

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: RISEBA University of Applied Sciences

Study field: Information and Communication Sciences

Experts:

1. Agnese Dāvidsone (Chair of the Experts Group)
2. Lana Ciboci (Secretary of the Experts Group)
3. Alicia Presencio Herrero
4. Katrīna Rudoviča (Student Union of Latvia)
5. Kristīne Tjarve (Employers' Confederation of Latvia)

## Summary Assessment of the Study Field

### Summary Assessment of the Study Field

The Information and Communication Sciences, hereafter ICS, study field at RISEBA University of Applied Sciences (RISEBA) entails one bachelor's and one master's study programme. The study field currently has been transferred from the Faculty of Media and Communication to the Faculty of Business and Economics. The ICS study field has an important place in the RISEBA's development strategy. In the past, the study field has been successful in attracting students that study in Russian and Latvian. Currently, the study field is admitting students studying in Latvian only and preparing for admission of English speaking students. The Russian speaking groups are to graduate in the coming years.

RISEBA has established a quality policy and is in process of developing a quality assurance system that contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programmes in the ICS study field. The system requires continuous improvement - experts have provided detailed analysis and recommendations for improvement further in this report. The procedures for the development and review of the study programmes of the study field and the feedback mechanisms are defined and they are logical. RISEBA collects and analyses vast amounts of quantitative data through frequent surveys, and the data are used later for taking decisions on the necessary changes to improve the ICS study field. One group that is not regularly surveyed, are the teaching staff members.

RISEBA has a good resource base and the students and the teaching staff have access to the necessary resources to ensure the quality of teaching and learning process. One challenge for the institution and the ICS study field is the accessibility of some of the premises for disabled people.

There are ambitious goals set in research, and there is a motivational system in place for the academic staff to involve in research. There is a need to increase activity in international research projects and raise the number of high quality publications. More active research in the field of communication and specifically strategic communication is advisable since currently most active research happens in the field of advertising.

The ICS study field has established strong cooperation with various stakeholders. A system for involvement of partners in the implementation of the study field is developed, however, for it to contribute to the improvement of the study process, more emphasis should be placed on working with public relations (PR) professionals. Good connections are established with the advertising industry and the advertising part of the bachelor's study programme is strong, however, closer connection is needed with the public relations industry and higher involvement of professionals currently working in the field of PR is needed.

Both study programmes at ICS study field are professional programmes and graduates receive professional qualification. The master's programme graduates receive the qualification of Strategic communication manager. For the bachelor's study programme, the intention of the programme management is to provide three qualifications: Public relations manager, Advertising manager, and Event producer. In the study programme, currently, there are students in all three specialization streams. However, by the time of the accreditation experts' visit and the period while this assessment report was prepared, only one professional standard (Public relations manager) for the bachelor's programme was in force.

During the visit, experts learned that graduates are satisfied with their study experience and with the quality of the knowledge and skills obtained. The study process is based on practical examples and thus the students are well prepared for working in the industry. However, the potential of involving graduates in the study field after graduation is not fully exploited - there could be different forms and ways how the ICS study field could involve its graduates in the implementation of the study programmes. There is an elaborated discount system for students and it is based on fair competition and appreciation of student creative achievements and other efforts.

There was recommendation from previous accreditation experts to involve students in the decision making bodies, however, currently there is still need for improvement, especially the selection of representatives from the student body to decision making bodies such as the Senate and others, and involvement of students council in the Quality assurance system.

The teaching staff demonstrates loyalty to RISEBA. There is a transparent motivational system of teaching staff in place.

From the employers perspective, there is a lack of professional event producers, and such initiative of RISEBA to start preparing new professionals in this field is very timely and highly appreciated. One aspect to consider on institutional level which was derived from the document analysis and the interviews that experts conducted during the visit is the following: looking at the current developments of the event industry, it seems that the intended specialization of Event producer fits better and is more related to topics that are included in the Audiovisual Media Arts (AMA) study programme. Therefore, the experts' suggestion is to consider options of opening Event producer specialization in the AMA study programme.

For the master's programme it seems like a relatively low point currently in terms of the number of students admitted, however, the graduates of the study programme are very satisfied with their study experience. The experts wish for the director of the study programme to apply the know how accumulated in other study fields in the Faculty of Business and Economics to attract students for the studies in English.

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

### **Analysis**

RISEBA University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter - RISEBA) is a privately owned higher education institution (hereinafter - HEI) with over 29 years of experience (was established in 1992). Since 2008 RISEBA has created "Information and Communication Science" study field (hereinafter - ICS study field) with two study programmes. The three faculties of RISEBA - Faculty of Business and Economics, Faculty of Media and Communication, and Faculty of Architecture and Design - offer from bachelor's to doctoral level education, offering full-time, part-time and distance learning in Latvian, English and Russian (recently not admitting new student groups in Russian). According to the self-assessment report (hereinafter - SAR) information and the attached management structure of the RISEBA, the study field is subordinated to the Faculty of Media and Communication, but referring to the on-site visit interviews with the HEI administration and the head of the ICS study field it was mentioned that it is subordinated to the Faculty of Business and Economics (hereinafter - FBE). Such changes happened because their development plans are connected to being part of the FBE and launching studies in English. Experts agree that it is a good and strategic decision for the study field export plans - focusing on globalization.

RISEBA offers two study programmes in ICS study field- professional bachelor's study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" (42342) and professional master's degree programme "Public Relations Management" (47342). Programmes in the study field have been devised in accordance with the principles of the Bologna declaration, and their strategic goal is to dynamically develop RISEBA under the auspices of Latvia's higher education system, in order that the attained degree and diploma are recognised in the European job market, and are useful for further education in other European countries.

The activities and development of the RISEBA ICS study field have been based on the overall concept of the HEI strategy from 2017 to 2020, but the new strategy is still in the process of development. The strategic guidelines of the past period were aimed at ensuring an interdisciplinary study process, promoting cooperation between different fields of study at the HEI itself, as well as with other HEIs in Latvia and abroad. Analysing the goals of the ICS study field (mentioned in the

SAR), they are clear and understandable, in accordance with the overall strategic development objectives of RISEBA and the tendencies of society and national economy. The goals of the study field are related to the process of providing modern and high-quality education in accordance with the requirements of the labour market in both bachelor's and master's study programmes. In order to promote not only HEI, but also the competitiveness of a particular study field, as well as to be in line with RISEBA's internationalization strategy, ICS study field has started reorienting the study process to English (previously implemented in Russian) in order to have a competitive offer not only in the former Commonwealth of Independent States (hereinafter - CIS) countries, but also for European citizens.

RISEBA offers a unique bachelor's study programme in Latvia, which combines three specializations: public relations (PR), advertising and event production, allowing students to choose a specific field in the third year of study. As the study field in the bachelor's study programme is provided in these three specializations, the HEI representatives have explored the needs of the labour market in all three fields - public relations, advertising and event production. In order to assess the competition, HEI has also analysed other Latvian HEI study offers in the mentioned specializations. Although these specializations are unique and during on-site visits were given positive assessment by both students and employers representing the advertising and event industry, but experts have not been able to assess the compliance of advertising and event producers' qualifications with the industry's professional standards. The goals of the study field related to the specialization in public relations in both professional bachelor's and master's programmes are in accordance with the requirements of the industry professional standards (professional standard "Public Relations Manager" and professional standard "Strategic Communication Manager"), whereas specialization in advertising and event production cannot be assessed, as industry professional standards have not been developed and approved yet. Experts have access to the draft of the Advertising Manager Profession Standard, which has not been finally approved yet and received comments from the developers of the Marketing Manager Profession Standard that the content of the mentioned standards overlaps but representatives from Ministry of Welfare mentioned that there is missing a part for communication industry (protocol from PINTSA meeting <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/media/7175/download>).

During the on-site visit, the experts' group learned that both students and lecturers emphasized the good cooperation between the study field and the Faculty of Multimedia, where it is possible not only to acquire multimedia skills, but also to create joint projects with students of other specializations. This cooperation between both faculties shows that ICS study field still has a strong link with the Faculty of Multimedia, experts see this as a positive aspect for the future development as well. Such good collaboration between different faculties and study fields happening at RISEBA, can be encouraged, especially as the HEI is small. As RISEBA offers professional higher education programmes, students are provided with a rich offer of internships in the study specializations they acquire. Internships are provided in close cooperation with communication industry professionals.

Although RISEBA offers both bachelor's and master's degree programmes, both SAR and on-site visit interviews with students indicated that only a few graduates of the bachelor's programme choose to continue their studies in HEI's master's programmes (including Public Relations Management). During the one-site visit with the head of the study field it was also acknowledged that RISEBA has not yet fully used the existing resources - graduates of the bachelor's study programme and their motivation for master's studies. As one of the potential directions of attracting students to the master's study programme establishment of cooperation with employers, for example, by offering discounts, etc. was mentioned.

It was observed during the one-site visit that, from students' perspective, the administrative staff and teaching staff is approachable and open to communication, easy to reach, this is very positive. The HEI has developed this study field not only on the basis of its strategy, but also on various studies on the needs of the national economy and the development trends of the Latvian state, also

covering the sustainability issues.

According to the SAR (p. 31), the Advertising and Public Relations Department is responsible for implementation and development of the study field, the availability and development of scientific and academic staff members, and methodological support. Participates in the development of new programmes corresponding to the study field and assessment of the quality of existing programmes. Facilitates the performance of scientific research in a sector corresponding to the study field.

Currently, the management of the study field and its corresponding study programmes is implemented at the RISEBA by one employee – the head of the Advertising and Public Relations Department and study programme director, and she is subordinate to the Dean of the FBE. The dean of the FBE evaluates the work of the director of the study field and the programme director.

