

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Ventspils University College

Study field: Management, Administration and Management of Real Property

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Summary Assessment of the Study Field

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Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeUAS) as a small regional university serves the regional development successfully. The institution has established good cooperation with local businesses. VeUAS meets the local business and municipality needs and is very well integrated in the regional ecosystem. Mission and vision of the institution are well defined; however, the uniqueness of the Faculty of Economics and Management should be more precisely defined. The administration of the VeUAS is supporting the study field properly, but there is room for improvement of the management processes and decision making procedures. The programme directors are not fully authorized to make decisions regarding their programmes. In the case of the professional bachelor study programme Business Management, the experts discovered that some decisions related to the study programme have been taken without involvement of the study program director at all. This situation should be changed and the institution should empower the programme directors.

Regarding efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System - VeUAS has a quality assurance system in place according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Objectives and tasks of the programmes and courses are set. The European Qualifications Framework is used as a guiding framework for defining the learning outcomes. However, there are a number of deficiencies on how the objectives are set and the learning outcomes are determined.

Qualification of teaching staff is an inherent part of the quality assurance. Faculty has possibilities for further training/professional development. While the regulatory documents and standardized procedures are in place, the experts' team was not fully convinced that staff recruitment always follows 'clear, transparent and fair processes'. The majority of teaching staff is qualified to teach their subjects, although in certain cases the academic degrees of the academic staff members was just one level higher than the programme level they are involved in.

Pedagogical, scientific and organisational work of academic staff members is evaluated periodically at the relevant faculty council meetings. The institution has introduced an individual assessment of faculty members which is in line with internal regulations. The efficiency of the internal quality assurance system needs closer attention from the management.

According to experts rough estimations, currently the Faculty of Economics and Management study field as a whole is financially sustainable, however, certain budget positions and financing of particular study programmes raise questions about the long-term sustainability. Unfortunately, only limited information regarding finances was available to the experts. Experts can assume that some cross financing is used to run certain study programmes with low student numbers. The income typically consists of the state budget funds, income from tuition fees, as well as targeted financial support from the Ventspils City Municipality. In addition to that VeUAS attracts more financial resources by implementing a variety of scientific and infrastructure projects, including EU Structural Funds.

Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the study field is heavily dependent on state financing. More than 80% of finances for the studies come from the state budget. That is a significant share compared to other higher education institutions in Latvia operating in the same study direction. Taking into consideration that the state financing for the social study directions in Latvia is shrinking year by year it might create high level risk in the future.

VeUAS has modern premises in Ventspils, 101 and 101a Inženieru Street. The study facilities consist of modern lecture rooms, laboratories and other amenities. Printed and electronic resources are available at the Ventspils City Library branch operating at VeUAS campus. Modern Student Hostel is located at the campus.

The academic process is carried out by a diversity of instructors. Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the courses are delivered by the elected faculty of the Faculty of Economics and Management (2018/2019).

Lecturers having solid industrial experience from the local business world are widely attracted to teach applied oriented courses. For some study programmes, highly qualified faculty from other higher education institutions in Latvia are attracted to ensure the best teaching quality. Few visiting professors from abroad are teaching at the VeUAS, as well.

According to the latest statistics, the number of scientific publications and participation in international conferences during 2013-2018 has increased from 6 and 3 to 24 and 18 respectively. The peak of scientific publications was reached in 2016. Majority of publications are produced by few active professors. Number of publications are included in the major databases like WoS, EBSCO, SCOPUS. However, the citation index of those publications is not high. Integration of the results of scientific research in the study process can be evaluated as average, because the majority of the courses are delivered by non-core professors of the Faculty of Economics and Management who are not active in research. Researchers are taking part in a variety of research projects (international and local). There are incentives for academic staff members to perform scientific research. Students are involved in performing research, however, that involvement could be much higher.

The high workload in the study and administrative processes can be mentioned as an obstacle to widen the staff involvement in scientific research.

Level of cooperation with regional partners is high and well established. The university has strong local, regional connections, mainly with the municipality and the local business actors. The non-formalized research and teaching cooperation with other higher education institutions and particular professors from those institutions takes place. RISEBA, BI School of Banking and Finance, Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, University of Latvia are among them.

The international partners are carefully selected, but their precise number is unclear. Majority of partnership agreements are signed under the Erasmus+ program activities. In both directions student exchange is in place, however, there is room to increase exchange activities. The joint international study programme in cooperation with University of Applied Sciences Krems, Austria is the flagship programme of the institution.

Assessment of the Study Programmes

All main levels of education programmes are offered by VeUAS (bachelor-master-doctoral) under the study field. The programme portfolio consists of one academic bachelor programme, two professional bachelor programmes, one academic and one professional master programmes, and a doctoral study programme.

"Business Management", professional bachelor programme (full time, 4 years, in Latvian). The biggest study programme brings half of the revenue of the study direction. Almost all financing comes from the state budget.

"Business Administration" academic bachelor programme (full time, 3 years, in English). The programme is offered for tuition fee only, it serves mainly international students. Low number of students (except the last year). High dropout rate (up to 2/3). The new part time (4 years in Latvian) version of the study programme has been recently designed, which differs from the English version significantly. Two different study programme versions having different content and structure awarding the same degree are provided for the evaluation. The appropriate synchronization of both study programme versions must be applied.

"Start-up Management" professional bachelor programme (full time, 4 years, in English). The study programme is new, started just in 2019. The title "Start-up Management" attracts the attention of potential students. Significant share of the courses are delivered by industry instructors.

"Business Administration" professional master programme (full time, 2 years, in Latvian) and the newly designed version (full time 1 year in Latvian), for students with a background in Economics, Management, administration and real estate management is offered. The new version is offering just 14 CP study courses which corresponds to the very minimum requirement set by the legislation.

"International Business and Export Management" joint academic master programme. (full time, 2 years, in English). The programme is targeted at the students paying tuition fee. The programme is

heavily dependent on non-VeUAS faculty. The graduates of the programme are awarded two diplomas: 1) Issued by VeUAS, 2) Issued by IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems GmbH in Austria.

“Business Management” doctoral programme (full time, 3 years, in Latvian). The sustainability of the existing doctoral study programme is questionable, as the former consortium with RISEBA and BI School of Banking and Finance has been broken down. Instead, the new partnership with another higher education institutions in Latvia has been established to launch a new doctoral study programme.

1. Management of the Study Field

Analysis

The analysis covers the following assessment areas:

- a) strategy making process, positioning
- b) administration and decision making processes
- c) student management processes
- d) academic integrity and mechanisms
- e) information management

As part of the strategy the aims of the study field are clearly defined. The study portfolio is fully in line with the study field. The institution introduced new programmes reflecting on the market needs, namely Start-Up Management and International Business and Export Management. The institution meets the local needs and is very well embedded in the regional ecosystem which is a right positioning. Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeUAS) is a small regional university which serves the regional development successfully. VeUAS mission expects high quality experts, excellent research and entrepreneurial spirit in all activities. The vision is built on the following principles: research, excellence, meeting the needs of the labor market. Mission and Vision are well defined, however, the Faculty of Economics and Management (FEM) should define the uniqueness of the institution. They must agree on a unique selling point. FEM should define a new recruitment policy because of the declining number of new students, probably focusing on international students. The joint study programme “International Business and Export Management' (KREMS Programme) is the flagship programme of the institution and also meets the regional needs.

The administration is supporting the study field properly, however, the organogram, which was provided by the institution, is not detailed enough. Certain functions (marketing, recruitment, alumni office, registrar office, international office) are hidden, and not articulated on the institution level. The academic integrity principles are set and widely communicated. Plagiarism is strictly forbidden and carefully checked. Academic honesty is one of the core values mentioned in the VeUAS development strategy for 2016-2020. This means respecting the highest standards of professionalism and accuracy, objectivity and truthfulness, moral and ethical principles, and honesty. There are problems with the decision making processes. Based on the meeting with the programme directors it became clear that they are not fully authorized to make decisions regarding their programmes, sometimes they are not informed about decisions related to their programmes (in the case of the professional bachelor study programme Business Management, the experts discovered that some decisions related to the study programme have been taken without involvement of the study program director at all). This situation should be changed and the institution should empower them.

Student management processes are well defined. The admission procedures are well established.

The recognition of former achievements is guaranteed. The learning outcomes are not always specified in course syllabi which are not available in case of each and every course. It is also unclear who is eligible to approve the course syllabus. During the interviews with faculty members and the administration they could not confirm the procedure of the syllabus updating procedures. Officially the course syllabi are revised by the programme directors and the final approval is by the Faculty Council, however, based on the interviews experts found that this procedure is not always followed. In some cases lecturers rely on Coursera to a great extent and the Coursera evaluation can give 20-30% of the final grade. There is no general rule about the composition of the final grade. Students seem to be satisfied with the support mechanism.

Regarding the academic integrity the institution provides an opportunity to check the originality of the thesis works. This service is part of the quality assurance system. Thesis works are available in the Library, except doctoral thesis works, which were defended in other institutions e.g. at RISEBA. The quality assurance system is available on Moodle. It has been developed and processes have been clarified. The quality assurance system and related documentation is developed in the framework of the European Social Fund Project.

As part of the information management the institution's website is available in Latvian and in English. The English website does not contain the summary of the institutional strategy; however, it shows all the necessary information for potential applicants.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Based on the analysis experts can give a conclusion that the institution in general meets most of the criteria related to the management of the study field. However, there is still room for improvements e.g. in the field of programme management. The institution has a clear strategy, the field of study is managed fully in line with the strategy. The administration is supporting the field of study properly, academic integrity is guaranteed. The information management is sufficient, but could be further improved especially in the field of English communication.

Strengths:

1. VeAUS as a small regional Higher education institution serves the regional development successfully.
2. The strategy is widely communicated and reflects on the strong position of the university in the local ecosystem.
3. VeAUS has strong local, regional connections, mainly with the Municipality and the local business actors. They provide financial support when needed. More than half of the graduates remain in the region, which shows that the institution plays an important role in regional development. The Faculty's strong regional embeddedness could be a long term asset for future developments.
4. The business community is quite happy with the quality of the graduates.
5. FEM revised its study programme portfolio and introduced modern digital teaching methods. They also introduced new successful study programmes like Start-Up Management and International Business and Export Management.
6. Current students and alumni are quite happy with the study programmes. They like the experiential learning approach which is widely used in all programmes.
7. FEM has an "elastic" learning process, and can keep its students who continue their studies on Master, Postgraduate or even PhD level.

Weaknesses:

1. The strategy is not published, not available on the English website.

2. The mission and vision are well defined, however, not distinctive enough. The FEM should define the uniqueness of the institution. They must agree on a unique selling point.
3. The market share is shrinking: in 2013 it was 1,03% and it became 0,98% by 2018. The trend continued in 2019 and 2020.
4. Certain functions are not visible in the organizational chart, namely marketing, recruitment, alumni management, registrars office, international relations which all belong to the Administration.
5. Students and especially the alumni are very dedicated, however, they are rarely involved in the activities. FEM should have initiated a more active alumni management based on the alumni association which is currently not known by the graduates.
6. The programme directors' position is very weak. They do not have enough power to make decisions regarding their study programmes. FEM should empower them by authorizing to make decisions and also by providing the necessary financial support.

2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

The analysis covers the following assessment criteria points:

- a) quality assurance policy;
- b) procedures for design and approval of the study programmes;
- c) teaching assessment and student feedback collection / information management;
- d) quality assurance system (as per the standards set forth in Part 1 of ESG, see further).

In line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), VeUAS has a quality assurance policy or a control system which was developed and approved by the university senate in 2014 (degree No. 14-82).

The self - assessment report suggests that the quality assurance policy governs processes for design and approval of the study programmes. It specifically mentions three governing bodies, or Councils responsible for decision-making and approval processes: Study and Science Councils, Study Programme Council, and Faculty Council. The discussion content covers comparisons of the local programmes with those of other HEIs, monitoring of lectures, interaction with students and surveying their opinions, establishing contacts with potential employers.

The main responsibility for the quality assurance work rests with subject lecturers. In turn, study programme directors, faculty deans, and Vice-Rector for Studies coordinate the work of these lecturers.

It is not exactly clear, however, how the three councils connect to one another and influence decision-making, and to what extent students and other stakeholders are actually involved in the programme design.

The ESG guidelines also suggest benefiting from 'external expertise and reference points'; experts assume this is covered during discussions within and/or among the councils.

Objectives and tasks of the programmes and courses are present, European Qualifications Framework is used as a guiding framework for writing learning outcomes. However, as pointed out in the separate analyses of the programmes, there are a number of deficiencies on how the objectives are set and the learning outcomes are written.

Qualification of teaching staff is an inherent part of the quality assurance. The self-assessment

report refers to the regulation 'On Vocational Education and Training of Lecturers...' that defines the procedure for evaluation and recording of professional development efforts of elected lecturers. Academic staff has possibilities of further training/professional development. They are responsible for their own professional development and must complete a total of 160 hours worth of further professional training by the end of their elected term.

While the regulatory documents and standardized procedures are in place, during the November 2020 visit, the experts team was not convinced that staff recruitment always follows 'clear, transparent and fair processes'. Namely, some programme directors had no voice in the appointment of specific professors. From the meetings with the academic staff of the study programmes, experts also concluded that there seems to be little or no encouragement of scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research.

Section 2.5 of the self-assessment report states that 'one of the most prominent problems is hiring professional lecturers in a regional higher education institution, which is influenced both by the higher education institution's location and the lack of competitive funding.' This might partly explain the limited presence of PhD degree holders in some study programmes. However, there are number of guest professors on board of the study field's teaching activities already (e.g. Prof. Volkova, Prof. Jackiva, Prof. Kozlinskis, Prof. Grasis), hence it might also be a question of organising available resources.

As evidenced by the enclosed CVs (in 2-6 Appendix of the self-assessment report), the majority of teaching staff is qualified to teach their subjects, although not always academic degrees of the staff is at least one level higher than the programme level they are involved in. For example, a lecturer has substantial industry experience and may be viewed as qualified enough for teaching courses in the Start-up Management programme. However, it does appear from their CV and the November meeting that their pedagogical experience is not strong enough. That said, pedagogical, scientific and organisational work of academic personnel is evaluated at the relevant faculty council meetings. The institution also performs individual assessment of faculty personnel in line with internal regulations. This lets experts question the efficiency of the internal quality assurance system.

Teaching assessment and student feedback collection/information management. In addition to the councils that approve the design of the study programmes, there is another governing body, VeUAS Senate, that approves Regulations on Study Procedure (according to self-assessment 2-3 appendix information). Regulations of State Examination Commission and Regulations of Final Examination Commission determine the procedures of State and final examinations, including defence and awarding of Bachelor and Master theses. Requirements and assessment criteria for the theses are not, however, outlined in the programme descriptions. Anti-plagiarism system is in place - students' term papers, Bachelor and Master theses go through the Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control Systems. Other types of coursework might not be checked, as became clear from the Q&A session with academic staff.

In line with ESG guidelines, quality assurance processes for assessment of students' progress take into account the criteria for and method of assessment and grading; where possible, assessments are carried out by more than one examiner, etc. That said, a common feature of the study field's programmes is the lack of details on the assessment criteria (the structure is always present but not the exact criteria that would allow evaluating whether the learning outcomes set are achieved); how many examiners contribute to the assessment process is not specified.

According to the self-assessment report, the internal system for evaluating and controlling the

learning processes includes interaction and contact with students, surveying of their opinions, establishing contacts with existing and potential employers.

Collection of feedback from students and graduates happens regularly through annual questionnaires. Students fill in questionnaires answering questions about course content and lecturers' work (relevance of the course, its organisation, pedagogical qualification of lecturers, etc.). The questionnaire completion is a prerequisite for signing up for a new semester. Career paths of graduates, students' satisfaction and progression are also tracked for quality assurance purposes. Answers are analysed and then management discusses the results with each teaching staff member. Student representatives are elected into the Study Programme Council, Faculty Council, and Senate.

The established feedback mechanism seems logical, and the meeting with students and graduates in November 2020 confirmed that feedback collection is a common practice at the end of each study course. Simultaneously, some students felt that their opinion is not considered to a sufficient extent throughout a study course duration (e.g. in the Bachelor's 'Business Administration' programme). In general, students' impressions and satisfaction varied a lot depending on the programme. The most satisfied students and graduates were from International Business and Export Management as well as from Start-up Management programmes. Whether the unsatisfied voices from other programmes do influence the change process or are taken into account was not clear from the meeting with the students.

The self-assessment report mentions that employers are involved in the process of monitoring and improving study programmes. Employers' representatives are also members of the Study Programme Council and thus have a chance to contribute to reviewing and approving necessary changes to the study process. During the meeting with employers, experts learned that they employ from 10 to over 100 interns or graduates from VeUAS. In general, they are satisfied with graduates' competencies but state that problem-solving, social and management skills, as well as public finance skills (accounting, economics, public budget, etc.) tend to be lacking among the graduates. One employer mentioned taking part in the study programme formation or influencing it, and a few of them did mention taking part in committees for Bachelor theses examinations. This confirmed that the employers contribute to improving the study quality at least to a certain extent.

A number of key performance indicators that concern the learning process quality (e.g. innovative learning methods, consultations with students) and the teaching process quality (e.g. clarity of programme aims and tasks, compliance of curriculum with educational standards) are usually taken into account when it comes to the study quality. Similarly to the design and approval of study programmes at VeUAS, the main responsibility for information management rests with the subject lecturers whose work is coordinated by the study programme director, faculty deans and Vice-Rector for Studies. The depth of integrating insights from the information management mechanisms into the quality assurance aim setting and measures was not apparent during the experts' team onsite visit and from the analysis of the study programmes alike.

Section 2.1 of the self-assessment report refers to Part I, Section 1.3 for the quality control system approved by the Senate but it is a SWOT analysis (perhaps Section 1.4 was meant, it describes functions of Vice-rectors for Research and Studies, a faculty dean, study programme directors, etc.). Section 2.4 refers to the use of statistical data collected at VeUAS annually - data on exmatriculation, on professional development of academic staff, results of scientific research, on study and organizational work. The report states that the results and recommendations for improvement of the study process are discussed at the Faculty Council, Study Programme Council and VeUAS Senate. Yet, from this section it was not clear what actions are taken to conclude on the

changes and implement them (with some examples or illustrations of statistical figures). Descriptions of the programmes do outline information about graduate and employer surveys. Some related Annexes displaying results are not available such as Annex 7.8 and Annex 7.9 for the International Business and Export Management Master study programme. In other cases, student evaluations are relatively low, e.g. between 4.8 and 5.7 out of 7 maximum points - evaluation of lectures, between 4.7 and 5.6 out of 7 - evaluation of the study programme content, between 3 and 7 - general study programme quality, for the Business Administration Bachelor study programme.

Quality assurance policy, procedures for design and approval of the study programmes, and information management are all logical parts of the internal quality assurance system. This system is usually created and maintained to contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study direction and the relevant study programmes. Having analysed the available information, the experts' team is not entirely convinced that the quality assurance system operates as a unified framework and that it ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction. There are several governing bodies (councils, senate) and official documents to support the quality assurance system but experts spot a number of areas for improvement in the current state of how the system is implemented: in writing the learning outcomes of each programme and courses, pedagogical expertise of some lead lecturers, clarity of students' learning evaluation criteria, appointment of teaching staff, and de facto satisfaction of some students. Student evaluations of the study quality based on the presented statistics in some cases appear to be relatively low, therefore, it remains questionable whether the collected data are sufficiently used to improve the study direction and relevant programme quality.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

General quality assurance procedures at VeUAS are in place but they might not be completely followed in day-to-day operations. Survey data are regularly collected from students, graduates, and employers, and information management is de jure carried out on a regular basis by responsible administrative structures and individuals within VeUAS. However, the use of this information for the purposes of improving the study quality de facto represents an area of improvement. Hence, the overall conclusion is that the internal quality assurance system does exist yet the experts' team questions its efficiency.

Strengths:

1. Active quality assurance policy is in place (developed and approved by the university senate in 2014).
2. Teaching staff takes part in compulsory professional development programmes.
3. The internal quality assurance system has relevant information management mechanisms that allow collecting feedback from students and employers; in addition, this system has both learning and teaching related key performance indicators.

Weaknesses:

1. There are three governing bodies responsible for decision-making and study approval processes - Study and Science Councils, Study Programme Council, and Faculty Council; but it is not entirely clear how they relate/complement each other, and to what extent students and other stakeholders are actually involved in the programme design.
2. There are a number of deficiencies on how the objectives are set and the learning outcomes are written as pointed out in the study programme's analysis (e.g. the need to follow a constructive alignment principle) - this implies that one of the responsible parties overlooked these issues.
3. Students' learning assessment for grading purposes generally has a structure but not detailed

criteria of what is being assessed to ensure the assessment practice serves the goal of evaluating the learning outcomes were achieved; some assessment practices raise questions (e.g. 20% share of online courses on Coursera chosen by students).

4. In some practical instances, staff recruitment processes might not be completely transparent (e.g. the case of teaching microeconomics/ macroeconomics).

5. The data collected from students and graduates on a regular basis is not likely to be used sufficiently to act upon these data and work on the study quality improvement; the internal quality assurance system as such calls for revisions.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

After getting acquainted with VeUAS infrastructure and having interviews with the VeUAS management, teaching staff and administrative staff, the following information was obtained.

The structure of VeUAS study process financing sources consists of the state budget funds, local government budget funds and income from tuition fees. Analyzing financing of the study field in more detail, it can be seen that "Business Administration" (academic bachelor`s) and "International Business and Export Management" (academic masters`s) are not financed from the state budget, but "Business Management" (doctoral) is fully implemented with public funding. On average, about 55% of the total funding is spent for lecturers' salaries, about 7% payment for faculty general staff and about 7% - other eligible faculty costs. The directors of study programmes are paid only 1% of the total funding for the implementation of the programme, except for "Business Management" (professional master's) is 4%, but "Business Management" (doctoral) - 5%. The financial distribution of the study programme "Start-up Management" (professional bachelor`s) is not presented in detail, as it was started in 2019.

VeUAS has been receiving significant financial support from Ventspils City Municipality since the establishment of the University. Ventspils City Council finances allowances for lecturers and researchers with a doctoral degree, as well as scholarships for doctoral students. In addition to the state budget funding, VeUAS actively attracts financial resources by implementing projects of international and local significance. Based on the presented funding justification 397745.52 (Appendix 2.25, self-assessment report), it can be seen that 77% of the total funding of the study field is state funding. The study process takes place in the premises in Ventspils, Inženieru Street 101 and 101a. The study process in the study direction is taking place at modern classrooms and laboratories. Ventspils city library branch is at students and faculty disposal.

