MSP Sociology prepares students for roles in high-demand areas such as state and non-governmental organisations, research groups, and doctoral studies.
- 3) The high employment rate of graduates indicates the effectiveness of the programme in preparing students for the workforce.
- 4) A comprehensive list of interesting and mostly well-designed courses important for the fulfilment of stated learning outcomes is available.
- 5) Interesting topics of MA theses which are relevant for the purpose of development of Latvian society.
- 6) Cooperation with other programmes and departments at the UL is taking place.
- 7) Mutual cooperation of the teaching staff within the department ensures information exchange and contributes to interdisciplinarity.
- 8) E-study environment and the use of Moodle which economises on time and eases coordination.
- 9) Good balance between quantitative and qualitative-oriented courses.
- 10) Very professional and supportive academic staff.
- 11) A strong teaching core, involving internationally acclaimed researchers.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a lack of public recognition and understanding of the field of sociology, leading to challenges in attracting and retaining students.
- 2) Despite the high demand for sociology graduates, the number of students in the programme does not meet the market needs, particularly in state offices.
- 3) No internship partnerships with partner institutions in order to provide students with relevant experience and to facilitate the process of writing the final thesis.
- 4) Lack of differentiation in curriculum content for students transitioning from the Sociology bachelor's programme to the master's programme, leading to a perception of redundancy and limited value.
- 5) Limited data analysis skills. The curriculum predominantly focuses on SPSS for data analysis, while students, graduates, and employers expressed a need for expanded skills, including Excel and programming languages.
- 6) Insufficient staff burnout protection.



7) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

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

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Sociology"**

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

- |   |
|---|
| 1) Introduce internship partnerships with partner institutions in order to provide students with relevant experience and to facilitate the process of writing the final thesis. |
| 2) Incentivise teaching staff to engage more with the public and the media for greater visibility of the sociology field in the public sphere to attract and retain students.   |

#### **Long-term recommendations**

- |  |
|--|
| 1) Assess the issues behind the drop-out rates and the low number of BA graduates continuing their way into the corresponding MA programme.  |
| 2) The study field and the study programme should develop a long-term strategy for enhancing public recognition and understanding of sociology. This could involve more public outreach initiatives, partnerships with media organizations, regular public forums or discussions, and continued incentives for teaching staff to engage with the public and media.   |
| 3) Revise and tailor the curriculum for students transitioning from the bachelor's programme to provide new and advanced knowledge and skills. This may involve incorporating more specialized and advanced courses, focusing on areas of sociology that were not extensively covered at the bachelor's level. Regular assessment and feedback from students in the master's programme can help identify areas where curriculum differentiation is most needed and guide ongoing improvements. |
| 4) Enhance the curriculum by including more comprehensive data analysis skills. In the short term, incorporate Excel training, and in the long term, consider adding coursework on programming languages relevant to data analysis like Python or R.   |
| 5) Introduce EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.   |
| 6) Introduce staff burnout protection measures.  |

## **II - "Social Sciences" ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Social Sciences" ASSESSMENT**

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

##### **Analysis**

2.1.1. According to Parameters of the Programme, the study field of the DSP Social Sciences is Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology. The goal of the programme is "to educate and train highly qualified professionals in the social sciences for employment in higher education, research as well as the public and private sectors. To consolidate existing DSP's in Communication Science,

Political Science and Sociology into a unified, interdisciplinary approach to training young professionals, passing on general skills, promoting cooperation between different fields of research and using available resources more effectively.” (Goal in Parameters of DSP Social Sciences), This aligns with the expectations of the broader field. The tasks of the programme further demonstrate its compliance to the SF, including “1. To study the theories and methods of the social science fields represented in the program, focusing on in-depth studies of the media and communication sciences, political science, sociology and social work in order to build theoretical and empirical understanding of the development of socio-political, communication and information processes. 2. To acquire the latest theoretical approaches and methods of communication science, political science, sociology and social work and the empirical application. .. 7. To prepare the PhD dissertation independently and defend it at the Doctoral Study Council, thereby demonstrating a high level of knowledge, skills and competence in communication science, political science and/or and sociology and social work.” (Tasks in Parameters of DSP Social Sciences). The programme is designed based on the experience of European Union member states in implementing social science studies.(SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.1.2.)

The DSP Social Sciences also complies with national regulations and the Bologna Declaration (SAR, p240).

2.1.2. According to SAR, the programme content is in line with the title of the DSP programme in Social Sciences. Its code, the degree that can be earned, the goals and tasks, the learning outcomes and the enrolment requirements are mutually linked and integrated. DSP Social Sciences covers three areas that are cited in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 49 (2018), “Regulations on Latvia’s Science Sectors and Subsectors”: 5.4. Sociology and social work, 5.6. Political science, and 5.8. Mass Media and Communications. The DSP Social Sciences codes are 51312 (Political science), 51314 (Sociology and social work), and 51321 (Mass Media and Communications.” (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.1.2.) Across the three directions, the programme does not aid, nor is aided by, expertise in anthropology, which could be an additional direction to develop.