The study field is administered by one person, who is responsible for both bachelor's and master's study programmes in both currently implemented study languages (Latvian and Russian). In the future, if the HEI is granted the right to implement the study programme in English, a foreign expert will be recruited to lead it. The experts had the opportunity to meet with the potential director and hear his vision of how the study field in English could work. However, this person did not have an official work agreement as programme director with RISEBA by the time of the experts' visit.

The main responsibilities of the study programme director are related to the development and implementation of study programmes to ensure the preparation and planning of the study programme content for implementation, as well as to cooperate with the HEI administration to ensure a quality study process (SAR, p. 31). She is responsible for organization of the whole study process, as well as the operation of the internal quality system, ensuring regular quality monitoring of academic staff (observing lecturers' work, process of lectures), participating in study programme development and quality assessment. Since the bachelor's study programme is offered in three specializations, experts suggest that professionals in the field who work in the particular specializations on a daily basis must be involved in the study field decision-making process.

One of the duties of the head of the study programme is to choose, in coordination with the head of the respective department, qualified staff for work in the respective study programme. It is essential that the head of the study programme knows the field, from which the professionals should be attracted, cooperates with the employers and professional organizations of the field (SAR, p. 32). As RISEBA implements professional study programmes, it is important that educators who teach the future professionals of the field know not only the theoretical aspects of the field, but also the needs of the our days labour market and the specifics of work.

The management process of the study programme is organized in cooperation with various structural units of the HEI and it is sufficient; it is available in the Annex to SAR "RISEBA decision-making bodies".

The management structure of the ICS study field and the corresponding study programmes is partly oriented towards the development of the study field, because the experts observed that, for example, the Study Programmes Councils do involve independent external experts, but to a large extent the councils are staffed by HEI lecturers or visiting lecturers who are intensively and regularly involved in the study process with several study courses. Student representatives are lacking in the councils. In the experts' conversations with the students, it could be understood that they are not informed about the monitoring and improvement of the study programmes, which suggests that student involvement in this process is either formal or does not involve all the parties mentioned in the HEI's regulatory documents.

The conversation with the director of the study programme and also SAR shows that every year in order to ensure the quality and supervision of the study programme, peer observations are carried out and study course descriptions are reviewed and updated, taking into account the results of student surveys at the end of study courses.

Although the students in the on-site visit positively responded to the cooperation with the head of ICS study field for her support and interest, the experts observed that it is necessary to involve

experts in specific fields in the supervision of such a large bachelor's study programme. Since the ICS study field in the bachelor's study programme offers students to specialize in one of the three specializations - public relations, advertising or event production, HEI should think about assigning a vice-head to each of the specializations who would be well acquainted with the needs of the specific industry.

Meeting with the management of the study field and the academic staff of the HEI confirmed that the support provided by the administrative and technical staff is of high quality to ensure the entire study process in accordance with the requirements and modern technological solutions. During the on-site visit interviews the teaching staff especially emphasized the support for the provision of scientific activity, participation in conferences and professional development programmes.

Although insufficient use of opportunities provided by digital platforms has been mentioned as one of the weaknesses in various parts of the SAR, on-site interviews with academic and administrative staff have shown that since spring 2020 HEI has taken a number of steps to educate academic staff on the use of digital platforms in study process providing both training and offering additional materials to those who go through the process individually. Materials on work on various digital platforms and on remote work are available on the E-RISEBA website and in a closed Facebook group for academic staff. RISEBA provides lecturers with the opportunity to give lectures on the ZOOM platform, O365 environment or MOODLE embedded video system, as well as a paid Miro.com platform is available to all lecturers.

During the on-site visit interviews with teaching staff experts group learned that in order to provide study programmes in English, RISEBA provides HEI teachers with English language courses according to the previous level of knowledge to prepare for TOEFL exams.

Referring to SAR and on-site interviews with RISEBA's administration, since the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year HEI has paid special attention to development of MOODLE system, as a result of which teaching staff is not only trained on this platform, but also regulations are worked out for the development of study courses on this platform. The material is based on the Distance learning study course component teaching-methodological material (According SAR Annex No. MN0003-01).

During the on-site interviews, the teaching staff emphasized that they were well acquainted with the motivation system in order to receive a higher salary according to one of the levels provided by RISEBA.

The system developed by HEI for the admission of students is understandable and logical, it allows both Latvian and foreign entrants to apply for studies. The application process in both the bachelor's study programme and the master's study programme complies with the general conditions applicable to the admission of students to higher education institutions.

During the interviews with students experts learned that students have the opportunity to use tuition fee discounts, as well as apply for HEI-subsidized budget places by participating in the competition twice a year.

Students have the opportunity to change the chosen study form, language and field during the study process, but this is done in accordance with the previously acquired study courses and the process of equating education. Also for students returning after academic leave or re-enrolling after longer periods, the study courses are equated with the existing study programme, in which studies are started / renewed.

The equation of study courses and credit points also takes place after mobility studies at ERASMUS partner universities or for those students who take part in double degree programme at the People's Friendship University of Russia.

As RISEBA has concluded cooperation agreement with Alberta College and LCA Latvian Culture College on the provision of a continuous study process for the graduates of these colleges (those who have graduated first level programmes and acquired a qualification in advertising and public relations) to continue their studies in the 2nd year, then these students also go through the process

of equating previous education (both the acquired study courses and the amount of credit points). The RISEBA has developed principles and mechanisms of academic integrity, which are known to both academic staff and students. Code of Academic Integrity is available in Latvian on the HEI website in the section "Regulatory Documents" (<https://www.riseba.lv/lv/zinatne/reglamentejosie-dokumenti>, Latvian version of website). These principles cannot be found in the English version of the website, but can be found in the RISEBA e-platform (Moodle). In addition to the Code of Academic Integrity, a regulation on plagiarism and a regulation on the management of students' intellectual property have also been published on the website of RISEBA.

During the on-site visit, RISEBA management representatives emphasized to the experts that special attention is paid to the creative parts of the diploma theses to exclude plagiarism.

Since 2013, RISEBA has been in the Unified computerized plagiarism control system, where each lecturer, with the help of the IT department, can check students' papers throughout the study year, comparing them with the databases of 20 Latvian universities. Before the defence, all HEI final theses are checked for plagiarism. Students are obliged to submit the final thesis to the IT department in electronic form (SAR, p. 41).

Both teaching staff and students, as emphasized by both parties during the on-site visit with the experts, know the principles of academic integrity, based on objectivity, fairness, responsibility, scientificity and openness, mutual respect and trust.

The study process also observes the ethical principles published in the RISEBA Code of Ethics (the developed Code of Ethics is based on the concept of Academic Integrity and the Code of Ethics of Latvian Scientists) (SAR, p. 41). The Code of Ethics is available on the HEI internal e-platform (MOODLE). Compliance with the Code of Ethics is monitored by the RISEBA Ethics Commission, which consists only of HEI staff and no student representatives.

Qualitative information about the requirements and programmes offered by the study field is available on the RISEBA website in Latvian and English, but not all information in both versions is completely the same. As HEI also implements study programmes in Russian (final courses, new ones are not admitted in accordance with the existing legislation of the Republic of Latvia), everyone who enters the Russian version of the website is informed that all information is available in the English version. The website contains up-to-date information about the programmes of the study field, topical information, for example, winter admission, conditions for becoming a RISEBA student, as well as about where one can study further after graduating from the specific study programmes (study fields). The students met by the experts emphasized that the HEI website provides high-quality information that is useful both for those who are just thinking about studies and for those who are already studying.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

The ICS study field is led by the programme director, who is responsible for both bachelor's and master's study programmes in both Latvian and Russian. In the future, if the HEI is granted the right to implement the study programme in English, a foreign expert will be recruited to lead it. The Study Programmes Councils do not involve independent external experts instead the councils are staffed by HEI lecturers. Students are not informed about the work of the Study Programmes Councils.

The management of HEI study field is organized in accordance with various regulatory documents, which are taken into account when managing a quality study process. Both students and academic staff are satisfied with the support provided by HEI in the organization of the study process - both for the support in acquiring new digital skills and for the provision of technological support as well as scientific activity. Students have the opportunity to use tuition fee discounts, as well as apply for

HEI-subsidized budget places by participating in the competition twice a year.

The system developed by HEI for the admission of students is understandable and logical, it allows both Latvian and foreign entrants to apply for studies.

The RISEBA has developed principles and mechanisms of academic integrity, which are known to both academic staff and students. A regulation on plagiarism and a regulation on the management of students' intellectual property have also been published on the website of RISEBA. Since 2013, RISEBA has been in the Unified computerized plagiarism control system, where each lecturer, with the help of the IT department, can check students' papers throughout the study year, comparing them with the databases of 20 Latvian universities.

Qualitative information about the requirements and programmes offered by the study field is available on the RISEBA website in Latvian and English, but not all information in both versions is completely the same.

#### Strengths:

- HEI's support in the management and provision of the study field.
- Support for the improvement of technological skills of academic staff.
- Support for learning English and the opportunity to prepare for a language test.
- Principles of academic integrity have been developed, which include not only plagiarism issues, but also the Code of Ethics and the Student Intellectual Property Management Regulations.
- Students have the opportunity to get study discounts and apply for HEI subsidized budget places.
- Different academic and administrative units cooperate to ensure the ICS study field process, for example good cooperation between Faculty of Business and Economics and Faculty of Media and Communication.

#### Weaknesses:

- The Study Programme Council lacks balance between professionals practicing in the modern labour market in all three specializations.
- Students are not informed about the work of the Study Programme Council and emphasize that they do not participate in it.
- The graduates of bachelor's programme have been not encouraged enough to continue their studies in the master's programme right at RISEBA.