To ensure the study process, 5 computer classrooms with approximately 300 computers in the university network are available. In addition, a wireless network is available in the university as well as in the student hotel. In 2015, VeUAS joined the Latvian academic network with a 10 Gbps band. Software for research work, including Matlab network licenses for employees and computer classes, SPSS and others are available. Computers in computer classrooms and staff are changed so that their age does not exceed 5 years. In the university data center, all servers are virtualized and located in a cluster that works with ProxMox. Open source products are basically chosen for service solutions. VeUAS has introduced the open source e-learning system "Moodle", which is currently widely used by other universities. VeUAS uses "Google Apps for Education" as an e-mail system. Since 2012, VeUAS joined the Information System of Higher Education Institutions of Latvia, which includes a part of the functionality of the Information System of the University of Latvia.

Students and lecturers use the services of VeUAS and Ventspils City Library to ensure the study process. The library of Ventspils University College is located on two floors with a department of study literature, periodicals and also fiction. The library of the VeUAS has a collection of books, and audiovisual materials. The following printed publications are subscribed for to ensure the study

direction: "Bilance", "Dienas Bizness", "IR", "Kapitāls", "Bloomberg Businessweek"; "Harvard Business Review USA"; "The Economist". The stocks are replenished every year depending on the faculty budget. The ordering procedure is coordinated by the dean at the request of the lecturers and with the permission of the rector. The experts discovered that some books assigned for study courses have been published at the end of the last century and the beginning of this century. Newer books are placed on a stand called "News", but they are in limited quantity, and the latest one was published in 2018.

The recruitment and election of teaching staff to academic positions is regulated by the "Regulations on Elections to Academic Positions VeUAS" (self-assessment Appendix 2.4.). The competition for the vacant positions of leading researchers, researchers and scientific assistants is announced in the newspaper "Latvijas Vēstnesis". In an interview with the teaching staff of VeUAS, it was clarified that in some cases the regulations are not observed.

The collegial institution organizes an open lecture, lesson or presentation of the results of the current scientific activity of the applicant for the academic position, in which at least two experts appointed by the collegial institution participate, it is recorded by the secretaries of the respective collegial institutions.

The professional development of the academic staff includes both the acquisition of appropriate professional development programmes and the exchange of experience and participation in conferences and seminars, which is confirmed by the appropriate documents.

The academic staff is entitled to paid academic leave for six calendar months outside their workplace every six years in accordance with the regulations on the procedure for granting academic leave to VeUAS lecturers for scientific research or scientific work outside their workplace.

The procedure for evaluating and listing the professional development of VeUAS elected lecturers in accordance with the professional qualification required for a higher education teacher is determined by the "Regulations on Pedagogical Professional Development of VeUAS Lecturers and its Registration", developed in accordance with LR MK regulations No. 662 "Regulations on the Education and Professional Qualifications Necessary for Teachers and the Procedure for Improving the Professional Competence of Teachers".

In the 2014/2015 academic year, the funding for ERASMUS + staff mobilities was significantly reduced at VeA, therefore a significant decrease in the number of mobilities in general was observed. The increase in funding was received only in 2018/2019 academic year, when there is also an increase in staff learning mobility. Assessing the mobility of teachers, it must be concluded that their number is small, which can be explained by the sufficiently large workload also in administrative work (self-assessment Appendix 2.7).

Some study programs have a high share of visiting professors from other higher education institutions in Latvia.

Support for students in the study process is mainly provided by the study administration specialist-clerk of the faculty, which includes the provision of information, the course of events related to the study process and record keeping. In certain issues, students can turn to the specialists of the Study Department, the director of the study programme, the dean of the faculty.

Foreign students are supported by specialists in foreign relations issues.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

VeUAS financing comes from three main sources: 1. the state budget funds, 2. local government budget funds and 3. income from tuition fees. In order to increase the financial independence the institution should increase the proportion of non-state and local government funds. The infrastructure for studies is well developed. Due to the increased demand for on-line teaching VeUAS should continue the development of the IT infrastructure. There are few deficiencies regarding

attraction and election of teaching staff and available materials in the library, which should be overlooked and improved.

Strengths:

1. The attraction of VeUAS technical support and financial resources in the implementation of international and local projects can be mentioned as positive. As a result, several auditoriums (5) are equipped with a very high level technology.
2. VeUAS library has spacious premises and is modernly equipped. Major scientific databases are available, such as EBSCO, Scopus, WoS and others.
3. The professional development of the academic staff is also to be welcomed, which includes the acquisition of appropriate professional development programs, as well as the exchange of experience and participation in conferences and seminars, which is confirmed by the certificates.

Weaknesses:

1. The attraction and election of teaching staff to academic positions is regulated by the "Regulations for the Election of Academic Positions at VeUAS", which, according to observations during the site visit, are not always observed.
2. Some study programs have insufficient local academic resources, visiting professors from other higher education institutions in Latvia are attracted to fill the gap.
3. As 77% of the study field is made up of state funding, which is considered risky and unsustainable, taking into account that the state budget funding is shrinking year by year.
4. Book collections are more available in English. The books available in the library in Latvian in the field of economics and management are outdated and just partly correspond to the current needs.

4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

Scientific research activities are performed according to the goals defined in the 2016-2020 VeA Development strategy and seven Research directions of the Faculty of Economics and Management. Academic staff is involved in all research directions, which are relevant to implementation of the respective study programmes. Factually, research interests and fields, covered by the faculty staff, is wider than mentioned in seven research directions (Appendix 2.8. Publications, conferences, projects). Therefore, Kurzeme region, Ventspils municipality and relevant businesses could expect some prioritization of research directions, based on local interests. It seems, that topics for doctoral theses approved by Programme council, is somewhat compromise between internationalization of research, approved research directions, interests of involved partner institutions, projects and degree candidates (for example, topic "Cutting-edge strategic decision-making for ensuring sustainability in the Northern European aviation sector").

Advanced students are involved in research projects together with faculty (for example, prof. K.Kreslins and student L.Jansone participated in the National research programme EKOSOC and the thesis was supervised and prepared based on research results). In most cases research results are incorporated in the study courses, which not always is reflected in the respective updated course descriptions.

Number of scientific publications and participation in international conferences during 2013-2018 has increased from 6 and 3 till 24 and 18 respectively. Funding for internal, national and international research projects, defended doctoral theses, 6 months academic leaves, expert status granted by Latvian Science Council are among incentives to attract staff involvement in scientific

research. At the same time high workload in the study process is mentioned as one obstacle to widen staff involvement in scientific research. The research activity should be increased, especially by publishing more in leading international journals. The scientific visibility is very low. The last conference which was organized by the institution dates back to 2017.

According to the Regulation “Promoting Research Activities at VeUAS” internal projects’ applicants have to include in the research project at least one Master or Doctoral student. Students should be involved in national and international projects as well.

Regarding innovations it is important to mention new Bachelor’s degree study programme “Start-up Management” was designed and received the license in August 2019. Excellent external infrastructure and business experience environment is created and available for students - Ventspils High Technology Park (VHTP), VHTP Business Incubator, Technology Transfer Centre of Kurzeme, VeA International Radio Astronomy centre. Good relations and support from Ventspils municipality is appreciated.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Despite that the number of scientific publications and participation in international conferences during 2013-2018 has increased from 6 and 3 till 24 and 18 respectively, the international scientific visibility is still very low. The students’ involvement in scientific research projects is progressing. The strong local embeddedness of the institution and the alumni support can help to increase the number of applied research projects regionally.

Strengths:

1. VeUAS has institutional regulations and bonuses for involvement of academic staff and students in scientific research.
2. Excellent external infrastructure and business experience environment is created and available for students - Ventspils High Technology Park (VHTP), VHTP Business Incubator, Technology Transfer Centre of Kurzeme, VeUAS International Radio Astronomy Centre.
3. Good relations and support from Ventspils municipality is appreciated.

Weaknesses:

1. High workload in the study process hinders staff involvement in scientific research.
2. Incorporation of research results in the respective updated course descriptions are not easily noticeable.

5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

The analysis covers the following assessment criteria: level of co-operations and partners, procedures of internationalisation, internships, traineeships, joint programmes, international cooperations.

Level of cooperation with regional partners is high and well established. VeUAS has strong local, regional connections, mainly with the Municipality and the local business actors. These partners provide financial support when needed, some of them offer scholarships. They are also active in the School’s Advisory Board. More than half of the graduates remain in the region, which shows that the institution plays an important role in regional development. The Faculty’s strong regional

embeddedness could be a long term asset for future developments e.g. if the institution would like to launch a new programme. The alumni contribute mainly on individual bases, the Alumni Association is not active in supporting the cooperation with the industrial partners. Alumni is very enthusiastic, so FEM should build on this opportunity.

Experts didn't have a chance to get familiar with essential active academic partnerships between FEM and other Latvian higher education institutions in place during the evaluation period. The cooperation agreement with RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance (BA) regarding carrying out the joint PhD programme was discontinued around 2015-2016 already. According to the oral information obtained during the visit, a new agreement was signed between RISEBA, BA and VeUAS in 2017. However, that agreement is rather a one-way agreement ensuring VeUAS students' possibilities to benefit from RISEBA and BA. The official (signed) version of this agreement is not available in the accreditation document package.

In 2019, a new partnership with Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViUAS) was established to develop a new joint doctoral study programme "Economics and Business". This partnership might serve as a new basis for continuation of the doctoral programme.

It is indicated that "the Appendix contains a list of different types of cooperation agreements with other institutions" (p 41. SER), however, no information about these agreements was found either in the report or on the website www.venta.lv.

The international partners are carefully selected, but their precise number is unclear. On the website the partner list is shorter than experts would expect based on the students' feedback on their semester abroad. Most of the partners come from the Baltic States or from the former Soviet Union, but there are few overseas partners as well. They have ERASMUS+ agreements with 56 schools in 17 countries. The end date of the majority of all those agreements is 2020 or 2021 (self-assessment report Appendix 2-9). FEM should update the international partner list on the website.

The incoming number of foreign students is low (the highest was 24 in 2014/15). They came mainly from Uzbekistan. The outgoing students' number is 18% higher. This imbalance is not sustainable in the long run. 8-9 faculty members used to apply each year for foreign exchange opportunities. The institution is quite actively applying for international funds, they have several international projects, e.g. Horizon 2020. These projects can improve the faculty members' international experiences.

In order to intensify the international efforts the institution is using international portals to promote their programmes and attract foreign students. VeUAS has two sessions per year when they promote their international partners and try to convince their students to apply for mobility opportunities, semester or internship abroad. Experts could meet some of the degree seeking international students who were enthusiastic but not fully satisfied. They complained about the English proficiency of the local professors and lecturers. FEM should improve treatment of (international) students as customers. The institution is not too successful in attracting foreign faculty and foreign students. The number of foreign teaching staff is not presented in Appendix 2-5. There was no incoming staff mobility at FEM during the past three academic years (since 2016) according to Appendix 2-7. VeUAS (FEM) is a member of certain international networks like CEEMAN or Baltic Sea Network. The institution should revise its recruitment policy and should use these networks more intensively. Students are well prepared for a semester abroad. The Business English course can also prepare for an international career – students were very satisfied with that course.

Traineeship is easily available thanks to the great industrial connections. Students also can apply for internships abroad. Employers are very satisfied with the graduates and highly value, when they have international experience.

The institution has a very successful joint programme with Krems. This is the flagship programme of VeUAS. Graduates and employers were very satisfied with this programme. The institution runs the programme, however, there are almost no local teaching staff involved in the programme, they come from Austria and Riga. It is advised to revise the contribution of the local academic staff within the programme. It is highly advised to rethink the role of the KREMS programme from faculty development point of view as well. More local faculty members should be involved in teaching. This programme showed the huge gap between the Austrian and local professors according to the students' opinion. Graduates of this programme have great career opportunities and all were very satisfied with the programme. The programme is run in a module system because of the professors availability. All local professors are tested from a language proficiency point of view. Based on that FEM should offer more courses taught in English, probably as electives.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

Based on the analysis above, experts can conclude that the institution in general meets most of the criteria related to cooperation and internationalisation. FEM has a strong embeddedness in the local ecosystem and strongly related to the industrial and governing partners including professional associations. However, there is still room for improvements e.g. in the field of international partner management. The scope of the international partner portfolio is following traditional patterns (partners come mainly from the neighbouring countries or they were traditionally related to the School).

Strengths:

1. Local partnerships are very successful, mainly with the municipality, professional associations and local business firms.
2. VeUAS has an intent to become more active internationally.
3. CEEMAN and the Baltic Sea Network provide the most important opportunities, frameworks for international cooperations.
4. Students and employers are interested to spend a semester or internship abroad.
5. The flagship programme with KREMS is quite popular, graduates are satisfied with the programme in general. Students are very satisfied with the Austrian professors.
6. International mobility is slightly increasing.
7. The Business English course is highly valued by the students.
8. VeUAS is quite successful in application for EU funds.

Weaknesses:

1. The international partners' list on the English website is misleading as it does not contain all the international partners.
2. The end date of the majority of ERASMUS+ agreements is 2020 or 2021.
3. The KREMS flagship program is "managed but not taught" by local faculty members which is a high risk and a lost potential.
4. The English proficiency of the teaching staff in some instances is questionable in the English programmes (according to the feedback from the students).
5. Few English courses as electives.
6. International students are not always satisfied with the communication and the service.

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

Analysis

Recommendations of experts given in the previous accreditation of study field and in the framework of evaluation of changes in licensed study programmes or study programmes corresponding to the study direction or procedure of inclusion of the study programme in the study direction accreditation page during the reference period can be summarized in following points:

1. "The institution should consider a better correlation between teaching process and scientific research."

Results of scientific research are included and delivered in the study courses of all levels. Advanced students are involved in research projects together with faculty. Research results are included in delivered study courses, which not always is reflected in the respective updated course descriptions. Term papers, Bachelor and Master theses led by lecturers are mostly connected with lecturers' research field. Recommendation can be considered partially completed and must be provided regularly.

2. Practical use of databases is weak.

VeUAS has formalized requirements into guidelines for making, formatting and defending masters, bachelors and term papers. In general students are encouraged to use the latest scientific articles. Study courses in a limited way try to incorporate usage into the study process. There is still room for improvement. Recommendation can be considered completed and must be provided regularly and in a more in-depth manner.

3. Academic staff need more modern teaching methods and knowledge.

VeUAS has provided teaching staff with seminars and training courses. In general teaching staff tries to incorporate more modern teaching methods and overall curricula is being updated. In some courses there is a lack of usage of new digital learning tools and other teaching methods that could be beneficial for its topics, for example, case studies, group works etc. Institution should continuously improve upon its methodological and pedagogical instrumentarium. On the other side, there are courses that are well developed and can be considered modern and efficient. Recommendation can be considered partially completed and must be provided regularly and in a more in-depth manner.

4. Feedback from students should be improved. Students are not sufficiently informed about the survey results.

Surveys are conducted at the beginning of each semester with intention to collect feedback regarding last semester. Results are given to the Student's Council. There are indications that students in some cases would prefer some informal or formal feedback activities during the study process in semester, as well. Overall qualitative student involvement in feedback activities could be increased - institution should properly convey the importance of feedback. There is still room for improvement. Recommendation in general can be considered completed and must be provided regularly and in a more in-depth manner.

5. More contact with foreign institutions, with distance learning, is needed.

Cooperation with foreign higher education establishments have improved. Joint programme with Austrian partners are universally well received. Institution is rapidly developing its distance learning capabilities. Recommendation can be considered completed and must be provided regularly

6. There are no joint study programmes.

Institution has a Master's level joint programme. Recommendation can be considered fully completed.

7. The English language skills of the academic staff are not sufficient for preparation and implementation of a study programme in the corresponding language. There are no special courses, seminars and other activities, including English courses, for the academic staff teaching foreign students.

English skills of existing personnel have been improved. Institution is providing language improvement opportunities to staff. Yet there are indications that in some cases english language skills are insufficient and can be improved further. English language proficiency is self- declared by

employees. There is no external evaluation of language proficiency introduced. Recommendation can be considered partially completed.

8. Research should be deeper – more experts of the Latvia Council of Science, more monographs, more international publications particularly in internationally cited editions.

Relevant research metrics - articles, monographs and LCS expert number has increased. There are indications that workload regarding the study process is limiting the potential for more scientific achievement. There is still room for improvement. Recommendation in general can be considered completed and must be provided regularly and in a more in-depth manner.

9. Insufficient presence of guest lecturers from abroad in the implementation of the study programme.

Guest lecturers are a major part of the joint programme with KREMS. Therefore it can be considered as a major improvement on overall internationalisation. FEM has seen an increase in incoming guest lectures - for example, in 2014/2015 there were no guest lecturers in faculty. On the other hand, guest lecturers in faculty as a whole (apart from KREMS program) have not seen significant statistical increase. For example - the last 4 academic years have respectively 9, 6, 8 and 9 instances of incoming guest lecturers. Recommendation in general can be considered completed.

Recommendations for the the professional Bachelor's study programme "Start-up Management" were made:

10. Improve names and contents of study courses until the end of accreditation period.

Although topicality of study course contents is reviewed by the lecturer before the beginning of each semester, there are indications that published topics of research results by academic staff not always are included and reflected in the respective updated course descriptions. Recommendation can be considered partially completed.

11. Make a strategy to attract foreign students, to provide a sustainable number of students in each study programme

VeUAS has international ambition and is implementing some relevant marketing activities. This goal can be seen in the document on 2016-2020 Strategy. On-site visits and meetings confirmed that the institution is continuously considering marketing activities within its capacity in order to attract foreign students. At the same time there is still potential to increase the sustainable number of international student body. Recommendation in general can be considered completed and must be provided regularly.

12. Improve and update quality management model of VeUAS, by developing new compliant documentation, which would comply with internationally recognized quality management systems

VeUAS has received funding in order to renew the internal quality management system. There are general procedures in place yet every day implementation is lacking. For example, a programme director position is not empowered enough to successfully make judgements on implementation (and therefore quality) of the program as whole. There are still areas that are not transparent enough. For more in-depth analysis please refer to chapter "Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System" of report. Recommendation can be considered partially completed.

13. Provide further training to the programme director and his/her deputy in the field of study programme management

VeUAS claims that it has provided opportunities for seminar participation. Yet experts can still identify that programme directors' position is weak and should be empowered to make decisions regarding study programmes in question. Recommendation can be considered completed.

14. Promote involvement of academic staff in research work to achieve VeUAS goals in terms of publishing results of scientific research

VeUAS notes that lecturers mainly consist of already established professionals and research oriented lecturers have been involved in the study process. Nevertheless, institutions should provide with more support (for example, editorial, mentoring, translation etc.) services and other incentives for

its staff in order to promote greater involvement in research work. Recommendation can be considered partially completed.

15. Involve highly qualified academic staff from other European Union countries in the teaching of the courses.

It is planned that during later stages of the programme - third academic year - institution will establish cooperation with the comparable study programme from Estonia and Finland. Recommendation can be considered still in the completion stage.

Recommendations for the professional Master's study programme "Business Administration" are made also were made:

16. By the next academic year, eliminate the fragmentation of study courses in the fields of research work, creative work, design work and management, and develop study courses that deal with business management issues in an integrated way.

Institution claims that the recommendation is in process of completion, therefore recommendation can be considered still in the completion stage.

16. Until the next academic year, to supplement the study programme contents with topical business activity related legal questions

Study courses are improved. For example, there is a study course "Labour law and work protection" and in other courses topics on law are included. Recommendation can be considered completed.

Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses

The institution takes into account recommendations made by previous assessment and licensing procedures. Out of 17 recommendations, fully completed can be considered 8, while 2 are still ongoing. In general it seems that institutions treat recommendations rather formally than substantially. Here are completed summary of previous recommendations in various degrees of completion:

Recommendations that can be considered completed:

5. More contact with foreign institutions, with distance learning, is needed.

6. There are no joint study programmes.

9. Insufficient presence of guest lecturers from abroad in the implementation of the study programme.

13. Provide further training to the programme director and his/her deputy in the field of study programme management

17. Until the next academic year, to supplement the study programme contents with topical business activity related legal questions

Recommendations that can be considered completed, yet it demands ongoing attention and improvement in order to stay compliant:

2. Practical use of databases is weak.

4. Feedback from students should be improved. Students are not sufficiently informed about the survey results.

8. Research should be deeper – more experts of the Latvia Council of Science, more monographs, more international publications particularly in internationally cited editions.

11. Make a strategy to attract foreign students, to provide a sustainable number of students in each study programme

Recommendations that are partially fulfilled and demands action:

- 1.The institution should consider a better correlation between teaching process and scientific research.
- 3.Academic staff need more modern teaching methods and knowledge.
- 7.The English language skills of the academic staff are not sufficient for preparation and implementation of a study programme in the corresponding language. There are no special courses, seminars and other activities, including English courses, for the academic staff teaching foreign students.
10. Improve names and contents of study courses until the end of accreditation period.
12. Improve and update quality management model of VeUAS, by developing new compliant documentation, which would comply with internationally recognized quality management systems
- 14.Promote involvement of academic staff in research work to achieve VeUAS goals in terms of publishing results of scientific research

In conclusion:

Strengths

1. Institution has made considerable progress with internationalisation.

Weaknesses

1. English language proficiency of staff can still be improved.
2. Institution has weak structures in place for promotion and support of research activities of its staff.
3. Overall research output and activities are still at relatively low levels.

7. Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Although VeUAS have a quality policy and quality assurance system in place, there are shortcomings that need to be addressed, for example, the functioning of a mechanism for the development and internal approval of the study programmes, as well as the supervision of their performance and periodic inspection must be improved, Internal regulations and mechanisms for recruitment and election of teaching staff to academic positions are in place, but it is important to ensure that VeUAS is following regulations.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: A quality assurance policy (approved by the VeUAS Senate) is in place in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: A mechanism for the development and internal approval of the study programmes, as well as the supervision of their performance and periodic inspection thereof has been developed. However, the functioning of the system must be improved. The inconsistencies in the study programmes have been identified.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Assessment of students' progress considers the criteria for and method of assessment and grading, where possible. That said, a common feature of the study direction's programmes is the lack of details on the assessment criteria (the structure is always present but not the exact criteria that would allow evaluating whether the learning outcomes set are achieved).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Internal regulations and mechanisms for recruitment and election of teaching staff to academic positions are in place. However in some cases the regulations are not observed. The procedures for assuring the work quality are developed.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: A lot of data regarding the achievement of students, employment, satisfaction with studies are collected and analysed. The performance of the institution is monitored, as well.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Quality assurance policy, procedures for design and approval of the study programmes, and information management are all logical parts of the internal quality assurance system of VeUAS. Having analysed the available information, the experts' team is not entirely convinced that the quality assurance system operates as a unified framework and that it always ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Level of cooperation with regional partners is high and well established. The university has strong local, regional connections, mainly with the Municipality and the local business actors. VeUAS has a long list of Erasmus + agreements. All the agreements must be updated as they are expiring in 2020/2021. Information about the essential active academic partnerships between VeUAS (FEM) and other Latvian higher education institutions is not available.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Despite that the number of scientific publications and participation in international conferences during 2013-2018 has increased, the international scientific visibility is still very low.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The institution in general tries to fulfill recommendations. Although many recommendations are still partially completed and require further attention in order to fulfill them at an acceptable level. English languages skills of staff and overall research output must be improved.

8. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

Institutional Strategy should be published in English and should be available on the website.
Ensure fair and transparent selection of academic staff.
VeUAS must revise its organogram: more precise positioning and clarification of certain functions (marketing, recruitment, alumni management, registrars office, international relations) could improve the quality of these functions, services.
VeUAS must revise the course syllabi approval process and should make all course syllabi available on-line.
VeUAS should check the role of Coursera courses in the curriculum and must revise the Coursera points proportion in the final grades. Now it is varying between 20-30% for some study courses in study programme "Start-up Management". (Important issue related to this is the usage of external courses in the study process and evaluation of the study results achieved. The Coursera courses are not explicitly highlighted in the accreditation materials; however, they were clearly identified during the discussions with students and faculty. VeUAS must re-consider how suitable is integration of the external courses into the study course delivered by VeUAS. VeUAS has no possibility to control the content and the quality of the means of assessment of the external courses at all.
FEM should empower the programme directors by authorizing them to make decisions and also by providing for them the necessary financial support
The institution should immediately update its international partner list on the website. The current list does not show all the partners based on the information from the students when they mentioned their study abroad destinations.
Prepare a list of cooperation agreements with other institutions.
Individuals responsible for quality assurance policy should clarify the roles of the quality assurance governing bodies (councils, senate) in how they complement one another.
The quality assurance policy should stipulate how students and other stakeholders are involved in the study programme design.
Each programme director should double-check how the programme aims, tasks, learning outcomes and assessment methods are written out - ensuring the necessary alignment and clarity of the students' learning assessment criteria.

Long-term recommendations

In the strategy of the study field, to envisage actions for the reduction of the part of the state budget, ensuring sustainable development of the study field.

To supplement the library collections with the latest literature in the field of economics both in English, but mainly in Latvian.
Doctoral Thesis Works should also be available in the Library, even if they were defended at other institutions.
Institutional Strategy should be published in English and should be available on the website.
FEM should define the uniqueness of the institution. Heads Departments and Programme Directors should agree on a unique selling point.
FEM should define a new recruitment policy because of the declining number of the newly enrolled students. They should pay particular attention to the international students' recruitment.
FEM should have initiated a more active alumni management built on the alumni association which is currently not known among the graduates.
The research activity should be increased, especially by publishing more in leading international journals.
VeUAS should revise its programme portfolio and consider closing its "micro programmes" attracting very few students and creating losses
VeUAS should attract more foreign teaching staff by putting together an internationally acceptable offer for potential candidates.
VeUAS should increase the English language proficiency of its lecturers who teach in English.
The institution (e.g. Vice-Rector for Studies) should introduce plagiarism checks for all the written coursework, beyond the term papers and theses.
Respective programme directors should preferably set out clear requirements and assessment criteria of Bachelor and Master theses (at the moment this information is not included into the self-evaluation report and course descriptions attached to it).
All the managers in place responsible for the study direction design and implementation should revise the internal quality assurance system, enabling more efficient use of the student, graduate and employer feedback collected; special attention should be devoted to the voices of the students currently studying in all the Bachelor programmes except Start-up Management.

II. "Business Management" ASSESSMENT

II. "Business Management" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

The professional Bachelor programme under assessment is entitled "Business Management" (42345). It is a full-time four-year study programme equivalent to 160 credit points. The programme is delivered in Latvian. A professional Bachelor's degree in Business Administration (profesionālā bakalaura grāds biznesa vadībā) as well as an Enterprise Manager's qualification (uzņēmuma vadītāja kvalifikācija) is awarded to the graduates.

The programme is designed and implemented according to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 512 "Regulations on the State Standard on Second Level Professional Higher

Education". The conformity assessment of the study programme with the relevant education standard is provided in Appendix 4.2 of the Self-assessment report (SAR).

To enter the programme, applicants must have their general secondary education or vocational secondary education (qualification level 3 according to the Law on Vocational Education of the Republic of Latvia, Section 5, Paragraph 3). The compulsory state exams (mathematics, English, Latvian) must be completed. No entrance test or minimum grade of the compulsory state exams is required.

The goal of the study program is to 'ensure higher education in business management, train specialists and professionals competitive in the Latvian and international labour market, who, in the changing socioeconomic conditions, are able to continue self-education, as well as independently start a company with the right business model.'

Compliance of the study programme with the occupational standard is illustrated in the Appendix 4.3. Knowledge required to perform the main professional tasks and the corresponding study courses to be studied is presented there.

The ten main outcomes of the study programme in the form of knowledge, skills and competence are presented in the self-evaluation report. Skills and competences to be acquired correspond to the sixth level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework and the profession's "Enterprise Manager" standard (fifth level of professional qualification), as well as the "Regulations on the National Standard of Second Level Vocational Education".

The programme aim, degree, qualification, aims, objectives, and learning outcomes are seemingly interrelated.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The programme aim, degree, qualification, aims, objectives, and learning outcomes are seemingly interrelated.

Strengths

1. The professional bachelor programme corresponds to the major regulatory documents.
2. Admission rules are appropriate for achieving study goals.

Weaknesses

1. No entrance test or minimum grade of the compulsory state exams is defined.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

Delivery of study courses is organized in the form of lectures and seminars. A detailed description has been developed for each study course, which defines the aim of the study course, provides the study course study results, describes the organization of students' independent work and evaluation of study results, determines the study course content and study course calendar, as well as relevant literature.

The organization of study programs is regulated by the "Regulations on Study Procedures at VeUAS" and the "Regulations of the Study Program Council of VeUAS" approved by the Senate of VeUAS. The organization and management of the study program is performed by the director of the study program according to the "Regulations on the study program directors at VeUAS".

The practical implementation of the study programme is supervised by the dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management, as well as the director of the program. Technical support and daily work with students is performed by the study administration specialist-clerk of the faculty. The Vice-

Rector for Studies and the Head of the Department of Studies are also involved in the supervision and implementation of the study process by creating the general framework of the study process.

The Bachelor's study program "Business Management" is implemented as a full-time 4 year (8 study semesters) study program, ensuring acquisition of 160 credit points. In accordance with the state legislation and the regulatory enactments of VeUAS, this means that students devote 40 academic hours to acquire one credit point, of which 40% are contact hours, but the rest is organized as independent work. Contact hours are delivered in the form of theoretical lectures, seminars, laboratory work, practical work and consultations in accordance with the schedule of classes for each semester.

The basic principles and procedures for assessing students' knowledge are determined by the "Regulations on knowledge evaluation at VeUAS" in accordance with the "Regulations on the second level professional higher education standard" (Regulations No. 512 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia of 26.08.2014). Teaching staff chooses teaching and assessment methods based on the goals of the study program and study courses. Assessment of study results is documented according to VeUAS regulations. Students take the oral or written examinations (exam or test) .

In some study courses, the teaching staff has developed an examination system using the results of intermediate examinations. The teaching staff informs the students about the form and requirements of the examination of the respective study course during the first two classes.

The state examination, a part of which is the elaboration and defense of the bachelor's thesis, is evaluated by the state examination commission. Composition of the commission for the respective academic year is approved by the VeUAS State examination commission. The Commission shall act in accordance with Regulations.

Comparing the content of the study course descriptions and the study program plan (Appendix 4.5), certain dissonance with the aim of the professional study program have been identified. The study program is too much focused to acquiring the academic knowledge rather than to meeting the professional needs of the respective field. In the professional standard of the Company manager approved on September 18, 2019, two of the four tasks of the company manager are indicated: planning and forecasting of the company's activities and organization of the company's activities and processes. Analyzing the study program plan and study course descriptions, it was identified that obtaining such professional knowledge and competencies as risk management, quality management and sales process organization are missing.

After getting acquainted with the study programme plan (Appendix 4.5.), some imbalance was identified. The main share - 22CP out of 36 CP devoted to the branch (professional field) basic theoretical courses and information technology courses are allocated for mathematics studies, (mathematics, financial mathematics, statistics, econometrics). 14 CP of all study courses of the study program are devoted to English language studies. It was found that some tasks required by the professional standard, such as risk management, quality management, presentation skills, are included in the study courses very superficially, but the organization of sales work is not included at all .

The joint/ mixed specialization in Marketing and Logistics is fairly questionable. Both of those specialization directions are deep enough to be individual.. In addition, it is hard to imagine how special knowledge and competences in Marketing can be obtained by studying just 4CP study course Marketing Management 4 out of 12 CP allocated to the specialization.

At the end of each semester, students in the LAIS system must fill in an electronic anonymous questionnaire about the study courses acquired in the respective semester in order to evaluate the study course and the lecturer's work in general. A student survey is conducted to find out students' attitudes towards the organization and quality of the study process. Based on the results of the

survey, those responsible for the implementation of the study programme take measures to improve the quality of studies. In surveys, students sometimes state that they want a more compact lecture plan, without breaks. . In the fall semester of the academic year 2018/2019, 42 out of 108 students of the professional bachelor's study programme Business Management (first, second and third year) participated in the education quality survey. The average grade in the 7-point system is over 5 points. Given that less than half of the students took part in the survey, it is difficult to assess reliability of the survey results.

In order to find out the graduates' opinion about the study programme and the study courses the graduates of the study programme are asked to fill in a questionnaire each year before graduation. VeUAS also conducts a survey of employers about graduates. Employers' survey data show that graduates of the professional bachelor's study programme "Business Management" are competitive in the labor market. Graduates have good theoretical knowledge.

VeUAS has signed ERASMUS + cooperation agreements with other higher education institutions for student exchange. The recognition of courses acquired within the study mobility of students of the study programme is regulated by the "Regulations on the recognition of courses acquired within the study mobility of the ERASMUS + programme in the field of higher education at VeUAS".

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions

Each study course of the study program has a course description, which determines the aim of the study course and the study results to be achieved. The description of the study course indicates the type of organization of independent work and evaluation of study results, determines the content of the study course and the study calendar plan, as well as the recommended literature. In general, the study program is not sufficiently balanced. Too much emphasis is placed on academically oriented study courses. Professional specialization study courses do not provide all the knowledge required for the current professional standard, such as sales system development, quality management and risk management. On the other hand, the combined specialization of marketing and logistics does not give confidence that the necessary competencies can be acquired.

Strengths

1. Each study course of the study program has a course description, which determines the aim of the study course, ensuring the achievable study results.
2. The description of the study course indicates the type of organization of independent work and evaluation of study results, determines the content of the study course and the study calendar plan, as well as the recommended literature.
3. VeUAS has signed ERASMUS + cooperation agreements with other higher education institutions for student exchange.

Weaknesses

1. The combined specialization in Marketing and Logistics doesn't provide confidence that the necessary competences in both specialization directions can be acquired, as only 12 CP are allocated for specialization.
2. In general, the study programme is not balanced enough. Too much emphasis is placed on academically oriented study courses. A proportion of mathematics and English language study courses in the total number of study courses seems too high.
3. The professional specialization study courses don't provide all the knowledge required by the valid professional standard. Obtaining some skills required by the professional standard have not been taken into account in composing the study programme. Sales system development, quality management and risk management are among them. The marketing study course should include

the development of a sales system, but it cannot be found in the study course description.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

After getting acquainted with the university infrastructure and having interviewed VeUAS management, teaching staff and service staff, the following information was obtained.

To ensure the study process, 5 computer classrooms with approximately 300 computers in the university network are available. A wireless network is available in the university, as well as in the student hotel. In 2015, VeUAS joined the Latvian academic network with a 10 Gbps band. Software for research work, including Matlab network licenses for employees and computer classes, SPSS and others have been purchased and updated. Computers in computer classrooms and staff are changed so that their age does not exceed 5 years. In the university data center, all servers are virtualized and located in a cluster that works with ProxMox. Open source products are basically chosen for service solutions. VeUAS has introduced the open source e-learning system "Moodle", which is currently widely used by other universities. VeUAS uses "Google Apps for Education" as an e-mail system. Since 2012, VeUAS has implemented the Information System of Higher Education Institutions of Latvia, which includes a part of the functionality of the Information System of the University of Latvia.

Students and lecturers use the services of VeUA and Ventspils City Library to ensure the study process. The library of VeUAS is located on two floors with a department of study literature, periodicals and also fiction. The library of the institution has a collection of books ~ 26,000 volumes and ~ 750 audiovisual materials. The following printed publications the study direction: "Bilance", "Dienas Bizness", "IR", "Kapitāls", "Bloomberg Businessweek", "Harvard Business Review USA", "The Economist". The stock is replenished every year according to the budget available. The ordering procedure is coordinated by the dean at the request of the lecturers and with the permission of the rector.

Support for students in the study process is mainly provided by the study administration specialist-clerk of the faculty. His/her responsibilities include providing information on the course of events related to the study process and record keeping. In certain issues, students can turn to the specialists of the Study Department, the director of the study programme or the dean of the faculty. Foreign students are supported by specialists in foreign relations issues.

Based on financial data, the study programme in the amount of 97% is financed from the state budget. The director of the programme receives 1% of the programme budget for managing the programme (Appendix 2.25).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The study provision, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision in general comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the future.

Strengths

1. VeUAS has good technical provision. Additional financial resources are attracted by implementing international and local projects.
2. To ensure the study process, 5 computer classrooms with approximately 300 computers in VeUAS network are available.
3. A wide range of scientific databases is available online, such as EBSCO, Scopus, Science Direct, WOS and others, which ensures access to the latest scientific publications.

Weaknesses

1. Just 3% of the total budget comes from tuition. Reliance on the state financing is risky, that does not ensure sustainability of the program in the future, as state funding of management education in Latvia is shrinking.
2. The funding of the director of the study program in the amount of 1% of the total budget (EUR 2093 per year, including taxes) does not motivate enough to ensure further development of the programme.
3. A very outdated specialized literature in Latvian language was found in the library. Some books are dated by 70-ties...90-ties of the last century.
4. The stand entitled "News" has a limited number of books with the latest literature, and they are not younger than 2018.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

VeUAS is implementing certain formal measures to avoid possible negative effects on the quality of the implementation of the study programme. To ensure the quality of the field of study "Management, Administration, and Property Management", a study process evaluation and control system has been developed. This system includes regular review of the study process at meetings of the Study and Scientific Councils, the Study Programme Council, the Faculty of Economics and Management Council. However, in real life, in some cases the procedures are not followed.

29 lecturers were teaching core courses at the Bachelor's study programme "Business Management" in the academic year 2018/2019. Of these, 16 (55%) are elected academic personnel of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and 13 (45%) are guest lecturers. Of all academic personnel at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences who are involved in the implementation of the study programme, 11 (69%) have a doctoral degree and 5 (31%) hold a Master's degree. Of the 29 lecturers teaching at the study programme, 13 (45% of the total) hold doctoral degrees.

The academic personnel involved in the implementation of the study programme are specialists in their field in Latvia, as evidenced by publications and scientific monographs.

Recruitment and election of teaching staff to academic positions is regulated by the "Regulations for Election of Academic Positions at VeUAS". The competition for the vacant positions of leading researchers, researchers and scientific assistants is announced in the newspaper "Latvijas Vēstnesis". In an interview with the programme director, it was revealed that in some cases the rules are not followed.

The professional development of the academic staff includes the acquisition of appropriate professional development programmes, as well as the exchange of experience and participation in conferences and seminars, which is confirmed by the documents issued at the end.

The procedure for assessing and accounting for the professional development of lecturers elected by VeUAS in accordance with the professional qualification required for a higher education teacher is determined by the "Regulations for Pedagogical Professional Development of VeUAS Lecturers and its Accounting".

Analyzing the study programme plan (Appendix 4.5), it was observed that almost all study courses related to economics and mathematics, approximately 30% of all study courses are taught by only two lecturers.

It is indicated in the SER (p.166), that the Faculty of Economics and Management of VeUAS has no

departments and no professor groups since 2015. Such a situation prevents fruitful professional cooperation of the lecturers, including the coordination of study courses and assessment of the lecturers' qualifications. That was confirmed during the meeting with the faculty members, as well. Mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members which particularly contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation is lacking.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The attraction and election of teaching staff to academic positions is regulated by the "Regulations for the Election of Academic Positions at VeUAS", which, according to discussions with the management of the study program, are not always observed. Approximately 30% of all study courses are taught by only 2 lecturers, which creates an overlap in the formation of the content of study courses and the formation of diversity of opinions. After discussion with the involved lecturers of the study program, it was identified established that there are problems in mutual cooperation, which does not stimulate promote the connection of the content of the study courses with the achievement of the goals of the study program.

Strengths

1. The professional development of the academic staff, which includes the acquisition of appropriate professional development programmes, as well as the exchange of experience and participation in conferences and seminars, which is confirmed by the issued documents, is to be positively assessed.
2. The regulatory acts of the University regarding the attraction of lecturers to a specific study course correspond to good practice.
3. The academic personnel involved in the implementation of the study programme are specialists in their field in Latvia, as evidenced by publications and scientific monographs.

Weaknesses

1. The attraction and election of teaching staff to academic positions is regulated by the "Regulations for the Election of Academic Positions at VeUAS", which, after discussions with the study programme management, is not always observed.
2. About 30% of all study courses are taught by only 2 lecturers.
3. The lecturers of the study program have problems in mutual cooperation, which does not promote achievement of the goals of the study programme.

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

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Sample of attached diploma is compliant with MK. Nr. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus"

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: VeUAS has an agreement in place with Turība University to provide students with options to continue education.

- 3 3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2-19 confirms that the institution guarantees compensation for losses if necessary.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Attached resumes confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with MK. Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi"

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Sample of attached study agreement (annex 24.8) complies with MK. Nr. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi"

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Study courses and materials are prepared in accordance with requirements.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The content of the professional study programme could be better balanced. Although in general the programme complies with the major requirements of the profession standard (see Section 2 “The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof”), it was found that some competences required by the profession standard, such as risk management, quality management, presentation skills, are not covered in depth, but the organization of sales work is not covered at all.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 4.2 confirms that the programme complies with the State Education Standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2.8 confirms that staff complies with requirements.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Most of criteria 1-14 complies with requirements. However, the content of the professional study programme could be improved/ better balanced.

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The learning outcome achievement is provided by the availability of financing (state financing, projects), excellent study, work and living infrastructure, access to study materials and communication via Moodle platform, library. However a very outdated specialized literature in Latvian language was found in the library. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The composition of faculty complies with the regulatory requirements. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The formal requirements R6 have been partially met, R8 have been met.

Evaluation of the study programme "Business Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Management"

Short-term recommendations

Reconsider feasibility of the combined specialization in Marketing and Logistics.

Reconsider rationality of the high share of Mathematics and English language studies. Study course descriptions should be reviewed, the identified inconsistencies should be eliminated.

Literature list for some courses should be carefully revised, the outdated literature should be replaced, and the extensive list of literature should be adjusted to the real reading capability of students.

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members should be strengthened to contribute to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation.

Integrate study courses into the study program, which would ensure students to acquire skills required by the relevant professional standard.

Balance the workload of some highly employed instructors of the programme.

Long-term recommendations

Gradually increase the share of non- state funded students in the financing of the study program, which will ensure the sustainable development of the study program.

Consider the possibility of increasing remuneration of the director of the study program, that would motivate director's involvement in the implementation and further development of the study program.

II. "Start-up Management" ASSESSMENT

II. "Start-up Management" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

The professional Bachelor programme under assessment is entitled 'Start-up Management' (42345). It is a full-time four-year study programme equivalent to 160 credit points. The programme is implemented in English. It was licenced under the Decree No. 2019/04-L of August, 1 2019, of the Study Quality Commission.

The programme has an ambitious aim 'to prepare competitive experts for the Latvian and international labour market with fundamental education in business management' and is an entrepreneurship education programme that is one of the cornerstone teaching areas in line with the current European agenda (see, for instance, Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan Reigniting the Entrepreneurial Spirit in Europe).

To enter the programme, applicants must have their secondary education as well as the compulsory state exams (mathematics, economics, English) completed. In addition to that, applicants go through a logics test, personality and individual values assessment in one-on-one interviews. During the meeting with students and graduates of the programme on the 17th of November 2020, it became clear that the interviews were the most memorable and useful experience for them in the admission process.

Graduates receive a professional Bachelor degree in Business Administration and a qualification of Enterprise Manager (Uzņēmuma vadītājs).

The self-evaluation report lists numerous learning outcomes that the programme sets to achieve (3 knowledge items and 29 skills items) across 22 study courses and states which abilities are targeted as 14 professional competencies when knowledge and skills learning outcomes are combined in line with the European Qualifications Framework. Correspondence of these competencies to seven overarching competence areas - from learning & information processing skills to digital technology skills - is also outlined with several overlaps, e.g. in entrepreneurial and communication capabilities development, client relation and marketing, leadership.

The programme aim, degree, qualification, aims, objectives, and learning outcomes are seemingly interrelated but there might be some input needed to make this interrelatedness clearer. For example, the term 'start-up' can have different definitions, including a very nascent venture that is in the process of foundation. In this case the qualification of Enterprise Manager would be too broad. It becomes especially questionable when the term 'start-up' does not appear a single time in the list of learning outcomes.

Another point is that as long as Business Administration is synonymous to Business Management and does correspond to the term 'uzņēmējdarbības vadība' in Latvian, there is an alignment between the degree and qualification. It might not necessarily be clear for all the international experts or applicants, hence, adding some extra information about that is likely to be helpful. Furthermore, the current list of learning outcomes -- knowledge, skills, and competencies -- looks lengthy and unstructured. A lot of items per outcome (especially, in skills and capabilities) and very little knowledge items. The issue that arises with that many items is how they are logically connected, and more importantly, how they are measured in order to ascertain they are indeed achieved.