The duration of the programme is 3 years (Study Programme Forms in Parameters of DSP Social Sciences). According to programme SAR, “the scope of DSP Social Sciences is 144 credits (CP) or 48 CP per year for full-time students. This scope of the programme has been calculated on the basis of the assumption that 1 CP corresponds to one workweek (40 work hours for the student). The academic year has 52 weeks, of which four are holidays. Accordingly, full-time students earn around 24 CP during each of their six semesters. The rules say that the mandatory share of the doctoral study programme involves preparations for the dissertation (analysis of the literature, research, conferences, writing of papers), a module of general skills, promotion exams, as well as participation in the UL’s doctoral schools and foreign universities which offer comparable experience. The scope of the mandatory part of DSP Social Science is 122 CP.” (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.1.2.)

The on-site interviews with the management of the programme, the academic staff, as well as current students have emphasised that the programme is bilingual and places emphasis on English competence – this is commendable and the results, which the expert panel saw in practice, are impressive, allowing UL students a competitive advantage in global academia.

The on-site interviews with the management of the programme have demonstrated that the recruitment is rigorous, the admission requirements are in accordance with the title and the degree to be obtained (Doctoral Degree of Science, Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in <Social Sciences> , Mandatory Annexes of the DSP Social Sciences, III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme, Diploma SOC DSP.pdf) and involves collaboration between administration and potential supervisors. However, the choice to allow enrollment into the DSP Social Sciences of students with backgrounds outside of the social sciences is a notable risk. The primary concern stems from the substantial differences in methodologies, theoretical foundations, and research paradigms between social sciences and other fields, such as the natural

sciences or medicine. Ultimately, the effectiveness of this enrolment policy will be judged by the quality of the graduates it produces. If these students can successfully acquire the necessary knowledge and skills and contribute meaningful research to the field of social sciences, then this risk could pay off. However, if these students struggle to meet the requirements of the programme, it may be necessary to reconsider this policy.

NB: There is a discrepancy between the nomenclature of the degree as stated in the Self-assessment report (page 239) - Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in social sciences - and the information available online

(<https://www.lu.lv/en/studies/faculties/faculties/faculty-of-social-sciences/doctoral-studies/social-sciences/>), where the degree is delineated as Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in Media and Communication, Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in Political Science, and Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in Sociology and Social Work (Source: University of Latvia website). This inconsistency can potentially lead to confusion among prospective and current students. To enhance clarity and avoid misunderstandings, it is recommended to align the degree name across all information platforms.

2.1.3. No changes have been planned during the evaluation of the study field (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.1.1.).

2.1.4. According to SAR, “DSP Social Science uses interdisciplinary foundations to ensure the preparation of highly qualified experts who can work in areas such as science, higher education and various areas of the social sciences in the national economy (sociology, social work, political science, the mass media and communications) This goal is in line with the Ministry of Education and Science (IZM) project “Fundamental positions on education and development of skills, 2021-2027.” (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.1.3.). This shows that DSP Social Sciences is also socially justified, as it provides a high value added to the students in terms of guest lectureships, mobility, cross-disciplinarity, grants, and research support (on-site interviews with the students of the DSP Social Sciences). The last factor is constrained by national systemic factors, but the UL is indeed excelling in striving to overcome them where possible.

The DSP Social Sciences is also economically justified, as it pools together students across the sub-disciplines of social sciences, providing a good balance between political science, sociology and communication (on-site interviews with the management of the DSP Social Sciences and the FSS).

It should be noted, nevertheless, that as a new programme, there is limited data available to evaluate its effectiveness. The lack of student and graduate feedback survey results makes it challenging to assess how well the programme is meeting its stated goals and the needs of its students.

While the DSP Social Sciences aims to involve employers in the improvement of the programme (Self-assessment report, p.248) , the extent to which this will be implemented and effective remains uncertain.

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

Conclusions:

The DSP Social Sciences is interdisciplinary, bilingual, and consolidates existing programmes and aligns with core disciplinary directions in the faculty. The DSP Social Sciences complies with national regulations and the Bologna Declaration. A discrepancy appears between the nomenclature of the degree as stated in the Self-assessment report and the information available online. The DSP Social Sciences is economically and socially justified, as it pools together students across the sub-disciplines of social sciences, however, the enrolment of students with backgrounds outside of the social sciences could pose risks. As the DSP Social Sciences was licensed in 2021, there is limited

data available to evaluate its effectiveness.

Strengths:

- 1) Interdisciplinarity: the DSP Social Sciences builds on expertise in communication and media that complement the faculty-specific study fields of political science and sociology.
- 2) Appropriate thematic content that covers research and other academic skills, empirical and theoretical expertise, independent study, and critical analysis skills.
- 3) Rigorous recruitment that involves collaboration between administration and potential supervisors.
- 4) Bilingualism: the programme is fully bilingual and places emphasis on English competence.