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

### **Analysis**

Quality assurance system is established, however, there is still room for improvement. In an interview during the visit, the Head of Quality Assurance stated himself that last year they started to improve the quality assurance system and that the improvement of quality assurance is one of the key goals of the new future Strategy of RISEBA. The HEI has identified the standards set forth in Part 1 of the ESG. The key documents of the HEI in this area are the Quality Policy and Quality Manual. Quality policy of RISEBA is publicly available, however it is rather general and broad (ESG 1.1). RISEBA has a prescribed procedure for the development of new and revision of old study programmes, the procedure of examination of complaints and proposals, the procedure of conducting the surveys among all stakeholders etc. and it is an example of good practice (ESG 1.2). What is needed is organization in a more structured way for all processes (within QA documentation) and clearly defined performance indicators for most important processes. For example, to determine the expected desirable results / values for each research and activity within the quality assurance system and to define the procedures in case of worse results and who is responsible for their implementation.

Admission requirements are publicly available, however more effort should be focused on



monitoring student progress (ESG 1.4) and digitalization of the entire internal system, and HEI is already aware of that (SAR, p. 60).

According to the information stated in the SAR (pp. 42-63) and the information the experts came across during the on-site interview with the Head of the Quality Assurance, experts can see the great effort that RISEBA is investing in the quality assurance system. However, from on-site visit to HEI and interviews with students, graduates, teachers and employers, it is evident that not everyone is sufficiently familiar with the quality assurance system at RISEBA or what it implies as such. For example, both students and teachers pointed out that the only mechanism for evaluating quality was the evaluation of teachers' work at the end of each semester. But, for example, students are not aware of what happens after they grade a teacher and, for instance, give him/her bad grades. The Senate is cited as a key place where students can point out certain problems and suggest improvements. However students are not given enough opportunities to collaborate with people in charge of quality assurance. Even the representatives of the Student Council pointed out that they do not cooperate with the Head of the Quality Assurance and the Head of the Study Quality Centre although in the SAR (pp. 53, 62) it is mentioned that, concerning annual student surveys, "the Student Council compiles questionnaire results and informs the management group and the Quality Manager of RISEBA about them". So, it is recommended that RISEBA devote much more time to educating all important stakeholders about the quality assurance system in higher education and how each of them can contribute to these processes. This can be done through training maintained by staff in charge of the quality system, certain publications etc. It is certainly important as part of these training to explain how the quality assurance system contributes to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programmes because interviews have shown that not everyone is familiar enough with it. It is also important to provide a mechanism for informing all relevant stakeholders about the procedures carried out within the quality assurance system. Namely, the quality results are not public. An intranet system that can be accessed by all active stakeholders can certainly be used for this, but it is important to publish some information on the website as it can be important for future students when making a decision to enroll in a HEI.

The contact data of staff members of RISEBA (teaching staff, management, administration, technical workers) are available on the website and as the experts learned during the interviews it is highly valued by the students. This favors consulting directly with them details of each department through their e-mails or mobile phones. Plus, enhances closeness by attaching the staff member's photo. However, the experts found that the contact information of the ICS study field staff members is still available under the Faculty of Media and Communication. According to the current situation, the information should be published under the Faculty of Business and Economics.

RISEBA needs to publish a lot more information about the quality assurance system on the official website, especially the key results that are achieved on an annual basis. During the on-site interviews with the HEI management group, they stated that they were in a process of improving the transparency of the data from the quality surveys on the web (ESG 1.8). It is recommended for future accreditation experts to review this point in depth. What RISEBA representatives said during the visit is that they collect a range of data, mainly through the method of survey, but not all evaluations are conducted continuously every year (interviews and information received from RISEBA during the on-visit), and they have problems with the small number of participants in these surveys (information received from RISEBA during the visit, SAR, p. 53), which is why in the future it is necessary to explore other evaluation mechanisms and ways to encourage all stakeholders to be more responsive in surveys (25% of respondents is definitely statistically not enough to make concrete conclusions). In order to ensure an advanced quality assurance system, it is necessary to follow the opinions of all key stakeholders on an annual basis, as well as their proposals for the improvement of the entire HEI. RISEBA is looking into automating the process of collecting the surveys because right now a lot of manual labor is used. The experts' group certainly encourages

them to continue with this plan (ESG 1.7). The teachers found the peer-evaluation process very useful. It is interesting for them to see how other colleagues work, it encourages them to work together, to learn from each other and in that way to get the highest grades from students. In the future surveys must collect the satisfaction of professors, students, graduates, employers and other HEI workers (Administration and Services Personnel). It is recommended to interpret the results through graphs and qualitative comments. Plans for the improvement should be based on the results of these satisfaction surveys with measurable objectives over time and quantifiable. These improvement plans must be constantly reviewed and updated. The institution needs to think about presenting to students some evaluation report or any information about survey results (in order to keep students interested in filling surveys).

A lot is done through different internal meetings, it is certainly important that the quality assurance system keeps minutes of all meetings where the internal quality was discussed and that it has clear mechanisms to adopt and provide for further processing everything agreed at those meetings. It is recommended to involve students much more in the quality assurance system itself, from conversations with student and graduate representatives and members of the Student Council it was clear that they are not familiar enough with this process.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

Quality assurance system is established, but there is still room for improvement which is explained in detail in the analysis itself. Quality policy of RISEBA is publicly available, however it is rather general and broad. The procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programmes of the study field and the feedback mechanisms have been partially defined. The HEI has identified the standards set forth in Part 1 of the ESG, which require special attention.

Strengths:

- Prescribed procedures for the most important parts of the quality assurance system.
- Peer evaluation of teaching.
- Inclusion of the development of the quality assurance system as one of the key goals in the new Strategy.

Weaknesses:

- Familiarity of all stakeholders with the quality assurance system, all measures and results of conducted surveys is not even.
- Student involvement is low in the quality assurance system.
- Too general and broad quality assurance policy.
- Insufficient publication of information on measures within the quality assurance system on the official website.
- Inconsistent implementation of surveys on an annual basis and a small number of survey participants.

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

### **Analysis**

Most of RISEBA income is made up of study tuition fees which are reviewed every year and approved by the Senate. Tuition fees along with other income make up HEI yearly budget, parts of which are allocated for each study field and study programme according to plans and cost estimates. Study process at RISEBA however is funded only by tuition fees as is the case with the ICS study field.

Precise financial breakdown for the study field is compiled and the expenses are clearly defined. More than half of the funding for the study field goes to academic staff and visiting faculty salary (According to SAR, pp. 63-66).

As RISEBA is a private HEI, students do not have access to state-funded budget places, but it is possible to obtain HEI subsidized budget places or tuition fee discounts for good study success and active involvement in higher education activities (based on conversations with students and graduates). RISEBA-subsidized budget places are granted through open competition for applicants who are Latvian citizens and permanent residents, and provides the applicants with an opportunity to start their studies with a 100% discount of the tuition fee. These budget places are created to attract the most capable students, motivate them to study better, increase the quality of the study programme (Rector's Order No. 19 / 1.1-11 / 61 PR0038, 25.03.2019).

RISEBA budget places are allocated for one study semester and are reviewed every semester. It is possible to apply for them from the 1st semester. Information about the allocated budget places is open and available to every student.

All RISEBA students have access to regulations on the application of tuition fee discounts (Senate 28.10.2015, No.15/1.1-07/08, Rules for application of tuition fee discounts), which describes the procedure of applying for discounts twice a year and how the decision-making process on the application of these discounts takes place.

During the expert meeting with students the positive aspect that tuition can be paid in installments every month was emphasized, which is important for working students. Students also emphasized that they appreciate the opportunities provided by RISEBA - they can participate in an internal competition and get discounts on tuition fees.

RISEBA funds different scientific research and artistic creation activities for their students, academic staff and also for secondary education pupils therefore stimulating future student's interest in the field of ICS. HEI funds educational trips, scientific research, staff participation in scientific conferences and seminars. Staff receive royalty bonuses for publications in high-ranking data bases. Student scientific conference is organized every year (SAR, pp. 63-66). During the experts' meeting with academic staff the accessibility of the financial resources for scientific work was valued as good. A member of the academic staff mentioned that scientific support is provided for anyone interested in receiving it as long as it is asked for.

Infrastructure of RISEBA used for this study field consists of three close proximity buildings. Two are located at Meza street and one at Durbes street (SAR, pp. 67-70). Study agenda is scheduled accordingly so that students and academic staff don't have to transfer from the buildings at Meza street to Durbes street between lectures happening the same day. Experts see this as a good practice of the planning of the study process as this lets the students and academic staff take advantage of the different infrastructure, materials and technical provisions provided in all three places without disturbing the study process with unnecessary commute.

Over-all the infrastructural quality of all three buildings is very good for both teaching facilities and all other common spaces shared by students and academic staff. There are many individual and group workplaces for students at the main building at Meza street and also at Durbes street. The building at Durbes street is accessible 24 hours a day seven days a week. Students are also able to book a time to work at computer classes if there are no lectures happening at the time. During the interviews some students report computer class schedule being very busy therefore limiting the time for individual work. This individual and group workplace system has been available before and continues to be available during the 2020/2021 academic year remote learning period due to COVID-19 pandemic. At this time students have to book the needed room in advance and comply with epidemiological safety measures. Overall students are satisfied with the number and quality of available facilities and experience no significant problems when needing a place for independent work.