Finally, the aim of the programme 'to prepare competitive experts...' is, as mentioned, ambitious. The levels of competitive expertise might be challenging to assess in comparison to knowledge or skills, for instance. During the visit, experts received the following answer about the students' expertise:

Of course, 'an expert' is a big word... Most of the topics are practically applied. Either they develop solutions for HEI, or an invited company etc. They are presenting results both to staff and invited parties. They explicate their steps, theory, results etc. That's how we evaluate them. If a student can answer these questions then he can be considered an expert in the topic because he does not regurgitate theory. They are writing essays on a topic, that's how they see how they think.' It would

be beneficial to include some information about evaluation mechanisms applied in relation to the level of expertise into the programme description

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The programme aim, degree, qualification, aims, objectives, and learning outcomes are seemingly interrelated but there might be some input needed to make this interrelatedness clearer.

Strengths:

1. Correspondence of the programme to the European Commission's priorities of teaching entrepreneurship in higher education.
2. Attractive title of the programme.
3. Careful selection process of study programme applications that students also appreciate.

Weaknesses:

1. There is a mismatch in the admission rules defined in the SAR and published at www.veuas.lv.
2. Absence of the explicit definition or the clarification of the term 'start-up' that would make the alignment with the received qualification 'enterprise manager' clearer.
3. The term 'start-up' mentioned nowhere in the list of learning outcomes.
4. Not quite clear alignment between the degree and qualification, especially for international experts.
5. Very long list of skills and competencies, looks unstructured or 'too much to be good'.
6. The programme aims to develop experts but what an expert is and how a novice indeed becomes the expert during the programme is not clear.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

In this section, experts will analyse the professional Bachelor study programme 'Start-up Management' course descriptions, including their content, aims and outcomes, methods, quality tracking and student mobility. The analysis is based on the self-evaluation report and the site visit to the higher education institution in mid-November 2020.

1. Description of study courses, aims, outcomes

There are 22 study courses of which five are generic (Professional English, Russian, Latvian, Communication Skills and Personal Growth/Development as an Expert) and 17 are specific to the industry (core theoretical and IT courses - Accounting, Statistics, Finance Management, etc.).

The course descriptions are quite extensive, but contain basic details such as course objectives, learning outcomes, evaluation components and weights; evaluation methods matched up against the expected learning outcomes (study results). They generally reveal interesting and relevant content that has elements of creativity and responds to the needs of the industry in current times such as dealing with uncertainty (e.g. in Platform Business Model, Developing by Experimenting).

The content of the syllabi is relevant to the course objectives and largely matches with the programme outcomes, yet in case of some outcomes it is difficult to conclude if they are covered to a sufficient extent. For example, '10. Ability to perform research with scientific value in the field of management', as there is little evidence where such skills are developed to the extent of value generation; skills and abilities related to work safety - this outcome is meant to be related to civil and environmental protection but while 'fire safety' is referred to once in 3-5 Annex with study

courses descriptions, 'work safety' is not encountered at all. '2. Ability to develop business strategy...' - business strategy as a concept is not found in any of the course learning outcomes in the aforementioned annex, only thrice in the literature sources (in the courses Business Management and Information Technologies for Entrepreneurs). Finally, the international aspect of the programme aim could have been better emphasized. So far this term is mentioned only in one study course, namely, Jurisprudence (please note - a more common term in English is 'legal sciences').

However, in all the syllabi the following points raise questions:

- a) Similar to the programme learning outcomes, each course should have SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) knowledge, skills and competencies - the specific learning outcomes. Right now the study results are just listed one after another, evaluation methods next to them in the tables are very generic and close to uninformative (an exception is the Game Theory course which provides detailed evaluation criteria).
- b) It is not clear what teaching methods correspond to achievement of the learning outcomes of each course.
- c) Basic literature list is in almost all the courses very long making it unrealistic for students to read all the items. During the visit, experts discussed this question, and gathered that specific pages of the indicated sources are communicated to students - then it is advisable to include them in the syllabi.
- d) Another question raised was about the literature, if the students can easily access all the listed items.

Even though the programme is new and none of the students has yet reached the thesis stage, having information about the thesis - what is expected, what learning outcomes are, how it is assessed, etc. is necessary. It is not in the course descriptions yet.

As a professional programme, it contains a student internship, on which 'the entire study programme is based'. The description available in the self-evaluation report states that 'the students will be able to complete an internship at a student-run digital services agency -- a cooperative society'; the internship is organised in cooperation with the leading accelerator Startup Wise Guys. It also states that the internship takes place in the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and that the students 'will be able to complete an internship at one of the companies'. Appendix 2.12 outlines the internship objectives and tasks, time and place, internship reporting and defence. Regarding the place, it adds that 'the student completes the internship at the VeUAS team developed company'. This information suggests that the internship might happen not only in the digital services agency; it does not become fully clear in the respective documents.

The internship is worth 20 credit points where one credit corresponds to 30 astronomical hours. It is a fully experiential learning based part of the programme that includes a written report that the students submit; they are also requested to attach a diary of their experiences to the main report. Depending on the nature and scope of the working tasks students perform within this internship programme, it does appear to be a valuable and necessary part of the study programme that develops a range of professional competencies.

Regarding teaching methods and assessment, the inclusion of Coursera online courses in several study courses (Information Technologies for Entrepreneurs, Technology Entrepreneurship, Basics of Economics, etc.) is resonant with the current times and could be a solution to the rapid shift towards online learning that HEIs experienced recently but there are several concerns about how this has been implemented. First of all, from the meeting with the students, it became clear that they choose

a Coursera course themselves from a list of several courses, engage in self-study of that topic, and complete a Coursera-based test which accounts for 20% or sometimes 30% of the grade. It seems that this is quite a large share of the grade, especially given that there is no information on what kind of test this is and how it is assessed.

2. Teaching and evaluation methods, student-centred learning

The programme is generally positioned as experiential, also in the rhetoric. During the meeting, experts have heard the expression 'Team Academy' principles. However, from either the meeting or the report, it is hard to gather what the ratio between theory and practice is. Some courses seem to be more experiential than others but the format of the programme is not quite comparable with the Tiimiakatemia model.

Student-centredness is the strong component of the programme which the students met during the visit confirmed.

Experts do, however, notice blind spots when it comes to theory or what contemporary theory is in new enterprise creation/management - experts would expect to see more elements of business model canvas, lean start-up related outcomes (beyond literature sources), entrepreneurship process, effectuation, bricolage, etc. During the meeting, the course representatives did not answer this question sufficiently.

Following the principle of constructive alignment in teaching (see Biggs, J. 2003 Aligning teaching for constructing learning. York, UK: The Higher Education Academy), it is not easily readable in the report how learning outcomes, methods and evaluation of achievement of the outcomes are matched together. That said, in the meeting experts got an impression that innovative experiential methods are employed, e.g. solving real-life problems of companies and individuals, earning challenges or alike (this is definitely an area of improvement for the course syllabi, in particular, those that are closely related with entrepreneurship).

Evaluation methods. In the report, 'a variety of examination methods in evaluation' is mentioned as the state standard. In practice, a lot of study courses have a rather standard set of evaluation methods - practical class discussions, individual/team projects, presentation delivery, essays, Coursera. Without knowing more about specifics of what these methods entail, it is not easy to conclude if they are enough and indeed serve the learning outcomes assessment.

3. Student, employer and graduate surveys

The programme is too new to objectively assess this component. Otherwise the information provided in the self-evaluation report and received during the visit is satisfactory. The report suggests that prior to the start of the programme, interviews were conducted with employers confirming that practically-oriented learning experience is important. Communication with employers continues during the studies. When possible, companies offer problems for students to work on within the course topics. Some employers also participate in grading theses.

During the meeting with students, they shared that after each course they submit feedback, assess internal communication, pros and cons, what can be improved. In addition to that, students have one-on-one meetings with the study director each month.

4. Student mobility opportunities

Assessment of this component is not applicable because no mobility has been in place yet.

Collaboration possibilities are being explored.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Based on the conducted analysis, the content of studies and their implementation can be described as almost compliant across the four criteria: 1) study courses, aims, outcomes; 2) teaching and evaluation methods, student-centred learning; 3) student, employer and graduate surveys; 4) student mobility opportunities. Several deficiencies identified. Some deficiencies were revealed with regard to matching the general study programme aims with the study course content, in the way the course learning outcomes are written out, lengthy lists of literature sources, etc.

Strengths:

1. The key entrepreneurship courses are student-centered (e.g. Technology Entrepreneurship, Developing by Experimenting).
2. A lot of learning seems to be experiential judging by the course design.
3. Connection with employers and their involvement into the study process.

Weaknesses:

1. Learning outcomes in most cases are not yet written out in a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) format, it is not clear how evaluation methods help assessing if the outcomes are achieved, and what role teaching methods have in this process
2. The course descriptions related to entrepreneurship, even though they are detailed, do not give enough information about what concrete theories in entrepreneurship/management students have to know as part of the knowledge component of the learning outcomes.
3. While entrepreneurial learning seems to be experiential, this is not reflected in the syllabi to a sufficient extent (information on internship is enclosed separately from the annex 3-5 with study course descriptions).
4. Rather standard set of evaluation methods and it is not always clear how exactly they serve the evaluation and grading processes.
5. Questionable share and quality of assessment of Coursera courses taken as part of the course.
6. Long list of literature - not clear what students should read while it is not realistic they can cover all the items listed.
7. BA thesis description and specifications in terms of learning outcomes and assessment are not included.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

The self-evaluation report indicates that students have access to the local library and numerous databases, such as EBSCO, Scopus, Science Direct, Web of Science. The library also has five free-access computers with internet connection for work and study processes and three computers just for VeUAS students. All the databases are available for free from each computer located in the library. Another library space is available through the City Library of Ventspils. However, it was not completely clear, also from the meeting with the students, if they can physically easily access all the literature items listed in the course descriptions.

Approximately EUR 1000 are allocated each year to supplement textbooks needed for the study direction. It is also stated that the study programme directors take care of the intellectual and material resources of the programme.

According to the extra information received from the local library, the library collection is replenished every year depending on the budget.

Criteria 3.1; the report referred to the general description of study direction. However, this description is too generic to understand in what way resources and provision, materials, etc. serve this particular study programme's goal achievement. From the meeting with students and graduates of the programme, we understood that a lot of learning happens online and an on-site library is not that often used. Experts do assume, however, that students are able to use the resources that are provided electronically and thus have access to all the necessary materials.

Information on the financial resources is available in the general section on resources and provision of the study direction. It mentions significant financial support received from Ventspils City Municipality and European Structural Funds, grants from the Latvian Council of Science, among other sources. In 2019, the programme received 6733 EUR from state budget resources and 1400 EUR from tuition fees. Costs per student were not yet calculated since the programme had been launched very recently. Therefore, it is difficult to evaluate adequacy of this component of the 3.1 criteria.

Criteria 3.2 stated as 'not applicable' in the report as it concerns only doctoral programmes.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The VeUAS resources and provision can be described as acceptable and most likely sufficient. In some respects, the general description of resources is too generic to objectively evaluate if they are enough for the learning outcomes achievement.

Strengths:

1. A variety of key electronic databases for research and exploration are outlined.
2. The on-site library seems to provide all necessary materials, if and when they are necessary/used by the students (most often online, that is, electronic resources).

Weaknesses:

1. Although acceptable, the general description of resources is too generic to assess to what extent the available resources serve the achievement of the learning outcomes and ensure high-quality study process. This might be the weakness of the documentation prepared for the evaluation procedure rather than the programme itself.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

Nine teachers are involved in teaching study courses of the programme. Seven of them are guest lecturers; two are elected (a lecturer and an assistant professor/docent).

All the teachers except one have at least a Master's degree. One teacher holds a PhD degree and teaches four out of 22 courses:

Statistics and Data Analysis,
Civil and Environmental Protection,
Sustainability and Green Thinking,
Future Leaders - Leadership).

The PhD degree holder also has several research outputs that demonstrate relatedness to the study programme content as well as pedagogy such as papers on business education excellence and innovation system. However, her influence on the study course content beyond the four courses she teaches is likely to be limited.

The teacher who holds a Bachelor degree is very actively involved in the teaching process, being responsible or partially responsible for 10 courses:

Personal Development,
Communication Skills (*),
Developing by Experimenting (*),
Innovation Week,
Information Technologies for Entrepreneurs (I, II) (*),
Sales and Customer Relations,
Project 24 (*),
Sharing Economy (*),
Platform Business Model (*),
Game Theory (*).

This teacher also runs seven out of these 10 courses on his own (marked with a *), while others are co-taught. The teacher's CV indicates extensive practical experience in entrepreneurship and start-up management yet not that much in pedagogy, and he is not an elected academic staff member.

Several teachers are invited as guest lecturers from other HEIs. A number of teachers have strong practical experience. The programme intentionally welcomes industry representatives to teach or assess BA theses.

The self-evaluation report states that 'the qualification of the teaching staff involved in the study programme corresponds to the requirements of the study programme by working in their specialty every day'. However, given the number of courses non-elected guest lecturers are responsible for, this may have implications for the academic content of the study programme. That said, guest lecturers with professional background can give a lot of valuable input into the programme's implementation.

English language proficiency level of the teachers looks adequate, corresponding to C1 and C2 levels (all above the minimum required B2).

The study programme is intended to be based on practice and the guest lecturers tend to be entrepreneurs themselves. 'Guest lecturers do not study economics and entrepreneurship, they don't study what others do and then use the results in the study process, but they are entrepreneurs themselves and transfer knowledge and skills to students, combined with theory', as stated in the report. Simultaneously, even for professional programmes that further open a way into obtaining a Master's degree, there are certain academic requirements. This implies that teaching is always related to research or the latest developments in the field. Co-teaching could be a way of ensuring that an MA or PhD degree holder is always on board of key courses.

Some sort of continuity through cooperation between the teaching staff members could be ensured regardless of the fact the programme began only in Autumn 2019. The report states 'the mutual relationship between study courses is partially described by the study course layout and information included in study course descriptions' but this is difficult for an external expert to track this mutual relationship.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Qualification of the teaching staff tends to correspond to the aims and tasks of the study programme but with few remarks. They mainly come down to the fact that one staff member with a BA degree but also a sufficient industry experience is responsible for several study courses. The pedagogical aspect of running these courses is questionable in absence of the qualified person proficient in pedagogy.

Strengths:

1. Strong presence of industry representatives and entrepreneurs that support practical orientation of the programme.
2. All teaching staff except one have MA degrees, one staff member has a PhD degree - this generally conforms with requirements.
3. Some courses have lecturers with mixed levels of academic degrees on board; an MA and a BA degree holders, an MSc and PhD degree holders complement one another.

Weaknesses:

1. Teaching staff composition might not always ensure sufficient expertise in combining practice with basic research insights/theory as well as pedagogical insights.
 - 1.1 A teaching staff member (non-elected guest lecturer) who has a BA degree despite having substantial industry experience is the only teacher responsible for seven courses, no co-teachers.
 - 1.2 Only two teachers are elected staff members. This can have implications for the pedagogical quality of the study courses as well as their academic component.
2. There is not enough information on how teaching staff cooperates to make sure study courses are sufficiently inter-related, e.g. there are no/few repetitions, there is logic in the course sequence.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Start-up Management"

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Sample of attached diploma is compliant with MK. Nr. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus"

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: VeUAS has an agreement in place with Turība University to provide students with options to continue education.

3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2-19 confirms that the institution guarantees compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Attached resumes confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with MK. Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi"

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2.21 and resumes confirms that involved teaching staff have at least B2 level of English.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Sample of attached study agreement (annex 24.8) complies with MK. Nr. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi" However, there is a very minor deficiency, the definition of the degree awarded must be adjusted.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Study courses and materials are prepared in accordance with requirements.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Programme complies with professional standard "Business manager", qualification level: PQL 5, LQF 6 (approved on the September 18, 2019)

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 3.1 confirms that programme complies with State Education Standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2.8 confirms that staff complies with requirements.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Overall assessment for R5 - compliant

Exception is Criteria No.8 which doesn't exactly comply with requirements, however that non-compliance can be considered as a misprint and can be easily corrected.

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The learning outcome achievement is provided by the availability of financing (tuition, projects), excellent study, work and living infrastructure, access to study materials and communication via Moodle platform, library. In some respects, the general description of resources is too generic to objectively evaluate if they are enough for the learning outcomes achievement. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The local and visiting academic staff comply with the regulatory requirements. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The formal requirements for R6 have been partially met, R8 have been met.

Evaluation of the study programme "Start-up Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Start-up Management"

Short-term recommendations

From the self-report, it is possible to understand though on a more subtle level that a start-up is rather an organisation/company that is innovation-focused, knowledge-intensive and uses technologies on a day-to-day basis, but it may not be a necessarily very young company in the process of foundation. The programme director should make the definition more precise by possibly adopting one of the well-known definitions like Eric Ries (an innovative company operating in conditions of extreme uncertainty) or Steve Blank offered (an organisation formed to search for a repeatable and scalable business model). Please see - <https://www.interregeurope.eu/oss/news/news-article/4539/what-a-startup-is/> (until the accreditation decision is taken).

The programme director should improve the quality of writing the learning outcomes - relating them more to the start-up context (at the moment there is no single mention of the term 'start-up' in the learning outcome, so it is only in the name). (until the accreditation decision is taken).

The different admission rules indicated in the SAR and the Admission Requirements must be aligned. (until the accreditation decision is taken).

Each study course leader on the programme should work on improving the course syllabi so that the learning outcomes are written out in the SMART format (the outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound), and the match among outcomes, teaching and evaluation is preferably clearer (until the accreditation decision is taken).

Study course leaders where this issue is in place should find a way of replacing a large share of Coursera assignments in the final course grade or make one specific (most relevant) Coursera course compulsory and outline how it is assessed in detail (until the accreditation decision is taken)..

Along the same lines of improving the syllabi, the course leaders should work on the list of literature that students have to read by giving most relevant sources that are indeed used in the teaching process; or, if everything is used, to indicate page numbers so that it is possible to assess the reading load (until the accreditation decision is taken).

Bachelor thesis requirements and assessment information is missing from the programme package - a person in charge, presumably the study programme director, should add this for evaluators to see (until the accreditation decision is taken).

A staff member in charge (e.g. the programme director or their deputy) should double check and ensure that all the literature sources listed in the syllabi are indeed available to students using electronic resources of the library or on-site (until the accreditation decision is taken).

To ensure balanced expertise in entrepreneurship and pedagogy, experts recommend connecting the teaching staff member with a Bachelor degree who is involved in implementation of several study courses with at least one teacher who holds a higher-level academic degree and is knowledgeable in pedagogy. Co-teaching is the solution for situations when one teacher has extensive industry or entrepreneurial experience and another teacher is knowledgeable in pedagogy (until the accreditation decision is taken).

Long-term recommendations

Recommendations for the improvement of the study direction (on a long-term basis) 1. Either to rephrase the aim of the programme 'Start-up Management' making it more mild, e.g. 'students developing from novices towards more expert' or 'students augmenting expertise in entrepreneurship practice', or include a section on indicative evaluation mechanisms. 2. It might be beneficial to add a terminological clarification on how business administration relates to business management and whether it is the same as 'uzņēmējdarbības vadība'. 3. Study course leaders in entrepreneurship-related courses of the programme should work on the syllabi vocabulary, because it should be clear what theories or main theoretical concepts students have knowledge about, and what parts of theory they apply. 4. It is also recommended to specify the share between theory and practice, and explain how student-centeredness expresses in the teaching methodology. 5. Study course leaders should also provide more details on how the evaluation methods listed in syllabi serve the purpose of assessing the learning outcomes achievement (following the principles of constructive alignment). 6. The theoretical aspect of sharing practical knowledge by practitioners needs to be justified by the link to research; in terms of teaching staff, the programme director should make sure that the industry representatives are always teamed up with the staff member proficient in pedagogy.

II. "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

II. "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

The full-time academic bachelor's study programme "Business Administration" has been offered in English at the VeUAS since 2014. The part time programme version in Latvian has been designed, as well, but no students have been admitted during the evaluation period.

The title of the study program in Latvian language is "Vadībzinātne", which doesn't correspond to the English version.

The title of the degree awarded is a "Bachelor's degree of Business Administration in Social Sciences". That differs from the title of the degree in Latvian language: "Sociālo zinātņu bakalaura grāds vadībā un administrēšanā". Thus, the title of the study programme and the degree awarded in Latvian and English languages are not aligned. The old sample diploma presented in the attachment has even different title of the degree awarded: "Sociālo zinātņu grāds vadībzinātnē" or "Bachelor of Social Sciences in Management". Unfortunately no clarification of changes in the title of the program or degree awarded is provided in the appropriate section of the Self Assessment Report of the study

programme (SAR).

The bachelor study program in management science is highly demanded by the labour market. A significant number of visiting students confirms that.

The admission requirements defined are the same as for the majority of bachelor programmes in the business studies in Latvia: general secondary education or vocational secondary education (third qualification level in accordance with Section 5, Paragraph three of the Vocational Education Law of the Republic of Latvia).

It is stated in the Self Evaluation Report, that according to the admission requirements the “previous knowledge in mathematics, Latvian and English is taken into account. Knowledge in mathematics ensures the acquisition of economics study courses in an appropriate amount and quality” (part 1.3, SAR). English language requirements are defined in the “TERMS OF ADMISSION AND THE MATRICULATION PROCESS FOR VENTSPILS UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES FOR ENGLISH-TAUGHT STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2020/2021”. However, no information about the minimum required level of mathematics knowledge was found.

No information was found regarding the minimum required level of English for admission and how the language knowledge will be ensured for the new part time programme version in Latvian according to: “part-time studies are planned in Latvian, and English language skills are essential for the acquisition of studies of scientific articles and academic literature in order to achieve higher study results” (part 1.3, SAR). That is even more important as for some courses core literature is in English.

Goals of the study programme in general appropriate are to the mission of the academic programme in the management field. Discussion regarding academic or professional orientation of the study programme and respective goals could take place in order to differentiate the programme portfolio and make it clear for the potential customers and external stakeholders. The significant challenge in reaching the goal of the existing English version of the study programme is related to the country of origin of the students. As only 4 out of all students since 2014 had been from Latvia, and only 5 from the EU, it is debatable whether the goal to prepare specialists “for the region and for Latvia” can be achieved considering the legal regulations in Latvia. That concern goes closely together with the high drop-out rate of the international students, as well.

The new version of the study programme in Latvian will serve this goal better.

In general, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes of the study programme are interrelated.

Significant differences in the content and structure of the current full-time programme in English version consisting of 120 CP (3 years) and the newly designed part-time version in Latvian (120 CP, 4 years) have been identified. The difference related to the study language is natural, the difference in the contact hours and the different methodologies for the full time and the part time programmes are logical, some difference in the course sequence can take place, as well. However different content and structure of the same study programme awarding the same degree, at the same educational institution, raises confusion. Usually the content and the structure of the study programme is very similar for the same programme having full and part time modes of implementation. This issue is discussed more in the next section.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The programme aim, degree, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are seemingly interrelated. However, the different versions of the title of the study program, the different titles of the degree to be awarded creates confusion.