Weaknesses:

- 1) No specific direction in anthropology is delaying further consolidation of departments within the FSS.
- 2) The decision to admit students from fields outside of social sciences may potentially dilute the focus of the programme and raise questions about the depth of knowledge and skills students will acquire by the end of their studies.
- 3) Absence of student and graduate feedback survey results, posing challenges in assessing the program's effectiveness.
- 4) Uncertainty regarding the extent of employer involvement in DSP Social Sciences improvement, as outlined in the self-assessment report.
- 5) Discrepancy in degree nomenclature between Self-assessment report and online information.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. According to SAR, "The content of DSP Social Science is based on goals that have been defined in the work programme "Growth and Employment" and its specific support project, "Establishing study programmes at the University of Latvia which facilitate international competitiveness and economic development in Latvia" (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.2.1). The SAR 3.2.1. also outlines the programme compliance with national regulations, including: The law on universities in the Republic of Latvia; The law on scientific work in the Republic of Latvia; Cabinet of Ministers regulations on delegating the right to grant a doctoral degree to universities; Cabinet of Ministers regulations on the procedure and criteria for awarding doctoral degrees, Cabinet of Ministers regulations on sectors and subsectors of science in Latvia."

The content of the study courses / modules comprise directed and self-study in the first part of the course and writing of academic articles in the latter part. These phases are staggered and interspersed with expectations of conference presentations (Programme Annexes, III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof, study plan DSP.pdf).

The SAR also makes clear that doctoral students are involved in teaching at lower levels through their studies ((SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.2.1). The on-site meetings with the expert panel made clear that students have ample opportunities to integrate into the life of the departments and FSS. According to SAR, the programme is harmonised with the overarching goal of the UL "Training human resources to satisfy labour market requirements in Latvia and the EU" (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.1.3.) This shows that the content of the programme is interconnected and complementary, and corresponds to, as well as meets the needs of the industry, labour market and scientific trends, preparing students well for academic careers as well as for work in applied fields of their studies. As there are no current graduates of the programme, feedback from employers is not

currently available.

2.2.2. According to SAR, “The independent work that students must do, as well as examinations and particularly the dissertation are all meant to demonstrate the study’s ability to use research methods and theories that they have learned so as to independently deal with serious research problems in the sector.” (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.2.2.). The main research areas of DSP Social Science are harmonised with the strategies of the UL and FFS (2021-2027), as well as the priorities of the UL FFS Institute for Social and Political Research (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.2.2.). As was confirmed during the panel's on-site meetings with the students of the programme, the students receive instruction from their supervisors regarding basing their research in the field of science and are also encouraged to disseminate their findings in conferences in Latvia and abroad - the support towards this is commendable.

2.2.3. During the on-site visit, the management and the academic staff involved in the DSP Social Sciences expressed that study implementation methods consist of lectures, seminars, individual supervised and unsupervised research work, as well as practical teaching and supervising opportunities for PhD students. SAR states that student-centred learning and teaching is being implemented via individualised approaches during seminars and supervised research work, as well as supervision allocation: “Students receive support and a reciprocal link with their instructors during the study process. Grading criteria are made known in advance. Grading helps students to show the extent to which they have learned what is necessary. The E-study Moodle environment is used in the study process so as to encourage independent studies. The study process takes into account the diversity of learning needs that exists among students, choosing appropriate pedagogical methods and encouraging motivation, self-reflection and participating in the study process among the students.” (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.2.3.)

During interviews, the students of the DSP Social Sciences expressed that the internationalisation opportunities, including short and long-term mobility, summer schools, and conference participation are beneficial to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the DSP Social Sciences.

2.2.4. Internships are not typically foreseen during the PhD study process, and the criterion is not applicable according to SAR 3.2.4. of the DSP Social Sciences and Annex III - Description of the Study Programme - 3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof.

Still, the on-site interviews with the management of the UL, as well as with the management of the FSS have shown that the UL demonstrates a supportive approach towards mobility and experience raising of the enrolled PhD students, and there is sufficient grounds to assess that flexibility would apply to student-initiated internships at relevant institutions, e.g., think tanks or research companies. Given the high level of integration of English into the implementation of the programme, any such opportunities would be easily taken in English.

2.2.5. The thesis topics of students are chosen and provided according to the expertise of the scientific advisors, as well as in some cases in consultation with the industry to establish industry needs. Upon the successful completion of the thesis, the students have the opportunities for pre-defence and defence, as the programme boasts a sufficient amount of experts: according to the Head of Study Field Declaration, “the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme "Social Sciences" (code 51312) (code 51314) (code 51321) comprises no fewer than five doctorate holders, at least three of whom are experts approved by the Latvian Council of Science in the relevant branch or sub-branch of science.” —

The DSP Social Sciences at the UL provides well-defined promotion opportunities for students, as demonstrated by the detailed regulations and procedures set out in the University's methodological instructions and rules (self-assessment report, p. 253-255).