All three buildings have auditoriums and teaching facilities with good quality technical support,

including audio visual equipment, good lighting and convenient classroom furniture. The equipment in auditoriums is used in standard study process and additionally can be accessed by academic staff to record lectures or conduct remote learning. Some of the auditoriums at Durbes street 4 have modular furniture which can be arranged and customized to fit different teaching and learning styles. Study process can also be customized at different auditoriums due to the availability of laptops which can be set up for use in class at almost any teaching facility (SAR, pp.67-70). Experts see these supporting features as a fine example of using simple methods to enrich the study process and encourage continuing with this practice. Other specialised teaching facilities located at Durbes street 4 such as computer labs, sound studio, video and photo studios are of great quality and fully accessible for students.

It is important to mention that none of the three buildings is fully accessible for people with physical disability. The management of RISEBA claims that the facilities at Durbes street are fully accessible and proof for accessibility was checked on the premises during the tour of the building. However experts also observed parts of the building's infrastructure that could possibly be obstacles for people with physical disability: steep, narrow stairs, no automatic entrance doors, different level door steps/thresholds followed by differently leveled floors between rooms. The main building at Meza street is also only partly accessible for people with physical disability. The Round building at Meza street is fully inaccessible. Management of RISEBA is aware of this infrastructural fault and has arranged some support for physically disabled people who wish to enter Meza street main building. One such arrangement is a deal with the dentistry located on the first floor of the same building. The dentistry's entrance is fully accessible and connects with RISEBA premises therefore if needed people can go through there. Other arrangements regard library's and other material resources which can be brought down to the first floor and received at the guard post if a person is not able to access respective parts of the building. These acts are recognized and may work well for the time being but it is emphasized by the experts' group that in the long term thorough improvements should be made regarding this issue.

Library resources at RISEBA consist of physical book collection and of digitally available relevant e-library and scientific database subscriptions accessible by both students and academic staff on computers located at the HEI premises and also their personal computers. Additionally in the past years data base and e-library resources in trial versions have been available as well. RISEBA library collaborates with other larger libraries in Latvia and therefore offers their students and staff a wider selection of resources (SAR, pp. 71-72). Physical library resources are available also during remote learning as the students and academic staff have the ability to commission needed books, journals etc. remotely and pick up them at library premises during working hours. Both students and academic staff report that there has been no problem with the accessibility of both physical and e-resource materials. The library resources are overseen and managed through different activities. Academic staff has the possibility to suggest necessary additions. E-resources are managed by annual review of the statistics on usage of these resources. This revision is done by the Directors of the study programmes. Students of the study field are also surveyed on the quality and relevancy of the resources for their programme. Additions and changes in the library resources happen according to the results of all the previously mentioned data gathered and also the allocated budget for the year for the study field resources.

When looking at study course descriptions for ICS study field it is impossible to miss that a large amount of study course sources and literature is dated with cases where the newest source for a course is ten years old as of 2021. Experts group recommends reviewing all study course literature content and where applicable update it to newer. In the master's study programme almost non-existent but very noticeable in bachelor's programmes study courses are cases of overwhelming number of primary literature sources in Russian. There are some study courses with more than half or all literature materials in Russian. Some of these courses in Bachelor's programme are: Basics of Compositions, Business communication, Basics of Visual Communication, Creative process, and in

Master's programme: Corporate Communication and PR, Public Relations Research Methods, Public Relations Strategy, Interaction Between Modern Journalism and PR. More courses in need of revision are listed for each study programme separately. Experts group expresses an opinion that for study programmes implemented in Latvian and English such practice is not appropriate and necessary actions should be taken to update study course material content according to the primary study languages. Study course materials in Russian language may remain as additional literature, if enough course material content is provided in Latvian and English.

Necessary computer software is available on HEI premises for use in study courses and also management of study process. Most of the software is also available for use on student and academic staff personal computers. Two different platforms are used to manage study process, study course content and student grades. E-RISEBA platform is used to create study course pages with course information and submission forms, and UNIMETIS is used to collect all student final grades and attendance data (SAR, pp. 66-70). The use of the E-RISEBA platform is not mandatory for all academic staff. During the on-site interview with the HEI management information was provided that though it is encouraged to use this platform, if a member of the academic staff wishes to use another method for their course organization it is not forbidden. Experts see this as both liberal, yet inconsistent approach to the organization of study courses and suggest that a uniform standard should be applied regarding this matter.

Other technical equipment needed for students in the study process is provided by RISEBA. This includes photo and video equipment, drones, and other audio-visual devices and material provisions. These resources can be used during the study process in the studios as well as borrowed to complete course work outside of HEI premises. This borrowing system is in place also during remote learning so that students have the ability to learn the necessary practical skills. Students are fully responsible for the borrowed piece of equipment and must return it in great condition. This ensures the continuous quality and oversight of these resources provided by HEI.

Methodological seminars and workshops have been offered for members of academic staff on various topics throughout the past years and especially during COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent remote teaching period to help with smoother transition to it. Though RISEBA has quite extensive previous experience in remote teaching for part time students there still has been focus on improving academic staff skills in work with Zoom, E-RISEBA platform and other technology and methods necessary for successful remote teaching. These methodological seminars are also held in different topics regarding working with foreign students, overall didactics, research and academic work and others (According to SAR, pp.73-79). Collaboration on these topics and offering help between different academic staff members is also encouraged. During the on-site visit interview academic staff members said they value these seminars provided by RISEBA highly and see them as useful. Students of the study field have not had major problems with transition to remote learning due to incompetence from academic staff. Therefore experts can conclude that previous knowledge and recent activity has succeeded in dealing with this difficult time for education during Covid-19 pandemic.

Academic staff members are being offered the opportunity to participate in conferences, professional seminars, skill top-up courses and other similar events to broaden their academic and professional skills. The participation fee is completely or at least partially covered by the HEI (SAR, pp.73-79).

RISEBA has a clear system for attracting and hiring members of academic personnel. This system complies with the according legislation of the Republic of Latvia. Elected academic personnel is attracted through open public competition while visiting faculty personnel is attracted from industry and partner universities. There are also methods in place to check candidate's compliance with inner criteria and quality measures for academic staff RISEBA. This is carried out by the RISEBA Compatibility Commission that reviews candidates accordingly and presents their verdict to the RISEBA Senate before a final decision is made. The inner criteria set forth by RISEBA for their

academic personnel is described in Academic Personnel Policy. This policy applies to visiting faculty members as well (SAR, pp. 72-73; RISEBA Academic Personnel Policy (linked in SAR, p. 72)).

The main qualities needed for all elected academic personnel is the ability to teach in at least two languages though it is not specified in which, high professional competence and understanding of ethical principles. The visiting faculty members have to be either high class professionals of their industry, or have Doctoral or master's degree and have teaching ability and experience. According to the information provided by RISEBA there is currently two times the amount of visiting faculty staff than elected academic staff (SAR, Annex 7) which experts see as a good indicator of there being great synergy between industry and HEI. This also indicates that the students of the study field should receive significant practical and up to date knowledge from experts of their industry.

According to RISEBA Academic Personnel Policy the amount of scientific research done by teaching staff varies between academic staff that is research oriented and teaching oriented. Research oriented academic staff are expected to do more scientific work and continuously maintain their knowledge of the field while teaching oriented staff's main focus is on methodological work and research of studies done in their field in order to prepare methodological materials and use this knowledge in their teaching work.

Regular assessment of academic staff is carried out at RISEBA. Annually academic personnel are assessed in certain predefined criteria: scientific, teaching and organizational work additionally their self-assessment report is taken into account. The quality of class materials is also reviewed, peer review for classes takes place, students are surveyed annually on each academic staff member. The results are reviewed by the academic staff member's immediate superior. The overall results are linked to the academic personnel remuneration system which determines their salary. During the on-site interview with academic staff this process and remuneration was described as motivating and appropriate.

RISEBA offers a wide range of activities for their personnel to improve different aspects of their professional skills. This includes previously mentioned methodological seminars, paying for attendance of different seminars, conferences and courses as well as language and didactics courses, CEEMAN seminars and summer schools on various topics. RISEBA presents a clear understanding of the necessity for improvement of academic staff and have also defined desirable outcomes on how academic staff can improve their and HEI work after participating in these additional activities, such as improvement of teaching methods, improvement of overall performance and stress management, improvement of E-RISEBA use and course descriptions (SAR, pp. 73-79). Though this system is in place, is reported as working well and has defined outcomes, it is not clear whether these outcomes are assessed properly and compared to previous results. Experts see that RISEBA has a great foundation to evaluate and review its academic staff member performance in longer periods of time according to different criteria.

Incoming and outgoing staff mobility in the past years is on average well below 10 staff members each year. It is also observed by the experts' group that in recent years most of the incoming and outgoing staff have visited a conference, seminar or to create/ strengthen partnership between HEI. Overall there are very few academic staff members who visit as teaching staff (SAR, Annex No. 9). In the SAR (pp. 79-81) it is stated that RISEBA management is aware of the situation and are taking some measures to encourage more active participation in staff mobility and hope to see more teaching staff join mobility after English programme is opened.

There are several various ways in which RISEBA supports their students and this is carried out by different institutions and representatives of the HEI. Student council of RISEBA is one such instance which provides a large amount of the necessary functions of student representation determined by The Law on Higher education of Latvia. Student council works with both local and foreign students, organizes extracurricular activities and also represent student academic interests in the biggest decision making bodies of HEI.

Support for all students is also carried out via student surveys on different aspects of the study

process – from study courses and academic staff performance to evaluation of HEI premises and provided services. Student suggestions and ideas are also taken into account from surveys and other means of communication with representatives of HEI. During the on-site interviews with students of ICS study field it was said that the management and academic staff of RISEBA is very approachable and open to dialogue with their students on different matters. It is emphasized that especially the study field director is very easy to communicate with and actively takes interest in the student's opinion herself.