Strengths

1. The profile of the study programme is popular in Latvia and EU.
2. The study programme has been verified by the market.
3. The programme serves exchange student needs well by providing opportunities to study business

in English.

Weaknesses

1. The title of the study programme and the degree awarded in Latvian and English languages have different versions.
2. Admission requirements regarding Mathematics are not precise enough, that might create potential confusion and conflicts.
3. There is a certain discrepancy between lack of English language knowledge entrance test and considerable role of English language in the study process (part-time programme).
4. The inconsistency between the programme's goal to prepare specialists "for the region and for Latvia" and legal regulations regarding work permits of non-EU students exists. Majority of the program students come from abroad.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.1. As it was mentioned already, two different versions of study programmes are submitted for evaluation - the full-time programme version in English language (120 CP, 3 years) and the new part-time version in Latvian (120 CP, 4 years).

For the full time (English version) of the study programme, 22 courses (59 CP) are offered under the group of compulsory courses, 17 - under the group of limited choice courses (45 CP), 6 CP are planned for the free choice electives. 10 CP are assigned to the Bachelor thesis according to the legislation. There is certain disbalance in the workload distributed among semesters, no justification for that is provided.

For the part time (Latvian version) of the study programme, 16 courses are offered under the group of compulsory courses (51 CP), 17 - under the group of limited choice courses (53CP), 6 CP are planned for the free choice electives. 10CP are assigned to the Bachelor thesis. The workload among semesters is balanced.

The logic of assigning the courses to either mandatory courses or limited elective courses is not clear enough. Some courses, like Managerial Accounting, Marketing or Strategic Management courses could better fit the mandatory course group. Instead, language courses would rather be assigned to the electives group.

Another related inconsistency refers to the number of CP for limited and free electives. According to the study plan, there are no possibilities for selection of electives as exactly 45 CP are offered in the list of limited elective courses (EN, full time version). 6 CP of free electives are included in the study plan. However, naming the concrete titles of free electives contradicts the very nature of the free choice.

The similar inconsistency issue refers to the LV part time programme version, as the number of CP for electives is 53 and exactly 53 CP are offered (Appendix 5.4). No choice is available. There is a new course called "Course work" in the list of electives, however there is no course description provided for that.

There are some discrepancies and mistakes in numbers in the accreditation documents submitted which leads to additional confusion. For instance, the total number of CP for the Microeconomics course indicated in the study plan (LV part time version) is 3 in the second column, and, 3+ 3 in the first and second semesters. Looks like that is just a misprint and it should be 6 CP in the second column (Appendix 5.4). Although, the number of CP in the Microeconomics course description is 4, and there is just one Macroeconomics course (p.195, Appendix 5.5). Looking at the "Knowledge necessary to undertake the course" on the same page, one can discover that the requirement is: "Final grade A, B, or C on the secondary school mathematics subject. Satisfies the success criteria for studies in course Mathematics I in parallel and closely coordinated with the course

Microeconomics I.” That leads to even deeper confusion, as there are no Mathematics I in this (LV) version of the study programme and no Microeconomics I in any version at all. By the way, it is not clear how the secondary school mathematics knowledge is tested before the course. Looking at the Microeconomics course description for the English full-time study programme version, the number of ECTS is indicated, and it is 4,5 ECTS (p. 95, Appendix 5.5). However, the prerequisite for this course is “preliminary knowledge of basic economics and mathematics” which is different from the previous course description.

There are other negligence and inconsistencies in the study course titles, translations in the documents submitted. Here are some examples related to the course literature:

- Some literature sources are outdated, e.g. Organisational Behaviour, G.A. Cole (1995); Praude V., Beļčikovs J. Mārketings (1999).
- It is doubtful whether the textbooks in Latvian can be considered as a source of studies for international students (e.g. 10 sources of literature for the Marketing course for the full time EN programme version are in Latvian).
- The course “Office Management” is lacking any source of literature in English, instead, books in Latvian are indicated as source for studies (full time EN programme version).
- A non-existing book is indicated as a literature for the Financial Accounting Course.
- The course “Business Ethics” is lacking any textbook at all.
- On another extreme there is too much literature indicated in some course descriptions. E.g., the 2CP course “Academic Writing” has 18 main and 7 supplementary literature sources.

Usage of a variety of terms in the course descriptions, identifying the workload, such as “lessons”, “lectures”, “classes”, “academic hours” and “contact employments” leads to confusion.

There is a minor non-compliance with the item (3) 1) Section 56, Law on Higher Education Institutions. The official state language (Latvian) studies shall be included in the study programme (compulsory course) for the foreign students.

2.2. Different study implementation and evaluation methods are indicated in the study course descriptions. Lectures, seminars, practical classes, laboratory work are the main types of academic activities. 40% of all classes (EN, full time programme version) are delivered as contact classes, the remaining refers to different modes of individual and group activities. For the newly designed LV part time programme version the share of contact classes is 20%, the remaining – student independent studies. Such a proportion corresponds to the requirements set by the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia.

The evaluation methods are set according to the state regulation. For the majority of courses the total evaluation is calculated as a cumulative result of different course activities. Most study courses have a rather standard set of evaluation methods - class participation, discussions, individual and team projects, presentations, essays, tests and exams. Without knowing more about specifics of what these methods entail, it is not easy to conclude if they are enough and indeed serve the learning outcomes assessment.

From the discussions with students and faculty members, experts got a confirmation that the variety of student-centered learning and teaching approaches are applied.

2.3. During the meeting with students, they shared that after each course they submit feedback, assess internal communication, pros and cons, and what can be improved. In addition to that, students have the possibility to meet study programme administration, as well. However, experts got the impression that the reaction to student feedback is not strong enough. Students expressed the opinion that they are not always aware of the impact of their feedback on the study process.

Regarding evaluation of the graduates, it can't be considered as reliable and useful as “at the end of the academic year 2017/2018, just one of ten graduates of the Bachelor's study programme “Business Administration” participated in the graduate survey. All questions (see 2.8.5) were given a

maximum rating of "7" (strongly agree)." (p. 75, SAR)

During the visit experts didn't get clarity about the particular mechanism of receiving feedback from employers and impact of that on the quality of the study process for this particular programme. That can be somewhat explained by the very small number of graduates of the programme so far.

2.4. In general, students of the VeUAS have highly evaluated mobility opportunities offered. The students of this study programme are using mobility opportunities quite a lot. During the report period 29 incoming students have studied in Ventspils as exchange students. 18 outgoing students. Students admit that studies in partner universities abroad provide additional life and study experience.

According to the self- evaluation report, recognition of the study results abroad is carried out in accordance with existing regulations and other legal acts of VeUAS, provided that the student has fully completed the study courses and has completed their contractual obligations. In case of a positively passed examination, upon the student's return, the entire completed study semester is recognized, as provided by regulatory enactments. If a study course at the host university is not evaluated positively, then the student must repeat the corresponding study course at Ventspils University of Applied Sciences.

There is no analysis provided regarding success of Erasmus students, however as it is mentioned in the report: "not all foreign students are able to fulfill the conditions of mobility responsibly, not being able to achieve the defined learning outcomes." (p. 75, SAR) More detailed analysis of the could provide valuable information on the reasons of such a situation.

There is dissonance in statistical data provided in the self evaluation documents. According to the information provided on page 74 (SAR): "The total number of enrolled students since the beginning of the study programme implementation in 2014 is 125." "Kopējais studējošo skaits kopš studiju programmas īstenošanas uzsākšanas 2014. gadā ir 125 uzņemtie studenti." (p.69, PNZ). In reality the total number of the enrolled students since the study year 2014/25 according to the table 5.1 is 49.

Admission data provided in the table 5.2. (p.73, SAR) is even more different. According to this table the total number of students admitted is 54. None of the admission figures by study years in this table correspond to the data provided in the table 5.1.

There is no clarification on the dynamics of the student number in the table 5.1. Although just 5 students were admitted at the first year of admission in 2014, the number of the second year students a year later has more than doubled and reached 12. A year later the number of the 1-st cohort students increased even by two more and reached 15 persons. In the study year 2015/16 two students are indicated as third year students, despite the fact that just 2 years have passed since the 1-st admission.

No clarification of such dissonances is provided in the report. Most probably some dissonance in statistics can be explained by the incoming exchange students.

There is no deeper analysis of the steep decrease in the number of graduates. The overall dropout rate in the study programme is more than 2/3. Only 15 students have graduated (out of 49 or 54 admitted). A remark is provided that students are not able to complete Erasmus+ mobility commitments.

The explanation: "The most common reasons for dropping out are when students start parallel activities such as working and then do not take time to study, or do not attend lectures and delay study courses for simple reasons, thus failing to achieve results." (p. 73) (SAR) doesn't sound reasonable. It needs serious analysis and clarification as the non-EU visiting students have a student's residence permit, not a work permit. According to the law, visiting students who stop studies should be expelled from the country.

The statement: "But overall the trends can be viewed positively as interest in the study programme

is growing" (p. 73, SAR) sounds too optimistic, as the number of first year students admitted varies between 5 and 8 (2014 – 2018). The only positive indicator is the recent increase of students admitted in 2019/20, the very last intake. However last year changes can't be considered as a trend. The high drop-out rate can't be considered as a positive trend either, it needs deeper analysis.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Two different study programme versions are provided for the evaluation. As the Latvian version has been developed later, the appropriate changes for the older version of the study programme should be applied.

Overall, the descriptions of the study courses/ modules provide the essential information for studies. The structure of the study programme ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the business and the scientific trends.

The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, seemingly contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are applied.

A unified standard term/ definition in the course descriptions, identifying the academic workload must be applied.

Strengths

1. The descriptions of the study courses provide the necessary information for studies, in general they comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments.
2. Guidelines for the traineeship, and the final thesis are well designed.
3. Student-centered learning and teaching approaches are applied.

Weaknesses

1. There are imperfections in course descriptions.
2. There is some disbalance in the workload distributed among semesters for the English version of the study program.
3. A minor non - compliance with the item (3) 1) Section 56, Law on Higher Education Institutions have been identified.
4. Students are not always aware of the feedback on their suggestions on course improvements.
5. Some complaints regarding English language proficiency of instructors have been observed.
6. High drop-out rate.
7. A reliable analysis of the graduates' feedback is missing.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

The self-evaluation report indicates that students have access to the VeUAS library and numerous databases, such as EBSCO, Scopus, Science Direct, WOS. The library also has five free-access computers with internet connection for work and study processes and three computers just for VeUAS students. All the databases are available for free from each computer located in the library. Another library space is available through the City Library of Ventspils.

Approximately EUR 1000 are allocated each year to supplement new textbooks, which is not a lot. It was also stated that the study programme directors take care of the intellectual and material resources of the programme. According to the information received from the VeUAS library, the library collection is replenished every year depending on the budget.

However, the mechanism of supplying core text books for the study courses doesn't ensure availability of the literature for every student. During the site visit at the library and discussions with students experts clarified that for some courses core textbooks are available, but for some courses just a couple of copies are accessible. Experts have to admit that this particular issue is not VeUAS

specific, it is heavily dependent on the financial capability of the institution. More extensive usage of the electronic resources, particularly free ones is helping to solve this issue at least at some extent. The buildings, technical equipment of the classrooms, and IT solutions provide excellent conditions to ensure the quality of the study process. The students have access to the electronic learning resources. The lecture halls are equipped with multimedia projectors, PCs, audio and video equipment for lectures in the class and online. Higher education institutions around the world are going through a period of challenges, the biggest of which is definitely the provision of a distance teaching, learning, and assessment process and VeUAS is not an exception.

The modern, compact campus provides good conditions for living and studying at VeUAS.

According to the miserly financial data provided about year 2019, the study programme is fully financed by tuition fee. The director of the programme receives just 1% (339 EUR/yr.) of the programme budget for the operation and development of the programme (Appendix 2.25).

The low number of yearly admission should raise questions regarding the financial feasibility of the study program. Looks like cross- subsidies are taking place.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The study provision, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision in general comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the future.

Strengths

1. Modern well-equipped classrooms.
2. Modern electronic study platform supports the in-class activities or even provides opportunities to replace in-class activities by on-line classes under the crisis conditions.
3. Students and faculty have library and numerous databases, such as EBSCO, Scopus, Science Direct, WOS available.

Weaknesses

1. Not all the study courses are supplied with the necessary number of the core textbooks.
2. The low number of student yearly admission raises concern regarding financial feasibility of the program in the long run.
3. The share of the budget allocated for program management is miserable.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

VeUAS undertakes certain measures to avoid possible negative effects on the quality of the implementation of the study programme. To ensure the quality of the field of study “Management, Administration, and Property Management”, a study process evaluation and control system has been developed. This system includes regular review of the study process at meetings of the Study and Scientific Councils, the Study Programme Council, the Faculty of Economics and Management Council, where employers and students can participate.

Professors, associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers are teaching at the study programme. The local young PhD graduates are attracted as the new faculty members thus ensuring continuity of operations.

The formal requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions regarding faculty have been met. 5 professors and associate professors elected to academic positions at VeUAS are teaching at the study programme. Nevertheless, there is a significant proportion of instructors who are not elected at the Faculty of Economics and Management. The increasing proportion of the non- elected

visiting instructors for the newly designed part time program version needs particular attention. Although inviting industry lecturers is a good phenomenon for professional programs, it is not so unambiguous in case of academically oriented education.

Experts were confused by certain discrepancies in the Self-evaluation documents regarding faculty statistics which makes evaluation more complicated. For instance, names of 4 instructors of English (full time) version of the study programme indicated in the Appendix 5.4 can't be found in the list of VeUAS faculty list (table 2.1, p.29, SAR). Names of 6 instructors of Latvian (full time) version of the study programme (Appendix 5.4) can't be found in the list of VeUAS faculty either (table 2.1, p.29, SAR). CV-s of those instructors had not been found in the set of self-evaluation documents submitted.

The declared English language proficiency level of the staff looks adequate, corresponding to C1 and C2 levels (all above the minimum required B2), however VeUAS has no formal procedure of testing language proficiency in place. The level of language proficiency is self-declared by each faculty member.

The academic staff is involved in scientific research in the field of management science. However, there is a disbalance related to the scientific achievements produced by academic staff members. Majority of the scientific achievements are produced by a limited number of faculty members. Out of 29 academics involved in delivery of the study program (Appendix 5.4), 12 have publications in the field related to the courses they are teaching (Appendix 2.8). Number of international scientific activities/ projects where faculty have been involved is limited.

No reasonable mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members which particularly contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation is presented in the relevant part 4.6 of the SAR (p.90).

During the site visit and meeting with faculty and administration experts discovered that there is a space for strengthening academic cooperation between the academic staff members. That is even more important because of the increasing number of guest lecturers who are not elected at the Faculty of Economics and Management. Right now, academic cooperation can't always be evaluated as productive. During the site visit experts observed certain problems and conflicts in the academic environment. Although conflicts are normal in the creative academic environment, the conflicts should be carefully managed in order to keep them productive, not disruptive.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The regulations of the Law on Higher Education Institutions regarding faculty structure teaching at the academic study programme have been met.

Strengths

1. Most of the study courses are taught by the full time local VeUAS faculty and visiting instructors from Ventspils..
2. Young recent PhD graduates have been attracted as the new academic staff members.

Weaknesses

1. Majority of the scientific achievements are produced by a limited number of faculty members.
2. Number of international scientific activities/ projects where faculty have been involved is limited.
3. There is some tension between the academic staff members, the academic collaboration can't always be evaluated as productive. During the site visit experts discovered that a mechanism for mutual collaboration between the faculty members is not at the best order. Insufficient cooperation of academic staff in improvement of the study courses and their correlation have been identified.
4. Raising the number of invited industry instructors doesn't strengthen the scientific capacity of the academically oriented study program.

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

Requirements

1. The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued.
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: Although looks like the sample of attached diploma formally is compliant with MK. Nr. 202 "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus", it doesn't correspond to the new degree to be awarded in the future.
2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: VeUAS has an agreement in place with BA School of Business and Finance to provide students with options to continue education.
3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Annex 2-19 confirms that the institution guarantees compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.
4. The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Attached resumes confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with MK. Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi"
5. The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Annex 2.21 and resumes confirms that involved teaching staff have at least B2 level of English. (based on the self-declaration)
6. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme, at least three of which are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of a professional doctoral study programme in arts.
Assessment of compliance: Not relevant
Justification:
7. The academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Academic staff of the programme complies with the requirements. The implementation of the compulsory and limited elective section of the programme will involve 3 professors and 2 associate professors

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Sample of attached study agreement (annex 24.8) complies with MK. Nr. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi"

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: There are deficiencies in study courses descriptions. (More information under chapter 2.1. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education has been received. Academic staff of the programme complies with the requirements. The implementation of the compulsory and limited elective section of the programme will involve 3 professors and 2 associate professors

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 5.2 confirms that the programme complies with the State Education Standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Annexes 2.6 and 2.8 confirms that staff in general complies with requirements. However, information (CV-s) about a few instructors is missing.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Assessment: No.1 doesn't comply with requirements, however that non-compliance is rather formal and can be easily corrected.

Assessment: No.9 and No.14 meets requirements Partially

Justification: Deficiencies in study course descriptions have been identified. Some information about instructors is missing.

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The learning outcome achievement is provided by the availability of financing (tuition, projects), excellent study, work and living infrastructure, access to study materials and communication via Moodle platform, library. However, for some courses just a couple of book copies are available.

The low number of yearly admission should raise questions regarding the financial feasibility of the study program. Looks like cross- subsidies are taking place.

Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The local and visiting academic staff comply with the regulatory requirements.

Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The formal requirements R6 have been partially met, for R7 have been met.

Considerable number of uncertainties and discrepancies have been identified in the documents submitted, therefore the overall assessment grade of the study program is "Average". Synchronization of the content and structure of the current full-time programme in English version consisting of 120 CP (3 years) and the newly designed part-time version in Latvian (120 CP, 4 years) must be performed till the accreditation committee meeting. After completing the short term recommendations the overall assessment of the study programme could be reconsidered.

Evaluation of the study programme "Business Administration"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration"

Short-term recommendations

Revise the title of the study programme and the degree awarded in Latvian and English languages. Take into consideration that the study programme is positioned as academic. Keep in mind Article 12 of "Noteikumi par valsts akadēmiskās izglītības standartu". Bakalaura grādu – ... sociālo zinātņu bakalaurs, ... – piešķir attiecīgajām zinātnēm radniecīgajā zinātņu nozaru grupā atbilstoši Latvijas izglītības klasifikācijā noteiktajām izglītības tematiskajām grupām.. (till the accreditation committee meeting).
Synchronize the content and structure of the current full-time programme in English version consisting of 120 CP (3 years) and the newly designed part-time version in Latvian (120 CP, 4 years) as the same degree for all graduates is awarded. (till the accreditation committee meeting).
Specify the minimum admission requirements for mathematics. Clarify whether and how English language proficiency is ensured for the students studying in Latvian language but using core literature in English. (till the accreditation committee meeting).
Reconsider relevance of the goal of the English version of the study program for visiting students: to prepare specialists "for the region and for Latvia". (till the accreditation committee meeting).
Study course descriptions should be reviewed, the identified inconsistencies should be eliminated. (till the accreditation committee meeting).
Apply a unified standard term/ definition in the course descriptions, identifying the academic workload. (till the accreditation committee meeting).
Revise affiliation of the study courses to mandatory courses or limited elective courses group. Introduce option for real choice of the (limited) elective courses.(till the accreditation committee meeting).
Literature list for some courses should be carefully revised, the outdated literature should be replaced, and the extensive list of literature should be adjusted to the real reading capability of students.(till the accreditation committee meeting).
The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members should be strengthened to contribute to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation. (1 - 2 years)
Encourage more faculty members (including visiting faculty) to contribute more to scientific achievements. (1 - 2 years)
Get statistical data regarding students and graduates in order, analyze the data. Perform comprehensive analysis of the drop out statistics. (1 - 2 years)
Synchronize and clarify information about faculty members in different documents. Supply the missing CV-s of the faculty. (1 - 2 years)
Reliable surveys of the program graduates must be introduced. The result of the surveys should be taken into consideration for further development of the study program. (1 - 2 years)
Introduce English language proficiency testing of the faculty by external evaluator. If necessary, support language skills development. (1 - 2 years)
Eliminate the disbalance in the workload distributed among semesters (English version of the programme).(1 - 2 years)

Long-term recommendations

The core textbook/ literature (electronically or in the paper form) should be made available to every student.

II. "International Business and Export Management" ASSESSMENT

II. "International Business and Export Management" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

'International Business and Export Management'(45345) is a joint academic Master's programme. This is a full-time 2-year study programme worth 80 credit points. The programme is implemented in the English language.

The programme awards two diplomas: one issued by Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeUAS) and another by IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems in Austria. The degree awarded by MC University of Applied Sciences Krems in Austria is Master of Arts in Business. The degree awarded by VeUAS is not clear as inconsistency in formulations of the degree used in different accreditation documents have been identified. Master of Social Sciences in Business Administration is used in the Self - Assessment Report (SAR, p.52), Master of Business Administration is used in the study contract (2-23_6_pielikums_Stud_liguma_paraugs_LV_un_EN_Kremsa (1).doc), Master of Social Sciences in Management is written in the sample diploma. Reference to one more distinct new formulation is provided in Section 1.1, (p.53) of the SAR: "Achievement of the aim ensures the acquisition of the Master degree of Social Sciences in Management and Administration." Three different formulations of the degree in Latvian language are used: Sociālo zinātņu maģistra grāds vadībā un administrēšanā) and Sociālo zinātņu maģistra grāds vadībizinātnē (SAR). The third version is publically available at the www page of VeUAS - Sociālais maģistrs biznesa vadībā.

The programme description sets out strategic goals, specific purpose, tasks, and results/learning outcomes, as outlined in the self-evaluation report (pp. 50-51).

The strategic goals are rather generic and could be attached to any business programme (e.g. 'to provide students with in-depth theoretical knowledge and develop their research skills and abilities' - not clear what kind of knowledge, and research in which area).

The specific purpose is three-fold. To prepare students who are able to:

- carry out research work rooted in the theoretical basis of business and business management in various local and foreign institutions and enterprises;
- compete in the labour market and respond quickly to changes in it [...] (this purpose is challenging to measure);
- successfully acquire further education in a doctoral programme.

The latter purpose is ambitious and might need to be revisited/reformulated, because further analysis did not reveal a way of determining if this purpose is achieved within the MA programme.