These instructions clearly lay out the requirements and process for defending a doctoral dissertation. The promotion work can take the form of a dissertation, a monograph, or a compendium of scholarly papers, each with its own specific requirements in terms of content, length, and contribution to the field of social science.

The doctoral degree (Ph.D.) in Social Science is granted for defending a doctoral dissertation, which should reflect original, independent scholarly research and make a significant contribution to the development of the relevant area of social science. The content and scope of the final examination for doctoral students are determined by the doctoral council of the relevant area of science, ensuring that the examination is tailored to the specific needs and standards of the discipline.

The regulations also provide clear guidelines for the publication of dissertation results in recognised and peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

2.2.6. The topics of the final theses of the DSP Social Sciences (see Self-assessment report, p. 255-257) at the UL have historically been relevant to the field and corresponded to the study programme. However, it's important to note that the programme was restructured recently and is now of an interdisciplinary nature. As such, no theses have yet been completed under this new format. Therefore, it is currently uncertain how the interdisciplinary nature of the programme will be reflected in the choice of thesis topics moving forward.

Historically, theses defended between 2012 and 2022 covered a broad range of topics within the scope of the Social Science field, such as national governance, foreign affairs and diplomacy, and various social issues. This diversity of topics reflected the comprehensive nature of the study programme and its alignment with the wider field of Social Science.

However, given the recent restructuring, it will be crucial to monitor how well the new interdisciplinary approach is reflected in the thesis topics chosen by students, and whether these topics continue to align with the broader field of Social Science.

In conclusion, while the historical thesis topics of the doctoral study programme "Social Science" have been both relevant and varied, the recent restructuring of the programme introduces some uncertainty about the future alignment of thesis topics with the now interdisciplinary nature of the programme.

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

The DSP Social Sciences at the UL demonstrates a comprehensive curriculum and offers well-defined promotion opportunities for students. With a detailed and systematic approach to dissertation defense and publication, the programme adheres to the rigorous standards of the discipline. However, the recent restructuring of the programme into an interdisciplinary format introduces an element of uncertainty. While historical thesis topics have been diverse and relevant, aligning with the broad field of Social Science, it remains to be seen how future thesis topics will reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the new programme structure.

Strengths:

- 1) Interdisciplinarity (according to the mapping of the study courses).
- 2) Internationalisation – English as a language of instruction and research activities is fully integrated in the programme.
- 3) Mobility – students demonstrate sufficient opportunities for top level conferences, summer schools and exchanges
- 4) The DSP Social Sciences provides clear guidelines for the promotion process, including the forms of promotion work, its requirements, and the process for defending a dissertation.
- 5) The programme allows for a diverse range of promotion work, including dissertations, monographs, and compendiums of scholarly papers, providing students with flexibility in their

research.

Weaknesses:

6) Uncertainty about future alignment of thesis topics with the interdisciplinary nature of the new DSP Social Sciences structure.

### **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 DSP Social Sciences is consistent and well designed. It complies with the Education standards. For further improvement, the uncertainty about future alignment of thesis topics with the interdisciplinary nature of the new DSP Social Sciences structure should be tackled.

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. Similarly to other study programmes, the DSP Social Sciences can also rely on a solid resource base in terms of library, digital solutions, courses or training, available to both students and academic staff.

The FSS library, where the social science collection is held, is open for 60 hours per week to serve the interests of students. Users have free access to the collection. The library is in three rooms with 544 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space. The library has 84 workstations, including 18 with computers.

The ULB also offers access to electronic resources, including the UL E-resource repository, the databases of journal publishers and others, as well as E-book platforms. In 2022, the UL has access to 42 E-resource platforms, and E-book ones include VLeBooks, ProQuest and Ebook Central, all of which are convenient for distance studies (SAR, p. 258).

Faculty members use the electronic Moodle E-environment to distribute study materials and to receive, examine and analyze work that students have submitted. Moodle supplements the LU information system (LUIS), ensuring the entry of grades.

The UL FSS has appropriate rooms for the study process. Most faculty members in KSA MSP have elected posts at the UL FSS, and they have high-quality offices and adequate support. Guest instructors have access to workspaces that are provided by the UL FSS.

As of January 1, 2022, the LU Library (LUB) has 26,426 titles related to the sociology, political science and anthropology study field, as well as 60485 copies of printed works, mostly in English, Latvian, Russian and other languages (SAR, p. 258).

2.3.2. FSS research is coordinated by the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute. Within the reporting period, the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research (CDMR) has been incorporated into the institute, (SAR p.81) therefore providing interdisciplinary cooperation.

The Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter- MES) has concluded a cooperation agreement with UL on the implementation of the study of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. (SAR p.84)

During the assessment visit, in the meeting with the management with the study director, it was confirmed that there is a sufficient amount of cooperation with other institutions. Within the projects of Horizon, there has been a cooperation, as well as there are plans to strengthen the cooperation with Rīga Stradiņš university. Some other cooperations include businesses in the field, for example,

SKDS, Kantar, Providus etc. The director also believes that a push forwards will be the move to Torņakalna, by being in the same environment and embracing more interdisciplinarity. In the meeting with the students of the DSP Social Sciences, it was confirmed that the students are satisfied with the provided resources and cooperation with other institutions. There are sufficient funds for students to explore the possibilities of different visits, conferences and summer schools.

2.3.3. Main funding principles are described in part 1.3.1. of this report as they apply to all study programmes of the assessed study field.

The funding of this DSP Social Sciences consists of both tuition fees and state funding for study places (8 per year). The study fee for 2021./2022. was 2350 EUR/ year and funding for the state funded budget places was 4890 EUR/year. Since there are planned (after the closure of DSP Sociology, DSP Communications Science, and DSP Political science) 25 students in state funded and 3 students in self-paid places, it is calculated that the total income would be 129 300 EUR/year and the total cost is calculated at 128 800 EUR/year (SAR p.259-262) where we can see that the funding can cover the costs adequately.

The costs of the study programme consist of: Faculty costs 39%; General personnel 8%; Other costs 14%; Infrastructure 11%; Property and services 2%; Indirect costs 26%. (SAR p.261)

The minimal number of students for rentability is 55 if all would be in self-paid places and 25 if in state funded places as calculated by cost of sensitivity analysis based on the students' number. (SAR p.262).

From the provided statistics of the study programme, the number of admitted students in 2021./2022. is 9- 6 in budget places and 3 in self-paid. Since the programme is new, more data is not yet available, however if taken in mind the numbers of the programmes that will be closed, the number should be sufficient.

In conclusion, UL has funding available to the study programme, funding sources and the use of funding ensures full implementation of the study process.

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

Conclusions:

The study provision is sufficient for the implementation of the DSP Social Sciences. Studies are held at the faculty building, soon to be moved to new premises in the campus of UL at Torņakalna. The methodological and informative resources are accessible to students and sufficient. The expenses are planned per each student. The study fee and student number sensitivity graph helps analyze the needed number of students to achieve a rentable study programme. The finances are currently sufficient to foster a conducive environment high-quality research and teaching.

Strengths:

- 1) The DSP Social Sciences boasts committed and motivated mentors and educators.
- 2) Financial support for doctoral conferences and summer schools is plentiful.
- 3) Students are engaged in research and teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level.
- 4) The DSP Social Sciences can rely on cutting-edge textbooks, software packages and multiple leading subscription databases.
- 5) Interdisciplinarity as evidenced by cooperation with the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute and the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research (CDMR).

Weaknesses:



1) Low participation in cutting-edge international research consortium, but the programme's management has shown strong determination for improvement on this issue.

## **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 resources for the implementation of the DSP Social Sciences are sufficient for the implementation of the programme. The finances are balanced and the DSP Social Sciences faces an improved operating environment (relocation to House of Letters in Torņakalns).

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. SAR states that "Selection and hiring of elected academic posts is based on regulations on academic and administrative jobs at the University of Latvia, as adopted by the Senate of the UL on 31 October 2011 with Decision No 153." (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.1.) The mandatory qualifications for academic staff include compliance with normative requirements; research aligned to with the content of the study programme and/or the taught courses they teach, English language skills, and publications in international peer-reviewed journals during the previous six years. (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.1.) This testifies to the compliance of the DSP Social Sciences with the requirements for implementations, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses.

According to SAR, "DSP Social Science has nine professors, eight associate professors, three docents and one senior researcher, which satisfies the requirement for at least five professors." (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.1.) Most of the staff have a sufficient research and publishing record, including international publishing. The list of publications of staff involved in the programme contains the publications of 16 members of the teaching staff (UL other annexes, Doktora studiju programmas "Sociālās zinātnes" īstenošanā iesaistīto mācībspēku zinātniskās publikācijas laika periodā no 2015. līdz 2021. gadam, kas indeksētas Scopus un citās datubāzēs, DSP macībspēku publikācijas.pdf). The students report high levels of satisfaction with their teaching and academic supervisory staff. Currently, there is a sufficient number of LZP experts for successful implementation of the programme, including for the formation of defence councils. There are 3 LZP experts for "Political science", 5 for "Sociology and social work", and 3 for "Media and communications" (HEI other annexes, Experts DSP.pdf). The involved academic staff have a high command of English, as attested by the students, and the students are benefitting from the fully internationalised approach.

It must be noted, however, that staff burnout protection measures, as well as EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols are insufficient, which is potentially a risk for learning outcomes of the DSP Social Sciences.