RISEBA's Student Career counsellor is tasked with helping students find internships and jobs in their industry as well as giving consultations regarding any topics related to the job market, helping to prepare CV's and introducing students with employers and biggest industry companies at the annual Career Days. Mental support is provided through Mentor Club, Study Buddy and curators. Study Buddy is aimed at international students who have the option to get an assigned buddy – a local student at RISEBA who helps with day to day activities and integration in the RISEBA environment. Local students can get an assigned curator – an academic staff member. Professional mental support such as a psychologist is not provided. Experts conclude that RISEBA relies on internal collective support for each representative of the HEI in matters of mental health and the HEI management also states that they have not had students with serious mental disabilities. International students receive specific support from the External Relations department on various study and residence permit related topics. RISEBA offers a wide range of tuition discounts and HEI paid budget study places. This information is freely accessible on RISEBA website. Students are also offered flexible payment plans for their tuition fees (SAR, p. 82).

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

### **Conclusions:**

The HEI has a clear understanding of the necessary resources and additional necessary professional improvement options needed for both students and academic staff of this study field. The key aspects of the study field resources are mostly well thought through, but some improvements should be made. Material resources are accessible and freely available also during remote learning. The academic staff members feel that they have all the necessary support and motivation from HEI management's side to fulfil their academic and teaching goals as well as the necessary resources for improvement. Academic staff and students seem to be well informed of different support RISEBA offers whether it be material, financial or regarding any other aspects of the study field.

### **Strengths:**

- Material provisions, HEI premises and technical equipment is appropriate for the study field and of great quality.
- Academic staff is very satisfied with and regularly take advantage of methodological seminars, language courses and other activities in order to improve their teaching and academic skills.
- High number of visiting faculty members.

### **Weaknesses:**

- HEI premises are mostly inaccessible for people with physical disabilities and the HEI currently has to rely on temporary solutions that are not very sustainable.
- Academic staff incoming and outgoing mobility numbers are very low.
- No professional psychological support is offered to RISEBA students, which is not a compulsory requirement rather a good practice that HEI can follow.
- Study course literature content for both study programme's contain dated literature and an overwhelming amount of materials in Russian for the Bachelor programme's study courses.

- Use of the E-RISEBA platform is not mandatory for all academic staff teaching study courses and use of the platform rated as insufficient for some courses of the Bachelor's study programme.

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

##### **Analysis**

In the SAR (pp. 6-7) it is mentioned that the development strategy of RISEBA is to transfer from a small business school to a HEI which entails development of science as one of the overarching goals to be achieved by 2020. The Research strategy developed for the ICS and related study fields (audiovisual and digital media) in 2019 (SAR, p. 83), sets the goal to improve the citation index of the staff publications, increase the number of publications co-authored with foreign academics, and increase the number of international events produced by staff members. As it can be deduced from the SAR (Annex No. 10), and from the interviews during the experts' visit, the scientific and artistic creation among the staff members in the ICS study field is a highly promoted activity by the RISEBA's management and also the management of the ICS study field. There is a Scientific Committee established at RISEBA that oversees the scientific activities at the institution. In all study fields research plans are developed for 2-year periods. The annual assessment of academic personnel includes evaluation of scientific work (it is currently about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the whole score for each academic staff member, and there are plans to give it even more weight). Staff members' involvement in scientific projects and contractual works, and participation in academic conferences is supported - there are six different means in place to promote the scientific activity of academic staff such as extra payment for high level publications and creative work, financial support for participation in academic conferences, support for editing the publications and other. The ICS study field has defined three specific research directions: communication history, communication ethics and aesthetics, and marketing communication. In the future, it is planned to start researching topics related to social advertising. For each of the three current research directions, there is one Lead researcher appointed who oversees and plans the activity of the scientific team (other staff members and students) involved in the research direction.

However, the results of the scientific research in the ICS study field only partly comply with the ambitious goals and the specializations of the ICS study field. As it can be seen from the Annex No. 10 of SAR, there is a notable body of publications in the subfield of marketing and advertising, but almost no publications in the subfield of PR and strategic communication, apart from some topics such as communication ethics. It is mentioned that in the annual RISEBA Students' scientific conference the Advertising and PR department is responsible for one conference section "Advertising yesterday, today and tomorrow". The lack of systematic approach to strategic communication research is a problematic aspect because the latter is the qualification given to the master's graduates and this raises doubts whether students have enough opportunities and whether they are encouraged to involve in scientific research in their fields of interest if they are not related to the topics of marketing and advertising. From Table 4.3 (SAR, p. 209) it can be seen that most of the core strategic communication courses on master's level are taught by visiting staff members who do not involve in research at RISEBA. Therefore, for the study field, it is highly advisable to strengthen its capacity and visibility in wider PR and strategic communication research. The specialisation on event production in the previous accreditation period has been covered by artistic creation projects rather than scientific research which are mainly production of various corporate and public events, production and staging of theatre plays by some academic staff members. Also in this subfield more scientific activity by academic staff members would be advisable.

Despite the fact that there is a financial motivation scheme in place at RISEBA for high level publishing, in the previous accreditation period, most of the publications of the academic staff are papers in various national and international conference proceedings. Even being indexed, such publications will not be enough to reach higher level of citations, therefore it is highly advisable for



the study field to motivate the academic staff members to aim for less quantity (because the numbers of papers in conference proceedings for some staff members are really high and proves that staff members are able to carry internationally relevant research) but more quality - publications in high level academic journals with impact factor. The number of publications co-authored with foreign scholars is low - only a few academic staff members have such publications (SAR Annex No. 10).

Speaking about the relation between scientific research and artistic creation in the study field and the study process, the link has been ensured, especially in the field of advertising, where there is an example of a textbook that is based on research results of one of the faculty members. The research results are integrated in several study courses in the subfields of advertising history and communication ethics. The research results are integrated in study courses on both bachelor and master's level.

Students are involved in the research process. It happens through development of their own annual research papers, writing bachelor and master's thesis. One format of student involvement mentioned in SAR is involvement in research projects together with academic staff members. In the SAR (p. 86) are given two examples about joint conference presentations and publications which are developed together by the academic staff members and students, both in 2017. The student involvement in research projects together with academic staff members could be higher. Several student research results related to branding, advertising and product promotion online, have been implemented by companies (SAR, p. 87).

The involvement of academic staff members in international research is not very high, and only a few academic staff members have been involved in international research projects on such topics as culinary history, Latvian national identity and organizations during Soviet occupation period. The main partnerships for scientific cooperation are developed with institutions in Estonia, Sweden and Russia, in the future there are plans to do joint research with an institution in Odessa, Ukraine. The justification given for low numbers of international research is the fact that the "niche" of the study field is Latvian history of communication and specific topics related to identity topics in the history of Latvia (SAR, pp. 88-89).

From the interviews during the visit, the experts' group learned that the staff members are not paid for the time they spend on preparing new project proposals, however, there is support provided by RISEBA's administrative staff in filling in the applications (three full-time staff members on institutional level). Freeing some time for academic staff members for preparing grant applications and working on project proposals would be advisable to raise the number of scientific projects implemented in the ICS study field.

Regarding the innovations at ICS study field, the research and scientific infrastructure can be mentioned, that includes examples of software used for data analysis. Another innovative means implemented at RISEBA is Adizes methodology for staff involvement in problem solving at institutional level. RISEBA also pays much attention to promotion of student creativity, development of their talents through the study process and by writing the final thesis of which one part needs to be a creative solution to a communication problem. As the experts' group learned during the visit, students appreciate that they have opportunities to engage in competitions already before applying for their studies, and the competitive, playful spirit is present in various aspects during their studies. This approach justifies the slogan of RISEBA where "business meets art".

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

RISEBA has developed strategy and means for stimulating research activity among academic staff members. However, currently, the actual research achievements at the ICS study field are partially

compliant to the ambitious goals. Research activity mainly happens in the subfields of marketing and advertising, while there is lacking research activity in the directions of strategic communication and PR, and also event management. Artistic creation among academic staff members mainly is related to the specialization of event production. There are many scientific papers published in conference proceedings during the previous accreditation period, but the number of high level academic journal publications is low. More active engagement in international research networks is advisable in order to raise the number of international research projects and co-authored publications with foreign researchers. Students are involved in the research process in various ways, however, the student involvement in joint projects together with academic staff members (especially on the master's level) could be organized more systematically. The results of the research projects are integrated in the study process via the study courses that are taught by the elected staff members. There is a good research infrastructure basis for social scientists in place, with a number of innovative tools and approaches.

#### Strengths:

- An institution - wide motivational and support system is in place for promotion of scientific and artistic activity of teaching staff.
- Research and artistic achievements are taken into account during the annual academic staff evaluation process.
- Three distinct thematic research directions are defined for the study field.
- High number of publications in terms of national and international conference participation and papers in conference proceedings.
- High numbers of artistic projects and artistic creation related to event production.
- Student creative talents are appreciated and there are various ways how students can apply their creativity and artistic talents during their studies.

#### Weaknesses:

- Judging by the number of scientific publications, very little research activity is happening in the PR and strategic communication field, compared to advertising and marketing.
- Almost non-existent research in the field of events' production.
- Low numbers of publications with foreign co-authors.
- RISEBA has developed mechanisms for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research and/or artistic creation, but it is functioning only partly and not supporting the achievement of the ambitious strategic goals. Higher level research publications would be advisable rather than high numbers of papers in conference proceedings during the next accreditation period.
- Little number of international scientific projects.

## 5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

### Analysis

In its operational principles, RISEBA is based on promoting international cooperation, both in the study process here in Latvia and in developing cooperation with foreign organisations. As stated in SAR, HEI's vision is to ensure its visibility and recognition in the international fora as a high-level body of studies and an international research, academic and corporate centre (SAR, p. 100).