The tasks become more specific by outlining areas of knowledge and skills students deepen into during the programme - export management, international business management, strategy, business and economic process analysis. Yet, not all of them seem to be directed to students. For example, the objective to 'redesign the content and methods of presentation within the programme...' is more relevant for an educator or programme director to implement rather than a

student.

The programme description outlines a number of results/learning outcomes. At first, four abilities:

- a) understanding and analysing a company and its export activities,
- b) understanding the links between a company and international environment,
- c) starting an export management related business in an international environment or to hold executive positions [...],
- d) successfully continue research and scientific activities including the development of a doctoral thesis.

The third ability is measurable only some time close to or upon graduation, whether an executive position or a new company started is indeed a result of the programme might not be easy to establish. The fourth ability is not easy to measure, as well, in particular to establish a connection between the studies in the programme and the development of a doctoral thesis in the future (very few graduates would proceed into an academic career and it is challenging to establish if it is the result of the research component of the programme). Measurability of the outcomes will be addressed further in the analysis.

Then several knowledge, skills and abilities are listed as a set of professional competencies. The list also includes the 'feedback' component where knowledge integration, critical analysis of scientific challenges, ethical responsibility for the impact of scientific results are mentioned. This component is not quite standard for the European Qualifications Framework. Also notable that the knowledge outcome puts a lot of emphasis on an 'in-depth understanding' which should have implications on how it is measured. While the listed skills and abilities correspond to the study programme's specific tasks, some of them might be difficult to achieve as part of the programme, e.g. 'ability to conduct business in an international business environment'.

The admission requirements come down to: a Bachelor's or a higher education degree in any sector and at least two years' work experience, as well as IELTS or TOEFL test proving the English language proficiency. Setting a minimum requirement for the work experience is definitely beneficial for the selection process. It can also increase chances of achieving one of the programme's outcomes - an ability to hold executive positions or starting an export management related business. As a direction of improvement, it might be possible to add more details as to what kind of experience is preferable.

There is certain ambiguity regarding study program management, as Sergejs Zikovs who is indicated as the programme director has left VeUAS in November 2018 already and became a full time employee of Emergn (according to the publicly available information). He is a Chairman of the Board of Society "Ventspils amateur football", as well. Una Bitmane who is indicated as the study programme coordinator has stopped fulfilling her duties in 2019 (according to the publicly available information). That creates concern about the managerial capability to deliver the academic study programme and coordinate the study process with Austrian partner.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Overall the name of the study programme, programme purposes, and learning outcomes targeted are aligned; admission requirements are relevant but there are a few deficiencies and a couple of points for improvement. The awarded degree must be clarified. Management capability of the study programme is unclear.

Strengths:

1. The logic between setting the general goals, then going into specific goals and tasks followed by

learning outcomes is clear.

2. Appropriate admission requirements, including two years of work experience.

Weaknesses:

1. Name of the study programme, degree and its purposes are not aligned, as the title of the degree awarded has four different versions in English and three in Latvian.

2. The general goals of the programme are too broad (can be applied almost to any business programme).

3. Some specific goals are not easy to measure (goal 3); or not realistic/possible (goal 4).

4. The final task on redesigning the content and methods of presentation does not seem to be related to students.

5. The feedback component of the results/learning outcome does not fit the EQF format of knowledge, skills, competencies.

6. Some learning outcomes might be challenging to measure and to associate directly with the programme, e.g. develop an ability to conduct business in an international environment, unless students indeed run such a business during the course.

7. Unclear management capability of the study programme.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

In this section, the experts will analyse the Master's study programme 'International Business and Export Management' course descriptions, including their content, aims and outcomes, methods, quality tracking and student mobility. The analysis is based on the self-evaluation report and the site visit to the higher education institution in mid-November 2020.

1. Description of study courses, aims, outcomes

The programme consists of 29 study courses in total. 21 of them are compulsory (A-part) and 8 are electives (B-part, including international consulting and specialisation courses). The course descriptions (7.6.pielikums) contain all the necessary parts such as general information (contact lessons, entry requirements, etc.), objectives, learning outcomes, assessment structure, course outline, basic literature.

While the study course objectives are present as the course description component, they are not always written out clearly. For example, in Corporate Governance and International Conduct, the course objective section outlines:

'The course focuses on:

- introduction to corporate risk management
- developments in corporate governance
- role of owners, shareholders and stakeholders
- ...'

That is, the section informs what the course focuses on in terms of the study topics.

Similarly, the description of the course Corporate Strategies outlines the objective as follows.

'The course will focus on the following topics:

- definition of strategic purposes and goals
- tools of strategic management
- ...'

In both examples, the objective is not clearly formulated in the relevant section, but in the second case the objective can be found in the Study results/learning outcomes section: 'To convey to the student what corporate governance is and how it is developed over the few years...'. Similar issues

are found in such courses as Business and Project Development, Corporate Governance and International Conduct, International Consulting, Corporate Strategies.

The learning outcomes of the study courses are mostly clear and relatable to the aims of the study programme. For example, Business and Product Development develops business planning and opportunity evaluation abilities, business strategy formulation and decision-making skills. This prepares students to start a business or hold executive positions. Export management and international context aspects are covered in other courses such as Foreign Trade Techniques and Structured Financing, International Business and Strategic Change.

The content of the courses, judging by the provided descriptions, matches with the learning outcomes, and thus should help achieve the study programme's goals.

According to the self-evaluation report, employers in surveys and interviews indicate that the programme matches the needs of the industry and the labour market. Research trends also inform the course design and delivery.

The Master's thesis requirements, however, are not present in the attachment to the report. It is important to add this description as this assignment carries a lot of weight and working on the thesis usually is the time when a student applies all the prior knowledge acquired and develops academic research skills (according to the diploma supplement, there is Master Thesis I and Master Thesis II, each worth 19.5 and 10.5 ECTS credits respectively).

6 course descriptions, e.g. International Finance, Investment, and Budget; Change Management and Emerging Governance Methods and others are missing in the Appendix 7.6.

The uniform standard in writing the course descriptions is missing. Some course descriptions are incomplete or inaccurate (e.g. International Management and Business Finance and Controlling; International Human Resource Management; Strategic Controlling and Reporting). In a few cases different titles for the same courses are applied, e.g. Business and Project Management /Business and Project Development; International Market Management and Outsourcing / International Market Management and Sourcing). Contradictory information is provided regarding the instructors of a few courses, e.g. Juris Ulmanis and Sanita Meijere are indicated as instructors for the International Market Management course in different documents. Similarly both Justin W. Bancroft and Sanita Meijere are indicated as instructors for the course Mergers, Acquisitions and Due Diligence.

Usage of a variety of terms in the course descriptions, identifying the workload, such as "contact lessons", "lectures", "classes", "lecture hours" and "academic hours" leads to confusion.

2. Teaching and evaluation methods, student-centred learning

The course descriptions contain objectives, results, teaching concept (methods) and assessment structure as well as course schedule and outline. Objectives, teaching and assessment methods seemingly match up well (though it is not clearly evident from the syllabi).

Teaching methods vary from the standard ones like lectures, videos, case studies, group exercises, leading to more specific methods like marketing problem-solving, 'hands-on lab' - business idea development, etc. Research activity is often part of students' individual work - market research, internal and external environment analysis. Yet, the current course descriptions do not quite reveal whether or how research skills are developed to the extent that graduates can become successful doctoral students (as per one of the programme's aims). This becomes particularly questionable given that in the 2019 graduate survey, none of the graduates planned to continue their studies at a

PhD level (p.61 of the self-evaluation report).

Assessment in most cases has several components. For example: 30% written assignment, 30% oral assignment, 40% final exam; or 50% written exam based on the Harvard Business Review case analysis, 20% case analysis, 30% project paper presentation. Sometimes, however, 100% is devoted to a written exam, e.g. in the courses Corporate Governance & International Conduct, International Accounting Principles and Taxation. Furthermore, while the assessment structure is clear, assessment criteria are not outlined in detail. This observation applies to both VeUAS and Krems taught courses.

The list of basic literature tends to be adequate and include contemporary sources, e.g. Osterwalder's business model canvas, Kim's Blue Ocean Strategy. However some courses lack literature at all. Chair International Law and Global Political Studies; International Management and Business Finance and Controlling are examples of such courses. Some courses have inaccurate lists of literature, e.g. International Consulting I; International Consulting II; International Consulting III.

Organisation of the study process ensures that student-centred learning can be implemented. Small groups of students working on real life problems for businesses and presenting results back to businesses. Student-centeredness and problem-based learning were confirmed in the meeting with students and graduates of the programme.

Since this is the joint programme between VeUAS and Krems University and it is accredited in Latvian and in Austria, both institutions should contribute to the programme planning and implementation. The self-evaluation report touches upon the latter when it comes to teaching staff and load (e.g. in the implementation of the programme, at least 18% of the content of the study programme is provided by the lecturers of Krems University; see the section on Teaching Staff for more detail). When it comes to the former (programme planning), there is no direct information available - this is why the experts inquired prof. Kreslins during the onsite visit in November, how cooperation with Krems University is organised. It appears that the related planning occurs during discussions with visiting professors from Krems. Sometimes the professors choose themselves which subjects to teach in order to bring the best to the programme. The rest of the planning happens within VeUAS and is under the auspices of the study director, the experts conclude.

3. Student, employer and graduate surveys

Feedback collection is built into the study process. Feedback surveys are conducted at the end of each study course. The surveys capture general study quality and student satisfaction. Based on the survey results, VeUAS together with representatives of Krems University take measures to improve the study quality. The self-evaluation report mentions a number of courses which underwent changes as a result of such measures, e.g. Research Seminar and Preparation for Master Thesis, International Management Simulation, Strategic Controlling and Reporting, etc.

The self-evaluation report in section 2.3 (p.55) does refer to the internship period; stating that in connection to that period, students indicate how study courses helped them achieve results and how real work experience is linked to university education. The study plan of this academic programme, however, does not mention internship. It might be that International Consulting III is meant when students work on hands-on consulting projects.

Companies that employ graduates of the programme also participate in surveys. They are generally quite happy with the level of graduates' preparedness, noticing that they are not only

knowledgeable but also skillful. From the meeting with the employers it also seemed that they are more happy with Master-level graduates than with the Bachelor-level graduates.

The self-evaluation report provides a fair amount of overview and detail about student, employer and graduate surveys, though the visibility of this information is sometimes low and it would be beneficial to include more information about employers and about students alike.

The survey results outlined on pp. 59-61 generally confirm the expert teams' observations from the November 2020 onsite visit. For example, out of eight survey responses received from the employed graduates :

- Over 60% of employers positively assess the study space and equipment; 37% assess that as satisfactory.
- Over 60% positively assess access to library resources and databases.
- Over 60% positively assess planning of lecture content; yet, 35% assess it as poor or satisfactory.

Meeting with the students and graduates of the programme proved that they are very happy with the programme and can definitely recommend it to other students.

In general, the experts' team concludes that the student, employer and graduate surveys are in place. The obtained results are processed on a regular basis and respective measures are taken to improve the programme.

4. Student mobility opportunities

Students of this joint programme have an opportunity to take one or more courses at Krems University in Austria. There were also Erasmus mobility options, an internship semester abroad, and the International Masters Week that targets development of theses.

As for Erasmus, this programme has been available at VeUAS since its inception in Latvia. Students have a choice from 90 Erasmus programme member states and 72 partner universities, according to the self-evaluation report. In the study years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, in total four students completed a semester abroad (Belgium, Germany, Austria). Within Erasmus partnership agreements, credit points (ECTS) earned in a partner university while on an exchange programme are transferred/counted to/towards home university (VeUAS).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The content of studies and their implementation can be described as compliant across the four criteria: 1) study courses, aims, outcomes; 2) teaching and evaluation methods, student-centred learning; 3) student, employer and graduate surveys; 4) student mobility opportunities. Some deficiencies identified that require attention of the study programme directors and course leaders. A unified standard term/ definition in the course descriptions identifying the academic workload must be applied.

Strengths:

1. Learning outcomes of the study courses are generally clear and relatable to the aims of the courses.
2. The outlined content is relevant and complementary, and matches with the study programme's aims.
3. Employers indicate that the programme matches the needs of the industry and the labour market.

4. Diverse teaching methods and student-centered learning employed.
5. Regular feedback collected; the level of satisfaction with the programme among graduates tends to be high.

Weaknesses:

1. Aims of the study courses are present as the course description component, but they are not always written out clearly.
2. The Master's thesis requirements are not present in the attachment to the report, whilst the thesis has a lot of weight in terms of ECTS and application of learning.
3. Six course descriptions are missing. Some course descriptions have inaccurate lists of literature. Some course titles are not aligned.
4. Evaluation structure is clear but its criteria are not outlined to a sufficient extent, that is, to be able to establish if the chosen evaluation method indeed assesses the learning outcomes targeted.
5. Certain research activities are integrated into many study courses but the course syllabi do not quite reveal whether or how research skills are developed to the extent that graduates can 'successfully continue research and scientific activities'.
6. Contradictory information regarding instructors teaching certain courses (few cases).

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

To ensure the study process, 5 computer classrooms with approximately 300 computers in the university network are available. In addition, a wireless network is available in the university as well as in the service hotel. In 2015, VeUAS joined the Latvian academic network with a 10 Gbps band. Purchased and updated software for research work, including Matlab network licenses for employees and computer classes, SPSS and others. Computers in computer classrooms and staff are changed so that their age does not exceed 5 years. In the university data center, all servers are virtualized and located in a cluster that works with Proxmox. Open source products are basically chosen for service solutions. VeUAS has introduced the open source e-learning system "Moodle", which is currently widely used by other universities. VeUAS uses "Google Apps for Education" as an e-mail system. Since 2012, VeUAS has implemented the Information System of Higher Education Institutions of Latvia, which includes a part of the functionality of the Information System of the University of Latvia. When evaluating the library collections, it was established that the literature necessary for the acquisition of the study course is available, but it has old publishing years. If there is a newer edition it is in limited quantity.

Students and lecturers use the services of VeUAS and Ventspils City Library to ensure the study process. The library of VeUAS is located on two floors with a department of study literature, periodicals and also fiction. The library of the University has a collection of books ~ 26,000 volumes and ~ 750 audiovisual materials. The following printed publications are subscribed for to ensure the study direction: "Bilance", "Dienas Bizness", "IR", "Kapitāls", "Bloomberg Businessweek"; Harvard Business Review USA; the Economist. The stocks are replenished every year depending on the faculty budget. The ordering procedure is coordinated by the dean at the request of the lecturers and with the permission of the rector.

According to the very limited financial data provided about year 2019, the study programme is financed by the tuition fee only. According to the Appendix 2.25 experts assume that less than 50% of the revenue stays at VeUAS, the remaining share (additional costs of 56%) goes to the Austrian partner. Actually there is some doubt regarding the credibility of financial data. According to the Appendix 7.2 the number of students in 2018/19 was 32, the number of students in 2019/20 was 24. Taking into consideration the yearly tuition fee EUR 2310, the revenue for the corresponding study years should be EUR 73920 and EUR 55440. According to the data presented in the Appendix 2.25,

the total budget of the study program in year 2019 was EUR 32 722,61 which is significantly different. No explanation for such a strange dissonance is provided.

Ten admitted students per year in average raises concern regarding the long term sustainability of the study program.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The study provision, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision in general comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the future.

Strengths

1. The technical provision of the auditoriums and the attraction of VeUAS financial resources by implementing international and local projects can be mentioned as positive.
2. To support the study program, various printed publications “Bloomberg Businessweek”, Harvard Business Review in the USA and others, as well as electronic scientific databases, such as Scopus and others are available, which provide scientific access to the study program.
3. In the VeUAS data center, all servers are virtualized and located in a cluster that works with ProxMox.

Weaknesses

1. As the main language of the study program is English, the appropriate literature is available in the library, but it is outdated and limited.
2. On the library stand with the latest books, the largest number of books is in Latvian.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

VeUAS undertakes certain measures to avoid possible negative effects on the quality of the implementation of the study programme. To ensure the quality of the field of study “Management, Administration, and Property Management”, a study process evaluation and control system has been developed. This system includes regular review of the study process at meetings of the Study and Scientific Councils, the Study Programme Council, the Faculty of Economics and Management Council, where employers and students can participate. However, it is difficult for an external expert to track in detail how that impacts the particular study programme.

Out of 15 instructors currently teaching 29 business courses at the program, 4 represent Austrian partner (Andreas Schachenhuber, Birgit Martinek, Daniel Hunebeck and Stephan Wittich), 4 professors are elected and primarily employed by another HEI-s in Latvia (Tatjana Volkova, Jānis Grasis, Inga Gleizdāne, Justin W. Bancroft), 4 are visiting instructors from business who also have part time teaching commitments at other HEI in Latvia and abroad (Sanita Meijere, Randev Dias, Juris Ulmanis, William Schaub), and 3 are elected academics of VeUAS (Kārlis Krēsliņš, Liene Resele, Ilga Zīlniece). Such a business model having heavy dependence on the external visiting faculty is not unambiguous. On the one hand students can benefit from the talent and professional experience of the best external instructors, on the other hand there should be serious concern regarding their research contribution to academia. That’s why such a business model is more appropriate for running the professional study programs. All lecturers in the program have relevant academic experience and also close ties with the industry and professional environment. Knowledge of current labor market issues allow them to achieve the relevant study results successfully .

Analyzing the current situation, it was identified that the study load seems to be unevenly

distributed, as some lecturers deliver five or more study courses throughout the program (e.g. Sanita Meijere, Justin W. Bancroft).

Analyzing the list of lecturers of the study programme, it was found out that 4 instructors mentioned in the Annex 7.5 (Andreas Schachenhuber, Daniel Hunebeck, Greg Mathers, Brigit Martinek) are missing in the Annex 7.6. (descriptions of study courses). Their names cannot be found in the Annex 2 - 6, which contain the lecturers' CVs, either. The CVs in Annex 2 - 6 do not follow a uniform format, as well.

Evaluating the CVs of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study program, it can be concluded how their qualification complies with the requirements of the study program implementation and regulatory enactments, and it allows to achieve the study goals and learning outcomes of the program and relevant study courses. As the study programme is implemented in English, the level of English of the involved teachers corresponds to B2 level at least.

During the meeting in November 2020, Prof. Kreslins noted that, according to the agreement, Krems University undertakes to teach courses worth at least 11 credit points; and that greater involvement of the lecturers from Austria implies greater costs.

Very scarce information (just one sentence) about involvement of the academic staff of the study program in the scientific research is provided in the Section 4.5 (p.66) of the SAR. It is noted in the SAR that "the academic staff from both partner sides took part in scientific research; such as the National Research Programme EKOSOC and INTERFRAME. However, no evidence of contribution of Austrian partners in developing scientific publications is provided in Annex 2.8. Only Professor Kārlis Krēslīņš is mentioned in relation to the state research program "INTRERFRAME" in the accreditation documents. Based on the information provided in Annex 2.8 Professor Karlis Kreslins and lecturer Iga Zīlniecekas followed by docent Liene Resele have been most productive in developing the scientific outputs. The visiting instructors (not elected by other HEI) have produced some 4 publications together during the accreditation period. According to the experts opinion, integration of the research results into the study process is quite limited.

What regards a mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members which contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation, it is mentioned in the SAR (p.66), that "Each course of the study programme has a connection with the previous and next course. There are several study courses where part of the course is taught by the next year's lecturer, such as Sanita Meijere and Justin W. Bancroft". There is a reference towards the "link between the study courses is indicated in the relevant manuals and guidelines", however it is not clear what kind of relevant manuals and guidelines are meant. No more expanded mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members which particularly contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation is presented in the relevant part 4.6 of the SAR. There are indications that regular assessment of the study programmes is carried out at the supervisory level (Study Programme Council and the Faculty Council). (Appendix 2.3) The activities of those supervisory bodies are determined by the Regulations of the Faculty of Economics and Management and Regulations of VeUAS Programmes Council.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The major regulations of the Law on Higher Education Institutions regarding faculty structure teaching at the academic study programme have been met.

Strengths

1. All teaching staff involved in the programmes have appropriate academic experience, connection with the field and professional environment, allow them to successfully achieve the relevant study results and meet the teaching goals and objectives of the study program.

Weaknesses

1. The workload is unevenly distributed and some teachers deliver five or more courses.
2. Limited involvement of Austrian lecturers in teaching as under the agreement, Krems University undertakes to teach courses worth at least 11 credits, and greater involvement of Austrian lecturers means higher costs.
3. CVs are not available for 4 lecturers of the study programme (Andreas Schachenhuber, Daniel Hunebeck, Greg Mathers, Brigit Martinek).
4. Teachers' CVs do not follow a uniform format, which makes their analysis difficult.
5. Contribution to the scientific results is limited due to composition of the faculty (majority of instructors are outsourced).
6. There is no evidence of joint Austrian- Latvian research activities.

5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "International Business and Export Management"

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The formulation of the degree in the sample diploma (IBEM diploms, pielikums) differs from the formulation in the program description in both languages.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: VeUAS has agreement in place with LLU to provide students with options to continue education.

3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2-19 confirms that the institution guarantees compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Attached resumes confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with MK. Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi"

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2.21 confirms that involved teaching staff have at least B2 level of English

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Academic staff of the programme complies with the requirements. The implementation of the compulsory and limited elective section of the programme will involve 3 professors and 2 associate professors

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Sample of attached study agreement (annex 24.8) complies with MK. Nr. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi" The definition of the degree awarded must be adjusted!

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: There are deficiencies in study courses descriptions. (More information under chapter 2.1. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof).

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education has been received. Academic staff of the programme complies with the requirements. The implementation of the compulsory and limited elective section of the programme will involve 3 professors and 2

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 7.3 confirms that the programme complies with the State Education Standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Programme complies with criteria - although in practice mobility is only in one direction. There is no example of VeUAS staff going abroad to partner institution.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Annex 2.8 confirms that staff partially complies with requirements. At least three instructors don't have any publications, two instructors don't have publications in the reviewed editions. Information about publications by Austrian visiting professors is not available.

15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Complies with the main criteria No1-No14. Some deficiencies have been identified (criteria 1 and 14).

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The learning outcome achievement is provided by the availability of financing (tuition), excellent study, work and living infrastructure, access to study materials and communication via Moodle platform, library. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts. Book stock should be replenished, part of the literature available in the library is outdated. There is concern regarding the financial data and long term financial sustainability.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The local and visiting academic staff comply with the regulatory requirements. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study programme leading to the master degree is based on the advances and findings in management science. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The formal requirements R6 have been partially met, R7, R8 have been met.