2.4.2. According to SAR, "The DSP in Social Science was created in 2021 and there were no changes in academic staff during the first year of operation." (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.2.) In addition, according to the position of the programme management expressed during the on-site visit, the UL is generally flexible in accommodating the schedules of the teaching staff to ensure their continuous contribution to the programme, including long-term absences (e.g., sabbaticals), conferences, and teaching visits to other HEIs. The purpose of this is to keep the teaching staff

involved with the programme, because for a PhD student losing the scientific advisor would have a detrimental effect on their thesis. During the on-site interview with the students, the respondents have not mentioned any cases when the changes in the teaching staff would have affected them negatively.

2.4.3. According to SAR, between 2015 and 2021, academic personnel at DSP Social Science published 104 papers that are indexed in the Scopus database. (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.3.) The growing amount of indexed international publications contributes to the implementation of a high-quality doctoral study programme and provides PhD students with research opportunities following the guidance of their scientific supervisors. The trend is also in line with the Development Plan of the SF, which prioritises the increase in “the overall Google Scholar Hirsch Index for 20 elected academic staff in the field” as well as “in articles in Scopus and WoS Q1 and Q2 journals” and by 2027 (p.4.) Given the academic seniority of the staff involved in DSP Social Sciences, this task largely falls on their shoulders. The management of the study field expressed an awareness during the on-site interview that overemphasis on local publishing, as well as publishing in under-ambitious outlets, is potentially hindering the streamlining of the research to reach the Development plan goal of scientific excellence for the study field to “Ensure international visibility of research and international recognition of study programmes”, which feeds into the UL strategic goal “The university as an internationally recognised science centre” (Study field annexes, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology study Field Development Plan, Development plan.pdf). Therefore, it is commendable that there is an upward trend towards international quality in publishing among DSP Social Sciences academic staff.

As per SAR, academic staff of the DSP Social Sciences participate in research-related projects, however, recent involvement in cutting-edge research consortia, including Horizon Europe, remains low. The completed Horizon-financed projects were impressive, however have all ended in 2017 and 2019: Horizon 2020 Framework Programme European Researchers Night in Latvia 2018-2019 (NIGHTLV), EUR 30 825; H2020 Marie Curie Innovative Training Networks grant SUSPLACE – Sustainable Place Shaping: Inclusive, Resilient & Connected Places, Greening Economies and Pathways to Sustainability, EUR 476 712,72; Horizon 2020 Framework Programme “Living Together with Difficult Memories and Diverse Identities”, EUR 81 368; H2020 Marie Curie Innovative Training Networks grant “Children Born of War: Past, Present, Future”, EUR 223 577 (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.4.) The programme management demonstrated awareness of the challenge during the on-site interviews and is determined to pursue more project opportunities.

During the on-site visit, academic staff mentioned their involvement in international research networks, including COST actions. A search of the Excel sheet provided on the webpage of the Latvian Council of Science seconds that one member of UL academic staff involved in the DSP Social Sciences – Iveta Reinholde – is listed in COST committees: (Latvijas pārstāvji COST akciju komitejās, <https://www.lzp.gov.lv/lv/latvijas-daliba-cost-akcijas>). Such networks are very beneficial for cutting-edge research exchanges and profit the supervisors as well as students, contributing to the implementation of a high-quality doctoral study programme, therefore, an increase in participation among academic staff would be beneficial for the strategic goals of the UL as well as the study field.

2.4.4. 16 members of the academic staff are involved in the DSP Social Sciences. The mandatory qualifications for academic staff include, among others, publications in international peer-reviewed journals during the previous six years (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.1.) By reviewing the Scopus database, the panel has established that the criterion is met, and all academic staff members have Scopus presence with no less than 2 indexed publications each. 13 academic staff members have Scopus H index higher than 2. Of them, prof. Daunis Auers (7), Jānis Ikstens (5), Inta Mieriņa (6), Iveta Reinholde (4), and Tālis Tisenkopfs (13) particularly stand out. The number of publications is adequate to support the study programme's quality and implementation in the study

field. It can be deduced that the management of the study field efficiently manages academic staff resources across the several programme levels, with the academic staff with the highest publishing and research outputs being ascribed to the PhD level.

2.4.5. SAR describes a mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme as follows: "Lecturing staff in the DSP Social Science are based in the three relevant UL FFS departments – political science, sociology and information & communication – and work in tandem with academic staff from other related faculties. This partnership and support culture is underpinned by the DSP Social Science Study Council, which reviews issues related to the DSP and its work (achievements by doctoral students, analysis of the study process and learning outcomes, etc.). All departments and most of the teaching staff in the programme are represented on the Council." (SAR of the DSP Social Sciences, 3.4.5.) This is adequate for ensuring the achievement of the aims of the study programme and the interconnection of study courses within the study programme.

According to interviews during the on-site visit, teaching staff cooperation is being ensured via regular faculty meetings. Networks including collegial mutual support are in place to ensure the implementation of the study programme.