The general objective of RISEBA in 2020 was to become an international reference center. However, after studying the evidence of the students' nationalities of the ICS study field, it is found that the students are still from the same places as in previous years, with little European and international representation. But experts believe that this could change when ICS study field will start implementing and promoting studies in English.

According to SAR (p. 100) RISEBA has established cooperation with or is a member of more than 15

different international and local employers' and export organisations, in order to promote awareness, as well as relationships with future cooperation opportunities, including Consortium of International Double Degrees (CIDD), European Association for International Education (EAIE), Association of Exporters of Higher Education, etc.

During the on-site visit, the management of the HEI emphasized that the target markets of foreign students continue to be addressed, focusing on offering HEI programmes to the residents of Asia, Vietnam, India and Africa. RISEBA wants 30% of the total number of students to be foreign students. Until recently, both study programmes of the ICS study field have been implemented in Latvian and Russian, and in the past, the main focus on attracting foreign students for these study programmes was on countries with Russian speaking students. However due to changes in Latvian legislation and not being able to admit students for studies in Russian anymore, RISEBA is in process of changing international strategy for ICS study field with planning to implement these study programmes in English, that would provide opportunity to attract students from abroad again, but might mean focusing on different markets.

International cooperation agreements make it possible for students to participate in ERASMUS+ exchange programmes to one of the European countries both for studies and internships as well as exchange studies in partner universities not participating in the Erasmus programme are offered. Currently, RISEBA has signed approximately 130 cooperation agreements with European and third country universities about mobility of students and the faculty, as well as other cooperation possibilities (SAR, p. 101).

The ICS study field has 18 academic partners in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Greece, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Russia, which students can choose from for their mobility experience. On the average, approximately 10 ICS study field bachelor students use this opportunity every year (SAR, Annex No. 13).

Master's study programme participants hardly use the opportunities offered by mobility, during the last five years only two students have used the mobility of the Erasmus programme (SAR, Annex No. 13).

ICS students are offered the opportunity to obtain a double degree (both in the bachelor's and master's study programme) with the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (Moscow, Russia), with which an agreement has been concluded in 2013/2014. Since 2014, only seven students of the Latvian bachelor's study programme have used the opportunity to acquire this double degree, but none in the master's programme. During this time, HEI has admitted 14 bachelor's students and three master's students who have chosen to obtain a double degree with RISEBA in Latvia (SAR, Annex No. 13).

During the experts' on-site visit and interviews with former and current Latvian students, positive feedback was received on the possibilities of this double degree, which provided an opportunity at the same time to obtain a diploma from both HEI and the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia.

Although the RISEBA has a large number of ERASMUS contracts and the development strategy emphasizes internationalization and assesses the competitiveness of graduates in the European labour market, HEI has established a double degree programme only with the People's Friendship University of Russia in Moscow, but no such cooperation with any of the European Union's partner universities.

In the ICS study field, no joint programmes are offered, and the HEI does not intend to create such programmes in the nearest future. As to opportunities and actual benefits to students, double-degree programmes are similar to joint programmes, and since the ICS study field has already had a lot of experience in implementing the double-degree programme, it is planned to continue cooperation in this format. However, if studies are to be offered in the English language, there will be a much wider choice of cooperation partners.

The aforementioned cooperation university, in which students of ICS study field have the opportunity to obtain a double degree, was described as one of the best universities abroad (in Russia) by

representatives of RISEBA during the on-site visit. Experts group expresses an opinion that this cooperation with the People's Friendship University of Russia in Moscow would not promote the attraction of foreign students from European countries in the future. The Russian university is attractive to students from Asian countries who speak Russian. As in the future HEI plans to expand the export target markets or to increase the number of ICS study field students from European countries by attracting them, for example, through the ERASMUS+ programme, it is necessary to look for a wider range of cooperation partners in the European Union - to be able to offer double degrees (also in order to meet the goals set by the internationalization strategy).

The head of the study programmes emphasized that they have started cooperation with the University of Nicosia in Cyprus, so that in the future (in a period of 3-4 years) they could offer a double degree in the specialization of event production. As both bachelor's and master's programmes are implemented by offering a professional degree in PR, also taking into account that professional standards are currently available only in one field (for qualifications PR manager and Strategic communication manager), HEI should focus on collaborations where PR study programmes can be offered.

RISEBA ICS study field has also concluded agreements with Latvian higher education institutions on cooperation in organizing the study process, for example, the Latvian Academy of Culture and the School of Business Administration "Turība", EKA University of Applied Sciences, etc. (SAR, Annex No. 11). During the visit the experts group learned, that closer cooperation has been established with the Latvian Academy of Culture, whose lecturers teach master's courses in the ICS programme; participate in state examination commissions, whereas students can attend Part C courses in the master's study programme "Public Relations Management" (SAR, p. 102).

In the SAR and during the on-site visit, representatives of the HEI emphasized that there is a small number of foreign guest lecturers, as well as low mobility of their academic staff abroad. In order to eliminate this problem, in the future, for teaching of separate study courses RISEBA plans to consider the possibility of attracting the elected foreign lecturers from other HEI departments.

The issue of potential foreign lecturers is also relevant because the ICS field plans to offer studies in English, focusing on various target markets. In order to ensure a high-quality study process for foreign students, also providing international examples, it is necessary to look for opportunities to attract such experts either for teaching study courses or for guest lectures, management of practice tasks, etc. One of the possibilities would be to address foreign organizations and companies here in Latvia, whose employees could be asked to share their experience with examples of international practice in the field of communication.

Analysing information available in the SAR, over the last five years, more than 30 HEI teachers have gone abroad for mobility, participating in conferences, representing RISEBA, as well as for teacher mobility in partner universities (SAR, Annex No. 9).

RISEBA has procedures available for the admission of foreign students (internationalization strategy, conditions for admission of foreign students (available at <http://doc.riseba.lv/>, International Student Admission Process)). International students must pass an admission test.

Taking into account the amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Section 56 part 3) on the languages in which the study process can be implemented, HEI has been reorienting towards English and new target markets, which were less relevant in the past. Along with these changes, the HEI also plans to export the ICS bachelor's and master's study offer in English to foreign students.

RISEBA offers a wide range of internships for all specializations of the study field, but at the same time emphasizes (SAR, p. 103) that there are not enough study tours to industry agencies and companies included in the study process. In order to overcome this weakness, in the future the HEI plans to invite guest lecturers involved in implementation of the programme, who represent agencies or companies, to organize tours for students to their companies. HEI also plans to work more closely with alumni and students already working, encouraging them to organize excursions and share their experience.

According to the SAR (p. 103) students may independently choose the place of their internship. It can be a company from any sector, including foreign companies, NGOs, municipal and governmental organisations. If a student has already been working in a company, he/ she may choose this company as a place of his/her internship. When the place of internship is chosen, the duties and a possibility to perform them should be taken into account. Furthermore, the duties should be related to the chosen qualification (advertising, PR, event production).

In interviews with the experts, bachelor studies students emphasized that they regularly receive information about workplaces where they can do internships or work parallel with the study process. Every year in the study courses practical tasks are integrated from companies that allow understanding the specifics of the field. Students indicate that 80% of the lectures have a practical orientation, which allows to strengthen the acquired knowledge in practice.

Experts positively assess that the Student Career counsellor is available at the HEI. During the on-site interview experts group learned that this counselor organizes cooperation with employers, career events (also remote), for example, 11 events were organized in November 2020 (for the whole HEI, not only for ICS study field students). The role of the Career counsellor is to support students in their professional development and to help them find internships that correspond to the specific field of study, including the ICS field of study. The specialist also helps to draw up an appropriate CV and advises on the conditions for communication with potential employers (SAR p. 106).

During the on-site visit, students and graduates mentioned that the director of the study field is supportive in finding internship places. She was characterised as very responsive and always helping with contacts and advice on how to establish communication with potential providers of internships. Experts highly value the cooperation of the study field manager with students.

During the on-site visit interviews with employers, experts also observed that the specialization in PR is under-represented, which is a negative factor, considering that the professional bachelor's or master's degree received by students after graduating from RISEBA is in the PR field.

When experts analyzed councils of both bachelor's and master's study programmes and their members, they saw a problem that in those Study Programme Councils the elected field professionals are also lecturers at the HEI, so they are not neutral advisors. In addition, there is a lack of wider representation of professionals practicing in the field on those councils; there is a lack of contribution to the development of study programmes and their connection with the particular industry.

For example, the council of the bachelor's study programme lacks representatives from the Latvian Association of Event Producers and the LASAP delegated by the boards of these associations (the bachelor's study programme council has a LASAP member, but she is not a delegated representative of the organization). In its turn, the council of the master's study programme lacks external high-quality PR professionals-strategists who would contribute to the development of the professional master's programme. By external the experts mean a professional who is not actively involved in the implementation of the study programme.

In order to establish a closer link with today's labor market requirements, it is desirable to invite representatives of employers' organizations or those who know the specifics of today's industry, for example, one representative from a PR agency, an event agency, an advertising agency, and representatives from so called inhouse organizations. It is positive that both study programme councils include digital communication expert, who represents a field that is important in all three specializations acquired by students of the ICS study field.

After meetings both with students and employers in the field, experts assessed that the HEI has established close cooperation with the Latvian Advertising Association, involving it in the development of advertising study course and providing internships, as well as planning to involve in the bachelor's study programme council in the future (representative already appointed to the Study Programme Council in 2020).