Evaluation of the study programme "International Business and Export Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "International Business and Export Management"

Short-term recommendations

The correct title of the degree in English and Latvian languages must be formulated. The key accreditation documents must be corrected accordingly.

In the description, the programme director or his deputy should make the general goals of the programme more precise and relatable to the programme content - what kind of knowledge it aims to develop, ambitious specialists in which industries, what is meant by 'private entities', what cultural economic, cultural and social needs are; that is, some statements are too broad to the extent of being vague which should be eliminated.

To reformulate specific goal 3 so that it is more realistic to achieve, e.g. 'to prepare specialists who improve their ability to compete in the labor market'.

To rewrite the last task of the programme that concerns redesigning the content and methods, make clearer what this task means; at the moment it does not seem related to students at all.

Master thesis requirements and assessment information is missing from the programme package - a person in charge, presumably the study programme director, should add this for evaluators/stakeholders to see (how it is assessed, what competencies develops, etc.).

Course descriptions should be reviewed, accuracy should be increased, the deficiencies indicated in the analysis should be eliminated.

To increase the provision of online theoretical resources in specialized study courses in the programme.

For the highest quality acquisition of the study programme, it would be necessary to supplement both electronic and printed resources with the latest professional literature and periodicals.

To check consistency among the Annex 7.5, Annex 7.6 and Appendix 2-6, making sure that all the names of the instructors involved are present and the information among the documents matches up.

Long-term recommendations

The person responsible for this (programme director or deputy), should possibly re-group the learning outcomes of the KREMS programme into wider groups, e.g. research-related skills, general knowledge, export management, and alike, and to fit the Feedback component (p.51 of the self-evaluation report) into the European Qualifications Framework format (knowledge, skills, competencies).

Similarly, it is advisable to reformulate some learning outcomes that are difficult to measure and establish if they are the result of the programme, e.g. ability to conduct business.

It would be desirable if each course leader outlined the detailed evaluation criteria in their courses in addition to the evaluation structure.

It might also be desirable to provide more details about research skills development that then enable graduates to become successful doctoral students.

The programme director is advised to revise the teaching load within the study programme to make sure it is distributed more evenly.

More full time elected faculty members should be involved in delivery of the study process in order to strengthen the local academic potential.

Research capacity of the study program must be increased. The international Joint Austrian-Latvian research activities might be carried out based on the good cooperation history in teaching.

II. "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

II. "Business Administration" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

Two different professional master study program "Business Administration" versions are submitted for accreditation. The full time 80 CP professional master study programme "Business Administration" has been offered by the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences since 2001. In 2019 Study Quality Committee approved changes in this study programme, allowing implementing the study programme within 1 year duration (40 KP). Both study programme forms are delivered in Latvian language. The graduates are awarded a Professional Master's Degree in Business Administration and a qualification of Manager of the Organization (Organizācijas vadītājs), approved on September 18, 2019 at the meeting of the Tripartite Subcommittee on Vocational Education and Employment, minutes No. 6.

The title of the study programme and the degree and qualification awarded are aligned. (Very minor correction of the definition of the qualification awarded in the diploma supplement (point 2.1) should be done)

The professional master degree programs in business administration are among the most popular study programs all around the world. Graduates of the program are highly demanded by industry.

The admission requirements set for the 80 CP study programme version are 1) Academic Bachelor's degree in the study direction: economics, management, administration and real estate management.

2) Academic Bachelor's or professional Bachelor's degree, or fifth level professional qualification in another study direction and at least two years of managerial work experience.

The admission requirements are similar to the requirements of the analogous programmes in Latvia, and correspond to the legislative regulations. However, no requirements regarding the English language proficiency is defined despite the fact that some courses have literature in English only.

The admission requirements set for the 40 CP study programme version are Professional Bachelor's degree and/or fifth level professional qualification programme in the study direction: economics, management, administration and real estate management.

The admission requirements for the 40 CP study program version are adjusted to the potential students having the professional background in the related (management) direction. Although it is

logical that previous education in the study field is considered, the potential risk regarding acquiring the necessary set of competences, is related to the fact that professions of economist and manager have quite different focuses. This challenge is closely related to the low number (14CP) of credit points for the study courses.

The overall goal of the study programme “Business Management” is “preparation of students for professional practical activities in the field of business management”.

The list of knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired and developed by studying at the 80 CP study program version is quite extensive, it corresponds to the needs of business. The possibility to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences by studying at the short (40CP) study program version is much poorer. Individual student-centred approach is advised for admission at this study program version. The formal compliance with the occupational standard is provided in the Appendix 6.3.

The main parameters of the study programme (the title, the degree and the professional qualification to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements) are seemingly interrelated.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The programme aim, degree, professional qualification, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are seemingly interrelated.

Strengths

1. Professional master level studies in business administration correspond to the needs of business, as well as to the European Commission’s priorities to strengthen competitiveness of European business.
2. The title of the programme reflects the content of the study program properly.
3. Knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired and developed by studying at the 80 CP study program version is quite extensive, it corresponds to the requirements of business.

Weaknesses

1. As the new 40CP study programme version is much poorer by its content in comparison to the 80 CP version, the problems with acquiring the necessary set of competences may occur.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.1. The two versions of the study programme (80 and 40 CP) are quite different as they are designed for different target markets. Unfortunately, no deeper justification and comparative analysis of the content and results to be achieved of the two different study program versions is provided in the self-evaluation report. Keeping in mind that there are just seven 2CP study courses planned for the shorter (one year) version of the programme, the fair justification of particular study courses is of utmost importance. For instance, focusing on investment management at the course “Financial and Investment Management” under the conditions of a very limited number of CP is fairly disputable. The previous education of the students deserves more careful attention and analysis, as study content and competences acquired in the directions - economics, management, administration and real estate management, can vary quite a lot.

Overall, study course descriptions provide guidance into the subject quite good. Objective of the course, expected study results, organization of students’ individual work, evaluation of the study results is provided in the course descriptions.

However, details of some course descriptions raise questions. For instance, prerequisites for some courses looks hard to measure and implement in practice:

- “knowledge in chemistry, biology, natural sciences” is defined as a prerequisite for the course

“Sustainable Society and Environmental management”.

- Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, Management, Marketing and Business Analysis are defined as a prerequisite for the course “Practical Business management”.
- Fundamentals of mathematics, basic knowledge of microeconomics, computer user skills (preferably manage Excel software, including the Solver tool) are defined as a prerequisite for the course “Decision Making in Entrepreneurship”.
- Knowledge and understanding of the regulatory framework in Latvia is defined as a prerequisite for the course “Labour Law and Work Protection”.

It is hard to imagine how compliance with some of those requirements can be ensured, as there is no indication of such knowledge in the admission requirements, and such knowledge might not be acquired as a part of the “professional Bachelor's degree, or fifth level professional qualification in non-management study direction”. Combination of “knowledge in chemistry, biology, natural sciences” might be even more rare among high school graduates.

Some courses have a very extensive list of literature. For example, 12 basic sources of literature of more than 3800 pages and 4 supplementary sources of literature of about 1400 pages for the 2CP course “Organization of Research”. Furthermore just one of those literature sources is in Latvian, the rest are in English. Some other courses have all the literature in English only, as well e.g. “Crisis Management”, and “Quantitative Research Methods”. That might create real problems as English language proficiency is not among the admission requirements.

It is mentioned in the Self-assessment report (SAR): “The topicality and relevance of the content of the study programme to the industry needs is also ensured by monitoring relevant business management education in internationally accredited study programmes.” (p.99, SAR). Reference to some relevant high-quality professional master programs would enlighten that statement.

It is stated in the report, that the programme provides “a relatively wide range of theoretical disciplines and information technology studies” (p.100, SAR). The seven 2 CP business courses (for the short one year study program version) can hardly be considered as “a wide range of theoretical disciplines and information technology studies”. In reality, the study program has rather applied, not theoretical orientation, which goes in line with its mission.

Some other inaccuracies in study course descriptions can be recognized. For instance, 30% of the total grade is attributed to the laboratory works, for the study course “Innovation and Technology Management”, however no laboratory works are indicated in the course schedule. Type of class is missing in the schedule, just numbers of hours are indicated for the course “Decision Making in Entrepreneurship”. The workload for the course “Business valuation” doesn't correspond to the minimum requirements, just 20% of the total workload is allocated for “Work at the library, independent studies”. The total workload for the 2CP course must be at least 80 academic hours.

Usage of a variety of terms in the course descriptions, identifying the workload leads to confusion.

Guidelines for the traineeship, and the master thesis are of good quality and comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments. The traineeship reports and master thesis are of relevant quality. The traineeship reports and master thesis comply with the provisions set forth in the regulatory enactments.

In general, the content of the 80 CP study program version is relevant and complementary, and it complies with the aims of the study programme, ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the current needs of industry. The 40 CP study program version by its content is much poorer. Reaching the complete set of the required study outcomes and meeting the regulatory requirements requests careful evaluation of the background of each potential student and adjusting the study content individually.

2.2. Different study implementation and evaluation methods are indicated in the study course descriptions. Lectures, laboratories, seminars, practical classes, are among the main types of academic activities.

40% of all classes are delivered as contact classes, the remaining refers to different modes of

individual and group activities according to the minimum requirements set by the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia.

For the majority of courses, the total evaluation is calculated as a cumulative result of different course activities. Most study courses have a rather standard set of evaluation methods - class participation, discussions, assignments, presentations, essays tests, exams. Without knowing more about specifics of what these methods entail, it is not easy to conclude if they are enough and indeed serve the learning outcomes assessment. Measuring the study results is of utmost importance also because 45 items of professional knowledge (Appendix 6.5) must be acquired by studying just seven 2CP courses in the short (1 year) version of the study programme. 14CP is even less than one semester.

From the discussions with students and faculty members experts got a confirmation that the variety of student-centered learning and teaching approaches are applied.

Although it is mentioned in the SAR that the group activities are frequently applied, almost no group work method is highlighted in study course descriptions. Group work is typical for business management studies at the master level. According to the experts experience, it is important to supplement/ raise student soft skills for business management studies at master level. To increase students' development and growth, experts suggest raising the role of group work activities.

2.3. According to the information provided by the Self-evaluation report, regularly at the end of each semester, an electronic anonymous questionnaire must be completed by students. Results of the questionnaire are presented in the Self-assessment report.

It is mentioned in the Self - assessment report that the new 40CP study programme version was designed based on the surveys and cooperation with employers. No clarification for that is presented. More information on this case might have been particularly valuable.

Compilation of the data from the survey of the professional Master's study programme "Business Administration" graduates is provided (p.108, 109, SAR). Unfortunately, no analysis of the survey results is presented. The lack of the evaluation/ grading scale doesn't allow to dispel confusion. Some data, e.g. "drop of the satisfaction with the study programme as a whole" from 5,35 (2017/2018) to 3,5 (2018/2019) should have raised concern.

2.4. In general, students of VeUAS have highly evaluated mobility opportunities offered. During the reference period, the ERASMUS+ mobility programme was used either three (p.110, SAR) or four (Appendix 2-11) times by the students of the professional Master's study programme, including participation in the ERASMUS+ professional internship mobility programme. Recognition of the students' study results is carried out in accordance with the regulations of VeUAS and other regulatory enactments. The study courses acquired by the students during the ERASMUS + mobility program in foreign universities have been fully recognized.

The low number of mobility cases can't be considered as a weakness, as that can be explained by the occupation and family status of the master students.

There is dissonance in statistical data regarding students and graduates provided in the self-evaluation documents. Inconsistent and mixed statistical data is provided in the Appendix 6.1. For instance, the number of the 2-nd year students in 2015 had been 14, however the number of graduates in the same year was 19. No explanation how the five extra graduates appear is provided. No deeper analysis of the drop-out is provided. For instance, just 16 graduates out of 35 second year students graduated in 2018, which is less than half.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The two versions of the study programme are provided for the evaluation – the 80CP and the 40CP versions. Both versions have different target markets (applicant backgrounds), different admission requirements, and different contents.

Overall, the descriptions of the study courses/ modules provide the essential information for studies. The structure of the 80CP study programme version ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes, and meets the needs of the business better. The 40CP study programme version is built on the assumption that a lot of knowledge, skills and competences had been acquired at the previous study level.

The study implementation methods, including the evaluation methods, seemingly contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are applied. However, the 40CP study programme version needs much more student centering due to the possible differences in students' previous background.

Strengths

1. Course descriptions are quite detailed.
2. Guidelines for the traineeship, and the final thesis are well designed.

Weaknesses

1. There are imperfections in course descriptions (in more detail described in the analysis).
2. Some courses have a very extensive list of literature. It is doubtful whether such an amount of literature can be studied during the short study period.
3. Limited amount of group activities during studies.
4. 45 items of professional knowledge required by the legislation must be acquired by studying just seven 2CP courses in the short (1 year) version of the study programme. The variety of previous education backgrounds makes this task even more complicated.
5. High drop-out rate.
6. Lack of appropriate analysis of the graduates surveys.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

The self-assessment report indicates that students have access to the VeUAS library and numerous databases, such as EBSCO, Scopus, Science Direct, WoS. The library also has five free-access computers with internet connection for work and study processes and three computers just for VeUAS students. All the databases are available for free from each computer located in the library. Another library space is available through the City Library of Ventspils.

According to the information received from the local library, the library collection is replenished every year depending on the budget.

However, the mechanism of supplying core text books for the study courses doesn't ensure availability of the literature for every student. During the visit at the library and discussions with students, experts clarified that for some courses core textbooks are available, but for some courses just a couple of copies are accessible. For instance, there are just a few copies indicated as the core literature for the course "Financial and Investment Management" available in the library. Besides, two of those literature sources are more than 20 years old, and one of them is in French language. Experts have to admit that the literature issue is not VeUAS specific, other higher education institutions are facing similar challenges. Book supply is heavily dependent on the financial capability of the institution. More extensive usage of the electronic resources, particularly free ones is helping to solve this issue at least at some extent.

The buildings, technical equipment of the classrooms, and IT solutions provide excellent conditions to ensure the quality of the study process. The students have access to the electronic learning resources. The lecture halls are equipped with multimedia projectors, PCs, audio and video equipment for lectures in the class and online. Higher education institutions around the world are going through a period of challenges, the biggest of which is definitely the provision of a distance teaching, learning, and assessment process and VeUAS is not an exception.

The modern, compact campus provides good conditions for studying at VeUAS.

According to the miserly financial data provided about year 2019, the study programme by 98,4% is financed by the state budget. Such a situation is atypical in the Latvian market. That can be considered as a strength in the short run, as well as a potential threat in the future, as the social sciences are not among the priority to be supported by the state. The study fee distribution is atypical in comparison with other study programs of the study field. No explanation for that is provided in the SAR. The director of the programme receives 4% (2879 EUR/yr.) of the programme budget for the operation and development of the programme (Appendix 2.25). That proportion is more favourable in comparison with the majority of other study programs in the study field.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The study provision, informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision in general comply with the specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme, create the prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicate the possibility to ensure a high-quality study process also in the future.

Strengths

1. Modern well-equipped classrooms.
2. The electronic Moodle based study platform supports the in-class activities or even provides opportunities to replace in-class activities by on-line classes under the crisis conditions.
3. Students and faculty have access to the library and numerous databases, such as EBSCO, Scopus, Science Direct, WoS.

Weaknesses

1. Not all the study courses are supplied with the necessary number of core textbooks.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

VeUAS has formal procedures which regulates new faculty attraction and hiring. As it is indicated in the Self-assessment report: "The main criterion in the selection of lecturers is their qualification, work experience, desire to participate in the implementation of innovative projects." Each new candidate's CV is evaluated, the candidates are interviewed by the director of the study programme and the dean. An open lecture is organized to examine pedagogical performance. Also, at the end of the semester the students provide their evaluation by completing questionnaires about each study course they have attended. The lecturers are elected into academic positions in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Latvia, Education Law, and Regulations on Elections for Academic Positions at VeUAS.

To ensure the quality of the field of study "Management, Administration, and Property Management", a study process evaluation and control system has been developed. This system includes regular review of the study process at meetings of the Study and Scientific Councils, the Study Programme Council, the Faculty of Economics and Management Council, where employers and students can participate.

The experts have noticed that VeUAS takes care of study quality and has appropriate formal procedures in place. No problem cases related to the changes in the composition of the teaching staff of the master study program Business Administration were identified.

According to the Appendix 6.5, 16 professors, associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers are teaching at the professional Master's study programme "Business Management". 60% of them are elected at the VeUAS, 40% - guest lecturers. The proportion of the faculty holding a doctoral degree is high enough for the professional master studies - 69%. The formal requirements

of the Law on Higher Education Institutions regarding faculty composition have been met.

The lecturers of the professional Master's study programme "Business Administration" are involved in scientific research activities. Scientific contribution of different academic staff members significantly differs. Some professors are very productive, some – less. However, that is natural, as visiting instructors of the professional program can contribute to the study process not so much by their scientific orientation but rather by their practical managerial experience. Most of the research topics are relevant to the study direction. At the same time, some research topics only indirectly can be associated with the management study direction. Couple of such research topics are: "Establishment of a Research Centre of National Importance for Information, Communication and Signal Processing Technologies". "Preserve, protect and develop significant culture and natural heritage and promote the related services" (p.116, SAR) Value of the practical managerial experience acquired by participation and management of the research projects have been particularly highlighted in the SAR (p.116).

No mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members which particularly contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation is presented in the relevant part 4.6 of the SAR (p.117). Cooperation with industry is described instead, which illustrates and emphasizes the role of business in the study program content development. However there are indications that regular assessment of the study programmes is carried out at the supervisory level (Study Programme Council and the Faculty Council). (Appendix 2.3) The activities of those supervisory bodies are determined by the Regulations of the Faculty of Economics and Management and Regulations of VeUAS Programmes Council.

What regards the whole study direction, during the site visit and meeting with faculty and administration, experts discovered that there is a space for strengthening academic cooperation between the teaching staff members. Different opinions regarding the content and pedagogy of some study courses exist, but possibilities for fruitful cooperation in some instances are missing.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The regulations of the Law on Higher Education Institutions regarding faculty structure teaching at the professional master study program have been met.

Strengths

1. Most of the study courses are taught by the highly qualified local VeUAS professors or visiting faculty members from the business.
2. The proportion of the faculty holding a doctoral degree is high enough for the professional master studies - 69%.
3. Young recent PhD graduates have been attracted as the new academic staff members.

Weaknesses

1. Majority of the scientific achievements are produced by a limited number of faculty members.
2. Not all scientific projects presented in the SAR are fully relevant to the study direction and the study program.
3. Insufficient cooperation of academic staff in improvement of the study courses and their correlation.

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

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with 16.04.2013. Regulation No 202 of Minister Cabinet "Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinošus dokumentus / Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents" However a very minor imperfection in the title of the qualification awarded have been identified. (point 2.1 of the diploma supplement)

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: VeUAS has an agreement in place with Liepaja University to provide students with options to continue education

- 3 3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2-19 confirms that the institution guarantees compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Attached resumes confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with MK. Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi"

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Sample of attached study agreement (annex 24.8) complies with Cabinet Regulation No.70 (23.01.2007.) "Mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement" ("Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi").

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: There are deficiencies in study courses descriptions. (More information under chapter 2.1. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof).

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Formally the programme with 80KP complies with professional standard "Manager of the organization", qualification level: PQL 5, LQF 7. (Appendix 6.3). However, programme version with 40 KP and its compliance with professional standards looks questionable, keeping in mind that all the necessary competences must be acquired by studying just seven 2 CP courses. For instance, focusing on quite specific investment management issues at the course "Financial and Investment Management" under the conditions of a very limited number of CP is fairly disputable. The previous education of the students deserves more careful attention and analyses, as study content and competences acquired in the directions - economics, management, administration and real estate management, can vary quite a lot. (More extensive analyses included in reports 2 chapter - the content of studies and implementation Therefore) In order to ensure that the 40 KP programme meets the requirements set in professional standard, the compliance of its content with the standard must one again be carefully assessed by VeUAS, also, in the context of the admission requirements.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 6.2 confirms that programme complies with State Education Standard.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2.8 confirms that staff complies with requirements.

15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Deficiencies in study courses descriptions have been identified. The title of the qualification awarded must be adjusted. And 40 KP programme's compliance to professional standard should be reviewed

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: The learning outcome achievement is provided by the availability of a variety of financing (mainly state financing, projects), excellent study, work and living infrastructure, access to study materials and communication via Moodle platform, library.

Appropriate core literature for some courses is lacking.

Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The local and visiting academic staff comply with the regulatory requirements.

Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: The study programme leading to the master degree is based on the advances and findings in management science. Conferred by the interviews, observations, and analysis of documents performed by the experts

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The formal requirements of criteria R6 have been partially met, for R7, R8 have been met.

Considerable number of uncertainties and discrepancies have been identified. Particularly the Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof part has a lot of remarks. The newly designed short (40 CP) version of the study programme needs very careful monitoring in the practical implementation due to the risk related to the differences in the previous education of students (the previous degrees of economist and manager still have quite different focuses). Problems with acquiring the necessary set of competences within the 40CP programme version may occur. The risk is reinforced by the VeUAS attempt to impair the admission requirements by unreasonable widening of the previous education background (Approved on 15.05.2019 by the VeUAS Senate, Act Nr.19-51). The attempt was rejected by the external expert (Report of 16.08.2019 by Liga Peiseniece).

After completing the short term recommendations regarding new 40CP programme, the overall assessment of the study programme could be reconsidered.

Evaluation of the study programme "Business Administration"

Evaluation of the study programme:

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Administration"

Short-term recommendations

The title of the qualification in the diploma supplement must be adjusted (point 2.1, both language versions) (till the accreditation committee meeting)

Study course descriptions should be reviewed, the identified inconsistencies should be eliminated. (till the accreditation committee meeting)

Apply a unified standard term/ definition in the course descriptions, identifying the academic workload. (till the accreditation committee meeting)

Prerequisites for some study courses should be revised, only relevant and realistically achievable prerequisites should be left. (till the accreditation committee meeting)

Literature list for some courses should be carefully revised, the outdated literature should be replaced, and the extensive list of literature should be adjusted to the real reading capability of students. (till the accreditation committee meeting)

Consider whether the "investment" part of the study course "Financial and Investment Management" corresponds to the core competence development of managers. (till the accreditation committee meeting) Short-term recommendation (1 - 2 years):

As the new 40CP program has just been launched, carefully analyze whether the 45 items of professional knowledge required by the legislation are fully acquired by the students of the 40CP study program version. Analyze correlation with the different previous education degrees. In case of necessity consider the possibility to increase the number of the study courses.

The mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members should be strengthened to contribute to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation.