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

#### **Conclusions:**

The teaching staff qualifications are in compliance with regulatory requirements and for the practical implementation of the DSP Social Sciences. Academic staff have a high command of English. Currently no personnel changes have taken place, and the management has flexible protocols to accommodate upcoming mobility and ensure low turnover of staff. All members of the academic staff have Scopus presence with no less than 2 indexed publications each. As for teaching staff cooperation, networks including collegial mutual support are in place to ensure the implementation of the DSP Social Sciences. It must be noted, however, that staff burnout protection measures, as well as EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols are insufficient.

#### **Strengths:**

- 1) The scientific publications of the academic staff are visible, topical and in line with UL priorities, there is an upward trend towards international quality in publishing among DSP Social Sciences academic staff.
- 2) A sufficient number of LZZ experts for successful implementation of the programme, including for the formation of defence councils.
- 3) Academic staff have a high command of English, attesting to internationalisation.
- 4) Academic staff resources efficiently managed across several programme levels, with the academic staff with the highest publishing and research outputs being ascribed to the PhD level.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- 1) Low participation in cutting-edge international research consortiums and networks (Horizon, COST).
- 2) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

### **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:** Fully compliant

The qualification of UL-affiliated and visiting academic staff is fully compliant with the conditions and regulations. For further improvement, participation in cutting-edge international research consortiums and networks should be strengthened and. EDI sensitivity and harassment training protocols should be introduced. These minor weaknesses do not affect the evaluation of the requirement.

## 2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

- 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 - 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

Provided course descriptions “ Study courses SOC DSP.pdf” are available in both Latvian and English languages. All course descriptions contain the requirements set forth in the corresponding sections of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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 diploma example available in annex “diploma\_paraugs\_DR\_latviski.pdf” is compliant with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 202 “Procedures by which documents certifying higher education recognised by the State shall be issued”

- 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 attached annex “ Study field declaration CSA MSP.pdf” affirms that the “Social Sciences” (code 51312) (code 51314) (code 51321) programme complies with the regulations of the Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

- 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:** Fully compliant

Provided annex "Study field declaration experts.pdf" states that the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme "Social Sciences" (code 51312) (code 51314) (code 51321) comprises no fewer than five doctorate holders, at least three of whom are experts approved by the Latvian Council of Science in the relevant branch or sub-branch of science. LŽP status of professors is stated in the annex "DSP ekspertu saraksts.pdf".

- 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

Provided annex "Declaration\_Latvian language.pdf" affirms that the knowledge of Latvian language of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language for the performance of professional duties and duties of office.

- 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:** Fully compliant

Provided annex "Declaration\_English.pdf" states that the English language proficiency of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the programme corresponds to at least B2 level of the Common European Framework.

- 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

Provided annex "Studiju ligumi.pdf" containing study agreements fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No 70 "Rules to be included in the study agreement".

- 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

Provided annex "Study continuation agreements.pdf" affirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education in Rīga Stradiņš University "Political Science" (code 51312), "Sociology" (code 51314), "Communication culture and multimedia" (code 51312) programmes, if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

- 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

rovided annex " Study continuation agreements.pdf" states that the UL shall guarantee the refund to students in the amount of tuition fees, if the programme of the study field Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology is not accredited due to the action (activity or failure to act) of the UL or the license of the study programme is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

- 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:** Not relevant

#### **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

The DSP Social Sciences complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments

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

Conclusions:

The UL DSP Social Sciences is interdisciplinary, bilingual, and aligns with core disciplinary directions in the faculty. The DSP Social Sciences content is relevant and corresponds to its objectives, ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes. It complies with national regulations and the Bologna Declaration. However, there is a discrepancy between the degree nomenclature stated in the Self-assessment report and the available online information. The DSP Social Sciences is economically and socially justified, but enrolling students from outside the social sciences may pose risks. Limited data is available to evaluate its effectiveness as it was licensed recently in 2021.

The study provision is sufficient, currently held at the faculty building and soon to be relocated to new premises at the UL campus in Torņakalna. Methodological and informative resources are accessible and adequate. Expenses are planned per student, and the study fee and student number sensitivity graph aid in analysing the required student count for a financially viable programme. The finances are currently sufficient to support high-quality research and teaching.

The DSP Social Sciences offers a comprehensive curriculum and clear promotion opportunities for students. The DSP Social Sciences maintains rigorous standards in dissertation defence and publication. However, the recent restructuring into an interdisciplinary format introduces uncertainty regarding future thesis topics and their reflection of the new programme structure.

The teaching staff's qualifications comply with regulatory requirements and are suitable for implementing the DSP Social Sciences. They have a strong command of English, and personnel

changes are appropriately managed. All academic staff members have a presence in Scopus with at least two indexed publications each, and their research visibility could be further developed by participation in cutting-edge consortia and institutionalised international networks. Academic staff cooperation networks, including collegial support, ensure programme implementation,. However, measures for staff burnout protection, as well as protocols for equality, diversity, inclusion, and sensitivity training, are insufficient.