In expert discussions with industry's employers (representatives of the event industry), it was clear that this collaboration has been started recently, but they highlighted skills that industry professionals expect from HEI graduates specializing in event production. These skills are more in line with the multimedia specialization; they are not related to the PR/ advertising industry or the communications industry. Therefore, experts see challenges for the implementation of three specializations in the professional bachelor's study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" in the future, taking into account the fact that ICS is now not in the Faculty of Media and Communication, but in the FBE.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

### **Conclusions:**

RISEBA has developed a number of internal regulations for the future development of internationalization, as well as it has established extensive cooperation with universities, employers' organizations in Europe, Asia and other countries. RISEBA also participates in the ERASMUS+ mobility programme, offering study places to foreign students, as well as providing mobility opportunities for its students. The number of students who decide on outgoing mobility is not large. The number of incoming and outgoing mobility should certainly be increased in the future, especially when the study programmes begins to be conducted in English, which is very commendable. It is positive that the HEI is actively involved in conquering export markets, which is implemented through participation in several agencies representing local and international organizations in Latvia. ICS study field students have the opportunity to receive the support of both a career counsellor and study programme director in finding internships and communicating with employers, which is a good support for students of professional bachelor's and master's study programmes. Although RISEBA has established good cooperation with various employers and industry practitioners are also involved in the implementation of the study process, experts see risks in the development of both ICS study programmes, given that their councils do not have strong practitioners who know today's labor market requirements. Study Programme Councils the elected field professionals are also lecturers at the HEI, so they are not neutral advisors. In addition, there is a lack of wider representation of professionals practicing in the field on those councils; there is a lack of contribution to the development of study programmes and their connection with the particular industry.

### **Strengths:**

- Extensive RISEBA representation in Latvian and foreign employers' and export promotion organizations.
- A wide range of Erasmus+ mobility agreements and arrangements for international cooperation.
- Good cooperation with employers in the advertising industry.
- Career counsellor provided by RISEBA who not only helps students with potential jobs, but also organizes various career events.
- Students have the opportunity to obtain a double diploma in cooperation with the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia.
- The ICS study field director is supportive in finding internship places for students.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Poor cooperation with the public relations industry.
- Low number of outgoing mobility students, especially in the master's study programme.
- Both bachelor's and master's Study Programme Councils are staffed by professionals who have been lecturers of the HEI for many years, but no independent professionals / experts in specific

fields are attracted.

- In the implementation of study programmes, especially in the specialization of public relations, there is a lack of professionals practicing in the labour market who would train professionals in accordance with modern labour market requirements.

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

### **Analysis**

In the SAR (pp. 108-111), analysis is provided about the implementation of six recommendations made by the experts of the previous accreditation. These recommendations are related to such issues:

- insufficient engagement of students in the decision making processes and Student Council;
- lack of analysis of the labour market and demand for young professionals;
- better alignment needed of the bachelor's study programme's title and content;
- clearer demarcation and differentiation between bachelor's and master's programme is needed (extensive vs intensive approach);
- lack of library resources and insufficient access to electronic databases;
- disbalance between advertising and PR courses in the bachelor's programme.

About student engagement in decision making bodies and participation in the Student Council, the conclusion of the experts' group is that the recommendation has been implemented partly. It is mentioned in the SAR that student participation has always been ensured in RISEBA's Senate and Constitutional Assembly, and also in the Study programme councils in each study field. During the previous accreditation period, also the system of appointing course curators is established to ensure better communication and information exchange with students. From interviews with students, the conclusion can be made that students feel listened to and have the impression that their opinion generally matters to RISEBA. During the visit, the experts learned that for being involved in the Student Council, students get study fee discounts, which might be a motivation for some to become a member of the Student Council. It is also ensured that foreign students can become members of the Council - the application form is available in English. However, three problematic aspects were identified during experts' visit. First, it was found that students are not represented in the Ethics committee of RISEBA, which would be highly advisable in order to engage students in the process of ensuring academic integrity. Second, the system of appointing student representatives for the Senate and Constitutional Assembly is approved by the Senate of the RISEBA. Students are informed about the procedures. However, during the visit, the experts did not come to full confidence that the actual practice complies with the prescribed procedures. Based on the information that the experts received during the interviews, experts' impression is that in some cases the appointment of the student representatives has not been at all transparent and has not been based on democratic principles of selecting candidates for these important positions. Third, the Student Council currently does not cooperate with the Head of the quality assurance system and the Head of the study quality centre. These are issues that RISEBA need to work on during the next accreditation period.

The recommendation about more thorough job market analysis can be evaluated as implemented. Connections with one of the industry associations - Latvian Advertising association - are made currently, and some changes in the study content have been implemented based on its recommendations. Information exchange happens with representatives of the event producer sector. At the same time, connections to PR and strategic communication professional networks could be improved and more professionals could participate in the review of the study content. As sources of information for market analysis surveys are conducted among the internship organizations, student experience is analysed after finishing their internships, and 4th year students and also recent graduates are surveyed. Such a system of combining information from different

sources and different groups should be maintained and continued also during the next accreditation period.

The recommendation about better alignment between the bachelor's study programmes' title and content can be evaluated as implemented. However, the ICS study field might face a new challenge by pushing forward the third specialization in the study programme - event producer. In the period, while the accreditation experts' group is carrying out the evaluation and preparing the joint report, there is no certainty whether the professional standard of event producer will be developed and approved, but when this happens, it should be considered whether the current title of the bachelor's study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" is in line with the three specializations that are planned to be offered in the study programme.

The demarcation and differentiation between bachelor's and master's programmes has been tackled during the previous accreditation period, but still the recommendation from the previous team of experts can be evaluated as implemented only partly. It is true that the labour market requires professionals with a wide range of skills and too narrow specialization would limit the graduates' chances in the job market. It is emphasized in the SAR (p. 108) that the demarcation has been established while adjusting the study programmes to the new professional standards, especially the professional standard for the master's programme "Strategic Communication Manager" and focusing on the master's level on management skills as well as planning, coordination and supervision skills. On the master's level more emphasis has been put also on the branding through several new study courses (Brand Communication; Personal Branding, Location Branding). Still, it was mentioned by graduates of the master's programme during the visit, that there are some overlaps in the study content between bachelor's and master's programmes.

Regarding the library resources and access to electronic databases, the recommendation can be evaluated as implemented - due to the fact that during the previous accreditation period, access to electronic resources has been improved. During the visit, the experts' group learned that students are satisfied with the provision of information, even during the COVID pandemic period, and during the interviews, it was emphasized that mostly the electronic library resources are used, and the remote access to them is good.

The ICS study field has analysed the sixth recommendation from the accreditation experts about the balance between advertising and PR study courses on bachelor level, and decided that the balance is already there. No further action was taken to proceed with the recommendation. Currently, there is still a disbalance - not in terms of credits for study courses, but other aspects: the number of high qualification professionals involved in the implementation of the study programme, the research carried out in the study field, where there is great emphasis on topics related to advertising, and less on public relations and event management. The experts' opinion is that the disbalance must be addressed.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

Out of six recommendations that have been described in the SAR, three can be evaluated as implemented, while two recommendations are partly implemented, and with one the ICS study field has decided not to proceed. The work on the implementation of the recommendations that are partly implemented and the one that has not been attended (about the disbalance between public relations and advertising in the bachelor's study programme), needs to be continued.

Strengths:

- The provision of and access to information resources has been improved, and RISEBA has adjusted well to the pandemic situation and the need to focus on electronic resources - during the experts'



visit, positive comments about library resources were received from students.

Weaknesses:

- The student involvement in the decision making processes still is insufficient, and this needs to be addressed.
- Balance between the study courses content in PR and advertising still has not been established on bachelor's level.
- Some overlapping of study content between bachelor and master's level still exists.

## 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:** RISEBA has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education, however the system is not working fully and improvements in various parts of the quality assurance system are necessary.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** RISEBA has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education, however improvements of the quality assurance system are necessary. Data from the quality assurance system are not publicly available, all stakeholders are not sufficiently familiar with the quality assurance system and what it means, some data are not collected annually and students are not enough involved in all quality assurance processes.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** RISEBA has set a procedure for development, internal approval of study programmes, supervision, and periodic inspection of the operation thereof (Annex to the SAR "The main normative acts and regulations of RISEBA")

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** The criteria are indicated in the course descriptions and made available to the students on RISEBA online learning platform. There is a Process Description "Process of Updating the Course/Module Specification" (Annex of SAR No. PR 0012-03) as well.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** The quality of academic staff work is ensured by the annual student questionnaires after each study course and by special procedure "Procedures for Evaluating the Work of Administrative Staff Members" organized by the Head of the study field (Annex of SAR No. PR0036-02).

- 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:** Student survey of the course conclusion is organised in accordance with the procedure defined by RISEBA - Process Description "RISEBA Study course assessment process" (Annex No. PR 0032).

- 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:** The RISEBA quality management system includes a regular quality audit procedure, as well as a related corrective action procedure to address non-conformities identified. However, the usage of data from the quality assurance system, regular analysis of all data and the involvement of all stakeholders is necessary in the future development of the study field.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** 49 cooperation agreements with European and third country universities about mobility of students and the faculty, as well as other cooperation possibilities and open-ended agreements with different organisations for the provision of places of practice for RISEBA ICS study field students (SAR, Annex No. 11, List of cooperation agreements). The list contains a variety of companies, both agencies and associations.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** There is very limited research activity in the field of strategic communication and PR and insufficient means of encouraging students and academic staff members to do research in this direction (e.g., the only annual internal conference panel is devoted to advertising), compared to advertising and marketing, which affects the implementation of the master's study programme in which the qualification of Strategic communication manager is given, but it was observed that students mainly do their thesis on topics related to marketing and advertising.

- 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:** Out of six recommendations that have been described in the SAR, three can be evaluated as implemented, while two recommendations are partly implemented, and with one the ICS study field has decided not to proceed.

## 8. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

Improve the system of student involvement in the decision making processes and implement democratic and transparent principles in appointing the student representatives for decision making bodies such as the Senate and Constitutional Assembly.