Encourage participation in the scientific projects which are fully relevant to the study direction; avoid spending time and efforts in participation in the projects which doesn't contribute to the scientific achievements of the Faculty of Economics and Management

Increase the role of group activities in studies.

Get statistical data regarding students and graduates in order. Perform deeper analysis of the drop out statistics.

More comprehensive analysis of the graduate' survey results should be done; the result of the survey should be taken into consideration for further development of the study program.

Consider the possibility to enrich the scientific activities by involving visiting instructors in joint research projects.

Long-term recommendations

The core textbook/ literature (electronically or in the paper form) should be made available to every student.

Consider the possibility to attract more students paying tuition.

II. "Business Management" ASSESSMENT

II. "Business Management" ASSESSMENT

1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

Doctoral study programme "Business Management" (51345) (further in the text DSP) submitted for accreditation has three different modes of implementation - full-time (three years, 40 credit points per academic year), part-time (three years) and part time extramural studies in Latvian language. Part-time studies require a time period longer than three years, but DSP is implemented only for full-time students during the whole time period since previous accreditation (2013-2020). During the site visit experts clarified with the study program management that only the full time version should be considered for evaluation. DSP is ending by elaboration and defense of doctoral thesis and by granting scientific degree issued by another HEI. (neither sample diploma nor diploma supplement are attached to the self-assessment report - SAR, blank diploma form is submitted instead). Currently according to the legal requirements doctoral degree should be Doctor of Science (Ph.D.) in Economics and Entrepreneurship. As VeUAS has no Promotion Council, the legal agreement with another HEI having the Council must be signed.

The aim of the DSP is to "prepare a generation of young scientists for international level scientific research and academic work, as well as for scientific and organizational work in public and private institutions" (Self-evaluation report). The aim of the DSP is specified by three tasks and five learning outcomes. Learning outcomes, excluding one learning outcome, do not comply with the requirements of knowledge, skills and competency described in the Table 2 (Qualifications framework, level 8) of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education (Regulations No.322, issued by Cabinet of Ministers, 13 June). Such shortage significantly affects interrelated requirements for DSP course descriptions and therefore implementation of the study programme.

Initially, the doctoral program was implemented as a joint study program together with RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance (BA). However the cooperation agreement regarding carrying out the joint PhD programme was discontinued around 2016 (no precise date of that is provided). According to the information acquired during the site visit, a new cooperation agreement was signed between RISEBA, BA and VeUAS in 2017. However that agreement is rather a one-way agreement ensuring VeUAS students' possibilities to benefit from RISEBA and BA. Furthermore, the incomplete draft of this agreement (without signatures) is enclosed for accreditation. No information about that cooperation is found in the www pages of RISEBA, BA. Instead, both institutions have indicated a different partnership in carrying out their doctoral program. Admission requirements state that applicants should have a Master's degree in Economics or Business Administration, or Master's degrees of other fields (if they possess work experience in business management, public management or educational work management and the necessary knowledge in management sciences).

During the 2013-2019 number of doctoral students has decreased more than three times - from 33 in 2013 till 10 in 2019. There was no admission to the DSP in 2016, 2017 and 2020. In the academic year 2019/2020 doctoral students of VeUAS made the last use of study courses and seminars from the partner institutions RISEBA and BA. Both former partner institutions established a new cooperation in delivering the joint DSP with SSE in Riga and Kaiserslautern University of Applied Sciences (<http://www.jointphd.eu/phd-programme/about-phd-programme/>). In February 2020 VeUAS obtained the license to implement a new joint doctoral study programme "Economics and Business" in cooperation with Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViUAS). Reasons for application to get a license for a new Doctoral study program are not described in the Self-evaluation report of VeUAS. Transfer of doctoral students of VeUAS from the DSP "Business Management (51345)" to the newly licensed DSP has not occurred yet. Nobody from

interviewed doctoral students during the Visit confirmed intention to switch to newly licensed DSP. There is no intention of VeA to enroll new students in the “old” DSP “Business Management” (51345).

Only full-time doctoral students were admitted during the whole period of assessment, which provides an opportunity to apply for the state budget funding and enroll the state budget funded students. Nevertheless, factual employment of students parallel to doctoral studies and family/children care responsibilities repeatedly confirms the need for part-time DSP in the VeUAS. Among admitted doctoral students are also those, who had completed study courses in doctoral programmes of other higher education institutions. Three doctoral students of VeUAS defended doctoral thesis and were awarded doctoral degrees by Promotion Councils of other institutions of higher education.

Good knowledge of English language of many advanced Master’s degree holders from Latvian institutions of higher education, including the VeUAS, as well as foreign applicants, would allow them to implement DSP in English language, too. It would be even more beneficial for Latvia to make amendments in the Law of higher education establishments, allowing Business Administration and Management programmes in Latvia for local residents to run fully in English language, too.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

VeUAS has accumulated experience in delivery of a full-time DSP in Latvian language in collaboration with RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance. There are motivated and purposeful doctoral students ready to defend their doctoral theses outside VeUAS.

Strengths: Adequate experience of scientific supervision of doctoral students and jointly implemented theoretical part of DSP with partner institutions, which created preconditions for a growth of the new generation of doctoral degree holders, including the academic staff of the VeUAS, involved in implementing DSP.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Absence of implementation of part-time doctoral studies with length more than three years and offer of doctoral studies in English language;
- 2) Learning outcomes, excluding one learning outcome, do not comply with the requirements of knowledge, skills and competency described in the Table 2 (Qualifications framework, level 8) of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education (Regulations No.322, issued by Cabinet of Ministers, 13 June).
- 3) The Agreement with another HEI having a Promotion Council is missing. That contradicts the obligation of VeUAS to award the diploma, indicated in the study contract.
- 4) Lack of clear information about the reasons to get a license for a new joint Doctoral study program, which partially explains insufficient intention of the faculty administration, academic staff and doctoral students to perform a transfer of students from the DSP “Business Management (51345)” to the newly licensed joint DSP “Economics and Business”.

2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.1. Content of studies in the DSP is described in quite a detailed way (see Appendix of the SAR - Study course map, Plan of the study programme, Descriptions of study courses). Inconsistency in content and implementation of doctoral studies emerge from insufficient description of learning outcomes (see Section 1.1), which is too much “process oriented” (for example, “doctoral study programme allows to gather academic personnel, highly qualified in business administration”) and only partially comply with Qualifications framework, level 8 of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education. Some courses (Marketing management) contain recurrence of study

results with concepts from pre-doctoral level (“understands the basic concepts and essence of marketing, understands the basic principles of marketing”).

Theoretical study courses are concentrated mostly in the first study year (30 credit points) and with the third semester courses (compulsory courses and electives) they form 1/3 of a doctoral student work-load. During the implementation of newly licensed DSP academic collegial bodies (including students and graduates) have to analyze the quantity and content of study courses in a detailed way. During the site-visit doctoral students and graduates highly evaluated research methods oriented study courses (Theoretical framework of research, Research design, Contemporary research in business) and noted that previously studied basic theoretical background courses (for example, Microeconomics) not always meets their needs for applied analysis related to doctoral studies.

From the Appendix 8.4 not always is clear, which institution, person, and when approved or updated course descriptions. It is unclear which person or persons are authors of the course description (for example, the course “Research design”). Several courses - “Innovation Management”, “Project Management” and “Theoretical Framework of Research” were approved in 2011, as a result the recommended literature is not sufficiently updated. Information concerning course approval is missing for the course “Risk and Crisis Management”. The recommended literature of the course relate to the years 1997-2008. In some cases (Financial management, 4 credits) study load of recommended mandatory literature (7 sources) and supplementary literature (23 sources) exceeds allocated time limit of 4 credit points. It seems that the members of the Doctoral study council (DSC), appointed by the Rector of VeUAS with the aim to coordinate implementation of the DSP, does not always pay attention to formal procedures of approval of study courses. The descriptions of the study courses seem to be a responsibility of their authors. In general, course descriptions comply with the aim of the DSP, but partially comply with the regulatory requirements. Defended doctoral dissertations meet the quality requirements of VeUAS and comply with national regulations, and provisions set by higher education institutions, in which Promotion Councils dissertations are defended.

2.2. Doctoral students and graduates conclude that evaluation methods of study results are appropriate, individual student-centred approach is respected by supervisors and responsible academic staff.

2.3. Analysis of submitted information, interviews with the doctoral students, graduates and employers during a site-visit testify openness of faculty administration and academic staff to consider doctoral students’ recommendations to improve content of doctoral studies and to choose research objectives with sufficient scientific novelty. At the end of semester, doctoral students submit a progress report, where they indicate obstacles that hinder studies and give suggestions for improvements. Reports are evaluated at the end of each semester at a meeting of the Council of the Doctoral Study Programme.

2.4. Students appreciate opportunity of outgoing mobility, which fit to the DSP requirements and research objectives. The main barrier to the outgoing mobility during a full-time doctoral studies is inability to combine it with full-time work duties and often with family life responsibilities. Difficulties to complete doctoral studies with a defended dissertation are rooted in the fact that theoretical studies in the VeA are separated from the doctoral thesis defense in the Promotion Council of other higher education institution. Besides that, according to education statistics regulations, such graduates of VeUAS are listed in the graduation statistics of other higher education institutions.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

History of implementation of the doctoral study programme by VeUAS in cooperation with RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance leads to its positive evaluation by doctoral students and graduates. Necessary basis for further development of doctoral studies in VeA with other partner institutions have been established. Procedures of approval and updating course descriptions should be reinforced.

Strengths:

Research methods oriented study courses are highly evaluated by doctoral students.

Faculty administration and academic staff take into account doctoral students' recommendations to improve the content of doctoral studies programme and to choose research objectives with sufficient scientific novelty.

Defended doctoral dissertations meet the quality requirements of VeA and comply with national regulations, and provisions set by higher education institutions, in which Promotion Councils dissertations are defended.

Weaknesses:

Insufficient description of learning outcomes influence imperfect content of course descriptions. Course descriptions only partially comply with Qualifications framework, level 8 of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education.

From the course description not always is clear by which institution, person, and when it was approved or updated.

Difficulties in timely completion of doctoral studies with a defended dissertation, which are rooted in the fact that theoretical studies in the VeUAS are separated from the defense of doctoral thesis, which occur in the Promotion Councils of other HE institution.

3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

3.1. Library resources, access to a databases and material and technical provision comply with the conditions for the implementation and development of the doctoral study programme. Ventspils city municipality and employers are supportive to doctoral studies in the VeUAS. Public access to electronic versions of defended master and doctoral theses in the VeUAS would be welcomed not only by the local academic community but internationally as well. Still an insertion of a particular thesis in the Latvian National library Academic repository is voluntary and based on a decision made by a student. Therefore only 6 theses from the VeUAS are available there, among them none of defended doctoral dissertations from the VeUAS doctoral study programme.

3.2. Historical cooperation experience in implementation of doctoral study programme with RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance, academic contacts (conferences, visits, publications) with other higher education institutions in Latvia and abroad, joint participation in the Latvian National research programme and various research projects create prerequisites for the further development of doctoral studies in the VeA, particularly to develop joint doctoral study programme "Economics and Business" in cooperation with Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViUAS).

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Library resources, access to databases and material and technical provision comply with the conditions for the implementation and development of the doctoral study programme. Resources and provision of the doctoral study programme meets essential requirements, but VeUAS Library resources does not include electronic versions of defended master's and doctoral theses.

Strengths:

Ventspils city municipality and employers are supportive in implementation of doctoral studies in the VeUAS.

Cooperation experience in joint implementation of doctoral study programme, academic contacts with other higher education institutions in Latvia and abroad, joint participation in the Latvian National research programme and various research projects are the prerequisites to ensure successful development of the joint doctoral study programme "Economics and Business" in cooperation with Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViUAS).

Weaknesses:

There is no public access to the electronic versions of defended master and doctoral theses in the VeUAS. Submission of the doctoral theses to the Latvian National library Academic repository is voluntary and limited, and based on students' decisions.

4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

4.1. Qualified elected academic staff is involved in running of the DSP – professors, associate professors and docent (all with doctoral degrees). Expected defenses of doctoral dissertations by doctoral students fit the development plans of VeA and will allow the continued process of rejuvenation of academic staff.

4.2. Regulatory requirement states that to run a doctoral study programme institution of higher education needs to have five doctors, of which at least three are experts approved by Latvian Council of Science in the area of awarding doctoral degrees. Acknowledgement in the Appendix 2.2 states that this requirement is fulfilled. At present a new generation of academic staff is incorporated in the doctoral study programme. According to information given in the Latvian Council of Science web-page (accessed 15.11.2020) expert rights are awarded to the four elected staff members. Information of approval is missing for the three elected staff members. Two out of six visiting professors, involved in implementation of the DSP, have the Latvian Council of Science expert right in economics and business. However, just 14 CP of the study courses out of 40CP are delivered by the elected professors of VeUAS. The rest are delivered by visiting professors or have vacancies.

4.3. Quantitative results of scientific publications and involvement in research projects contribute to the implementation and development of doctoral studies. Fluency of English language conversation and academic writing, as well as provision by administration qualitative English language editorial services would contribute to widening scope of publications in highly evaluated peer-reviewed international journals.

4.4. Academic staff is involved in scientific research in the field related to the content of the study programme both at national and international level. The obtained information is used in lectures, seminars and individual consultations. Most publications are accessible from databases through the Library of VeUAS and Internet sources.

4.5. There is a complete set of academic collegial bodies established according to legal regulations and by initiative of VeA, which contributes to improvement of doctoral studies. Quite frequent replacement of principal heads and leaders, related to doctoral studies, sometimes leads to insufficient heredity. Larger involvement of academic staff in decision making and quality assurance procedures would help to increase collaborative power and to accelerate development.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

The doctoral study programme is an important precondition in renewal of qualified academic staff in the Faculty of Economics and Management. Increase in English language proficiency and widening of expert status awarded by Latvian Science Council to the involved academic staff would give additional value added to newly licensed doctoral study programme.

Strengths:

Academic staff is involved in scientific research in the field related to the content of the study programme both at national and international level.

Expected defenses of doctoral dissertations by doctoral students fit the development plans of VeA and will allow the continuation of the process of renewal of academic staff.

Weaknesses:

Insufficient fluency in English language of selected staff members.

Rather low percentage of elected and visiting professors are experts in the area of awarding doctoral degree, approved by Latvian Council of Science.

Significant part (26CP out of 40CP) of the study courses are implemented by non-VeUAS full time faculty, which might lead to the risk of sustainability in the future.

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

Requirements

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

Assessment of compliance: Non-compliant

Justification: No sample diploma is submitted for evaluation, blank diploma form is submitted instead. Diplomas are issued by other HEI, having Promotion councils. However, no contract with other HEI is enclosed.

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

Assessment of compliance: Non-compliant

Justification: No relevant contract is submitted. An incomplete draft document without signatures has been submitted instead

3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2-19 confirms that the institution guarantees compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Attached resumes confirms that state language proficiency is compliant with MK. Nr. 733 "Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu, valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi"

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2.22 confirms compliance with requirements.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Conclusion of the Higher Education Council Nr. 1.10/37 (issued on May 8, 2020) and Affirmation by VeUAS (Appendix 2.2).

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Sample of attached study agreement (annex 24.8) complies with MK. Nr. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi". However, the formulation of the degree awarded differs from the one in the study program description. Besides, according to the article 4 VeUAS is taking obligation to: "guarantee... awarding the appropriate education document". Such an obligation is not valid without an additional legal contract with another HEI having Promotion Council.

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Insufficient approval and renewal of course descriptions: from the course description not always is clear, by which institution, person, and when it was approved or updated. Insufficient description of learning outcomes influence imperfect content of some course descriptions.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Opinion has been provided by the Council for Higher Education. Programme complies with requirements.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Justification:

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Annex 2.8 confirms that staff complies with requirements.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Assessment criteria No.1: Implementation of the DSP is partially compliant with the Qualifications framework (level 8) of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education (Regulations No.322, issued by Cabinet of Ministers, 13 June) due to facts that learning outcomes of the DSP, excluding one learning outcome, do not comply with the requirements of knowledge, skills and competency described in the Table 2 (Qualifications framework, level 8) of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education (Regulations No.322, issued by Cabinet of Ministers, 13 June). The sample of the diploma is not submitted which leads to non compliance with formal accreditation requirements.

Assessment criteria No.2:

A valid document confirming that the higher education institution will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution (a contract with another accredited higher education institution), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued, is not submitted.

Assessment criteria No.8

A sample of the study agreement has deficiencies to be corrected.

Assessment criteria No.9

Insufficient approval and renewal of course descriptions: from the course description not always is clear, by which institution, person, and when it was approved or updated. Insufficient description of learning outcomes influence imperfect content of some course descriptions. Learning outcomes, excluding one learning outcome, do not comply with the requirements of knowledge, skills and competency described in the Table 2 (Qualifications framework, level 8) of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education (Regulations No.322, issued by Cabinet of Ministers, 13 June).

General assessment of table above (R5): Partially compliant, assuming that the deficiency No. 2 will be eliminated instantly and the sample diploma will be submitted.

Requirements (R6-R8)

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Justification: Unclear perspectives to complete the doctoral study programme, to achieve learning outcomes and to defend doctoral dissertations in a situation, when the former partner institutions RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance changed collaborative partner institutions.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Rather low percentage of elected and visiting professors are experts (approved by the Latvian Science Council) in the area of awarding doctoral degree.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Justification: Three doctoral dissertations evaluated by reviewers and by Promotion councils of other higher education institutions give a proof that DSP is based on advances in economics business management.

Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Initially (in 2013) the study programme was carried out only in a full-time mode (in Latvian language) as a joint program with RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance. During the evaluation period three students graduated from the study programme with a defense of doctoral thesis in the higher education institutions outside Ventspils. In the meantime there are unclear perspectives to complete the doctoral study programme, to achieve learning outcomes, which are described insufficiently, and to defend doctoral dissertations in a situation, when the initial partner institutions of VeUAS - RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance have left the consortium. During the site visit experts clarified with the study program management that only the full time version should be considered for evaluation, therefore, the assessment is provided only for full time implementation.

Strengths:

Cooperation experience in joint implementation of doctoral study programme, academic contacts with other institutions of higher education in Latvia and abroad, joint participation in the Latvian National research programme and various research projects are the prerequisites to ensure successful development of the joint doctoral study programme "Economics and Business" in cooperation with Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViUAS).

Weaknesses:

Absence of part-time doctoral studies for a longer period than three years, and offer the DSP in English language.

Insufficient description of the learning outcomes, which comply with the requirements of knowledge, skills and competency described in the Table 2 (Qualifications framework, level 8) of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education (Regulations No.322, issued by Cabinet of Ministers, 13 June).

Difficulties in completion of doctoral studies with a defended dissertation, which are rooted in the fact that theoretical studies in the VeA are separated from the doctoral thesis defense in the Promotion Council of other institution.

Lack of intention from the administration, academic staff and doctoral students to perform transfer of students from the DSP "Business Management (51345)" to the newly licensed DSP "Economics and Business".

Evaluation of the study programme "Business Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Business Management"

Short-term recommendations

Submit a sample of the diploma to be issued for the completing the study programme.

Submit a valid document confirming that the higher education institution will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution (a contract with another accredited higher education institution), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued (till the accreditation committee meeting).

Provide data in the Appendix 8.1 of the Self-evaluation report separately for state budget funded and tuition fees paying doctoral students, and specify title of tables in the Appendix 8.1 indicating that enrolled and exmatriculated students belong to the VeUAS (till the accreditation committee meeting).

Replace a draft document submitted as the Appendix of Self-evaluation report, "Sadarbības līgums Nr. (?) no 2016.g. (?) starp Ventspils Augstskolu un starpaugstskolu DSP "Biznesa vadība", kuru īsteno Biznesa, māksas un tehnoloģiju augstskola un Banku augstskola" with a scanned file of the signed original document (Agreement) (till the accreditation committee meeting).

Adjust a course descriptions with the learning outcomes, which comply with the requirements of knowledge, skills and competency described in the Table 2 (Qualifications framework, level 8) of the Regulation about Latvian Classification of Education (Regulations No.322, issued by Cabinet of Ministers, 13 June) (till the accreditation committee meeting).

Adjust the study contract according to the legal requirements (correct definition of degree, legal guarantee to defend the doctoral dissertation in the partner institution) (1 - 2 years).

Take actions to discontinue delivery of the existing study program DSP "Business Management (51345)", transfer students to the newly licensed joint DSP "Economics and Business". In case of rejecting that option by some students, complete the DSP "Business Management (51345)" for them in the earliest possible time-term. (1 - 2 years).

Long-term recommendations

Apply a cooperation experience from the joint implementation of doctoral study programme "Business Management" (51345) with RISEBA and BA School of Business and Finance, academic contacts with other institutions of higher education in Latvia and abroad, joint the Latvian National research programme and various research projects to develop and strengthen a sustainable joint doctoral study programme "Economics and Business" in cooperation with Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViUAS).

Discuss with the students, graduates, social partners and partner higher education institutions option to launch the DSP in English language and the version for part-time students.

Evaluate a current potential of the doctoral degree holders in the Faculty of Economics and Management of the VeUAS and to discuss in the academic community of the VeUAS perspectives to develop and finalize DSP with defence of doctoral dissertations in the own Promotion council.

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

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

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:		Partially compliant	Although VeUAS have a quality policy and quality assurance system in place, there are shortcomings that need to be addressed, for example, the functioning of a mechanism for the development and internal approval of the study programmes, as well as the supervision of their performance and periodic inspection must be improved, Internal regulations and mechanisms for recruitment and election of teaching staff to academic positions are in place, but it is important to ensure that VeUAS is following regulations.
R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.		Partially compliant	Level of cooperation with regional partners is high and well established. The university has strong local, regional connections, mainly with the Municipality and the local business actors. VeUAS has a long list of Erasmus + agreements. All the agreements must be updated as they are expiring in 2020/2021. Information about the essential active academic partnerships between VeUAS (FEM) and other Latvian higher education institutions is not available.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).		Partially compliant	Despite that the number of scientific publications and participation in international conferences during 2013-2018 has increased, the international scientific visibility is still very low.
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.		Partially compliant	The institution in general tries to fulfill recommendations. Although many recommendations are still partially completed and require further attention in order to fulfill them at an acceptable level. English languages skills of staff and overall research output must be improved.

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	Business Management (42345)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
2	Start-up Management (42345)	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Good
3	Business Administration (43345)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Average
4	International Business and Export Management (45345)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
5	Business Administration (47345)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Average

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
6	Business Management (51345)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Average

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

In general, the experts have uniform opinion about the study field and particular study programs.