#### Strengths:

- 1) Appropriate thematic content that covers research and other academic skills, empirical and theoretical expertise, independent study, and critical analysis skills.
- 2) Rigorous recruitment that involves collaboration between administration and potential supervisors.
- 3) Interdisciplinarity (according to the mapping of the study courses).
- 4) Internationalisation – English as a language of instruction and research activities is fully integrated in the programme.
- 5) Mobility – students demonstrate sufficient opportunities for top level conferences, summer schools and exchanges.
- 6) The programme provides clear guidelines for the promotion process, including the forms of promotion work, its requirements, and the process for defending a dissertation.
- 7) The programme allows for a diverse range of promotion work, including dissertations, monographs, and compendiums of scholarly papers, providing students with flexibility in their research.
- 8) The programme boasts committed and motivated mentors and educators.
- 9) Financial support for doctoral conferences and summer schools is plentiful.
- 10) Students are engaged in research and teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level.
- 11) The DSP Social Sciences can rely on the latest and most acclaimed textbooks, software packages and multiple leading subscription databases.
- 12) The scientific publications of the academic staff are visible, topical and in line with UL priorities.
- 13) A sufficient number of LZP experts for successful implementation of the programme, including for the formation of defence councils.
- 14) Department academic staff resources efficiently are managed across several programme levels, with the academic staff with the highest publishing and research outputs working on the PhD level.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) Uncertainty about the future alignment of thesis topics with the interdisciplinary nature of the new programme structure.
- 2) No specific direction in anthropology is delaying further consolidation of departments within the faculty.
- 3) The decision to admit students from fields outside of social sciences may potentially dilute the focus of the programme and raise questions about the depth of knowledge and skills students will acquire by the end of their studies.
- 4) Absence of student and graduate feedback survey results poses challenges in assessing the programme's effectiveness.
- 5) Uncertainty regarding the extent of employer involvement in programme improvement, as outlined in the self-assessment report.
- 6) Discrepancy in degree nomenclature between Self-assessment report and online information.
- 7) Low participation in cutting-edge international research consortiums.
- 8) Lack of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.

## Evaluation of the study programme "Social Sciences"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### 2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Social Sciences"

#### Short-term recommendations

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|--|
| 2) Align the degree name across all platforms to avoid confusion among students.   |
| 3) Collect and analyse student and graduate (when available) feedback survey results to contribute to assessing the programme's effectiveness. |

#### Long-term recommendations

- |   |
|---|
| 1) Explore integrating anthropology into the programme to ensure further consolidation of departments within the faculty.   |
| 2) Provide guidance and support to students in choosing thesis topics that reflect the interdisciplinary approach of the programme.   |
| 3) After a few cohorts of students have graduated, conduct a review of the admission criteria. If students from outside the social sciences have struggled to meet the requirements of the programme, consider adjusting the admission criteria or providing additional support for these students. |
| 4) Follow through with the stated aspiration of involving employers in the improvement of the programme.  |
| 5) Boost participation in cutting-edge international research consortiums.  |
| 6) Introduce EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion), sensitivity and harassment training protocols.  |

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

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

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



Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
<p>R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 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:</p>		<p>Partially compliant</p>	<p>The UL has evidently made significant efforts to ensure the continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of its study fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. These efforts are underscored by the implementation of a comprehensive Quality Management System Manual, a robust University Strategy, and the development of an ambitious Study Field Development Plan. The latter provides a framework for the longitudinal evaluation of the study field through a plethora of indicators.</p> <p>However, there are indications of inconsistencies in the application of these quality assurance systems. Notably, there is an absence of annual reports for certain years, and the procedures for data analysis and feedback incorporation appear to be irregular. Furthermore, student awareness regarding their ability to submit official complaints or suggestions seems to be lacking, and the procedure for collecting and utilising employer feedback seems to lack regularity and systematicity.</p>
<p>R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)</p>	<p>Fully compliant</p>		<p>UL demonstrates compliance among all criteria of scientific research. Minor weaknesses have been identified in research visibility, but they do not affect the requirements.</p>

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Fully compliant	Cooperation with local and international organisations on all levels is fully compliant with the requirements. Minor weaknesses have been identified, but they do not affect the evaluation of the requirement.
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 the recommendations that could have been implemented, were implemented.

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

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Political Science (43312)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
2	Cultural and Social Anthropology (43314)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Excellent
3	Sociology (43314)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
4	Diplomacy (45312)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
5	Political Science (45312)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
6	Cultural and Social Anthropology (45314)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

<b>No.</b>	<b>Study programme</b>	<b>R5</b>	<b>R6</b>	<b>R7</b>	<b>R8</b>	<b>Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)</b>
7	Sociology (45314)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
8	Social Sciences (51312)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good

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

Experts do not have dissenting opinions