Publish data (e-mail, phone number, photography) about staff members (teachers, management, administration and technical staff) on the website of RISEBA under the information of Faculty of Business and Economics.

Address foreign organizations and companies here in Latvia, whose employees could be asked to share their experience with examples of international practice in the field of communication.

In order to establish a closer link with today's labor market requirements, it is desirable to invite representatives of employers' organizations or those who know the specifics of today's industry, for example, one representative from a PR agency, an event agency, an advertising agency, and representatives from so called inhouse organizations to involve as guest lecturers. Especially the experts recommend the study field to consider the possibility of attracting public relations lecturers who have more recent practical experience and know the current work specifics.

Study course literature content for both study programme's should be reviewed due to dated literature in both Bachelor's and Master's study programmes and an overwhelming amount of materials in Russian for the Bachelor programme's study courses.

Continue working on the recommendations that were given by the previous accreditation experts but were only partly implemented or not attended at all regarding the overlaps between the bachelor's and master's study programme, the balance between PR and advertising study courses on bachelor's level.

## Long-term recommendations

Expand the number of researchers and the level of research activity in the directions of PR and strategic communication, and event production.

Raise the number of international research projects and raise the number of scientific publications with foreign co-authors.

It is recommended that RISEBA devote much more time to educating all important stakeholders about the quality assurance system in higher education and how each of them can contribute to these processes. This can be through training maintained by staff in charge of the quality system, certain publications etc.

It is important to provide a mechanism for informing all relevant stakeholders about the procedures carried out within the quality assurance system. Namely, the quality results are not public. An intranet system that can be accessed by all active stakeholders can certainly be used for this, but it is important to publish some information on the website as it can be important for future students when making a decision to enroll in a HEI.

Better accessibility options should be considered at Meza street for people with physical disability.

Incoming and outgoing academic staff mobility should be improved focusing more on longer term visits in order to give lectures.

Use of the E-RISEBA platform should be mandatory for all study courses.

## II. "Public Relations and Advertising Management" ASSESSMENT

### II. "Public Relations and Advertising Management" ASSESSMENT

#### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

The RISEBA professional Bachelor study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" (42324) has 240 ECTS (160 CP), degree to be acquired is Professional Bachelor's degree in Advertising and Public Relations. The duration of the programme is four years in full-time studies

and four years five months in part-time studies. RISEBA envisages to implement the study programme in the form of full-time and part-time presence studies in Latvian. In accordance with the above law and amendments, the admission of new students to the Russian language stream at RISEBA does not take place, only students admitted until 1 January 2019 continue their studies in Russian. Commencement of implementation of the study programme in English is planned for 2021/2022 academic year.

The purposes of the professional Bachelor study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" are to prepare highly qualified, competent and competitive public relations, advertising and event producers specialists; professionals for public bodies, mass media, companies and NGOs; to promote the development of students' creative potential during the studies and thereafter, to give an opportunity to continue studies in a master's programme after graduation. It has been found out during the on-site visit that many part-time students already work in the field of communication.

For the bachelor's study programme, the intention of the programme management is to provide three qualifications: Public relations manager, Advertising manager, and Event producer. In the study programme, currently, there are students in all three specialization streams. However, by the time of the accreditation experts' visit and the period while this assessment report was prepared, only one professional standard (Public relations manager) for the bachelor's programme was in force. The standard for Advertising manager had been prepared but was not approved. The professional standard for Event producer has not been submitted for approval yet.

The ICS study field might face a challenge by pushing forward one of the specializations in the study programme - Event producer. In the period, while the accreditation experts' group is carrying out the evaluation and preparing the joint report, there is no certainty whether the professional standard of Event producer will be developed and approved, but when this happens, it should be considered whether the current title of the Professional bachelor programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" is in line with the three specializations that are planned to be offered in the study programme.

After the analyses of the total number of students during the last 7 years, it can be concluded that the number of students tends to decrease (Table 1.1 of the SAR, p. 124). These data are related to the decrease in the number of students studying in study programmes of the ICS in all Latvian HEIs (see Table 1.2 of the SAR, p. 125).

According to the SAR (p. 127), and due to amendments in the Law on Higher Education Institutions prohibiting to implement study programmes in the Russian language, the number of students admitted during the 2019/2020 academic year decreased by 18.1%.

It is recommended to promote the enrollment of foreign students to promote synergies between countries, within the field of public relations and advertising management. This would have a positive impact on the group of employers and students when carrying out their internships. In the 2020/2021 academic year, only 20 foreign students attended these studies. The course with the most foreign students was 2018/2019, with 30 students divided into the four academic years.

The exmatriculation rate of students in the programme exceeds the 21% in the 2017/2018 of the total number of students. According to the data provided by the SAR (p. 126), 54% were expelled for not continuing their studies after a break during the aforementioned course. During the 2018/2019 course, the rate decreased and was 8,13%. Of that number, only 3.3% dropped out after the break.

The title of the study programme, the degree and the professional qualification to be acquired correspond to the programme objective, according to the principles of the Latvian qualifications framework. Tasks, results to be achieved and the content of the programme are mutually coordinated and result from the programme mapping. At the end, students take a qualification exam and develop a bachelor's thesis, which reflects all the achievable results of the programme and are assessed by the State Examination Commission. The study programme is aligned with the European Bologna skills. The Professional Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations provides an

opportunity to continue studies in the master's programme after graduation.

For the admission of students to the programme in English, a test in that language is requested, unless they have a B2 certificate or higher. It is recommended that official certificates recognized by the European Union are always requested. For foreign applicants, they must take a specific test, called the RISEBA admission test. All the information on this test, as well as on the admission processes, is publicly available on the professional Bachelor programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" website (<https://www.riseba.lv/en/students/undergraduate-studies/public-relations-and-advertising-management>), it is intuitive and accessible.

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

### **Conclusions:**

In brief, the admission requirements, as well as the complementary admission tests, allow the selection of the most suitable candidates to study at the professional Bachelor programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" and ensure that professional qualification is acquired through learning outcomes. Through the proposed study programme, students acquire the Professional Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.

In the study programme, currently, there are students in three specialization streams, however, by the time of the experts' visit and the period while this assessment report was prepared, only one professional standard (Public relations manager) for the bachelor's programme was in force. In case all professional standards are approved and all three qualifications are maintained in study programme, it is recommended to reinforce the professional profile of Event producer, since it is considered that it is not sufficiently developed in the study programme to professionally train students. As of the 2021/2022 academic year, this study programme will be offered in English. All information about the study programme is public and accessible on the study programme website, which can favor the enrollment of future students. It is recommended to work on increasing enrollment and the recruitment of foreign students.

### **Strengths:**

- The study programme has its niche in the Latvian educational market - mostly in the field of advertising.
- The bachelor's skills are aligned with the European Bologna skills.
- The study programme is prepared to be provided in English language to attract more foreign students.

### **Weaknesses:**

- In general, the enrollment rate has been declining during the previous accreditation period. Enrollment rate, especially for native Russian students, has decreased due to the changes in the legislation.
- There is no certainty whether the professional standards of Advertising manager and Event producer will be developed and approved.

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

### **Analysis**

The bachelor's study programme consists of general courses in humanities and social sciences, including courses that develop basic social, communication and organisational skills; basic theoretical sectoral courses and IT courses; professional specialization sectoral courses; electives,

internships and the state examination (SAR, p. 131). The content of the programme is in accordance with the learning outcomes at the level of study programme and in accordance with the qualification that students receive upon completion of the programme, however, some improvements are needed, which are listed below. Evaluating the descriptions of ICS study field's study courses, many shortcomings can be seen in them, which need to be improved in the near future. For all descriptions of study courses the name of the bachelor's study programme in the section Study Programme should be reviewed because it is used differently. It would also be desirable for the descriptions of study courses to show the specialization in which the course is implemented, for example in Public Relations, Advertising or Event Production.

Challenges with the usage of the state language can be seen in the descriptions of study courses, which can be observed especially in the descriptions of study courses prepared by teachers whose mother tongue is not Latvian. Experts believe that there should be no such shortcomings; therefore, it is necessary to review the Latvian language terms and review the usage of grammar in the descriptions of study courses, for example, in the study course Introduction to Public Relations and Development of Media Relations. It is not acceptable that the descriptions of the study courses of the HEI in the state language contain grammatical errors. Experts see risks that lecturers whose mother tongue is not Latvian, but who teach courses in Latvian, do not have sufficient level of Latvian language. Study courses related to communication with the media, content creation in the mother tongue should be conducted by professionals whose knowledge of the state language is at the highest level not only by certification (document), but also in real life. Experts also noticed a lot of design shortcomings in the reviews of study courses, which can be eliminated if there is one person responsible for the descriptions of study courses, who reviews their technical design, for example, the usage of typeface, etc.

When looking at study course descriptions for this study field it is impossible not to notice that a big amount of study course sources and literature is dated with cases where the newest source for a course is ten years old as of 2021. Experts group recommends reviewing all study course literature content and where applicable update it to newer. Very noticeable in bachelor's programmes study courses are cases of an overwhelming number of primary literature sources in Russian. There are some study courses with more than half of all literature materials in Russian language. Expert group expresses an opinion that for study programmes implemented in Latvian and English such practice is not appropriate and necessary actions should be taken to update study course material content according to the primary study languages.

Study courses Business Communication, which are implemented in English for full-time and part-time students and are taught by two different lecturers, have different content plans and different lists of literature and information sources. As all students receive the same number of credits after completing this course, it is desirable to coordinate the descriptions and content of both courses.

The study course Introduction to Mass Communication Theory, although taught by one lecturer, has a different list of information sources in both languages of the study process that need to be reviewed.

For study courses Accounting, Integrated Marketing Communication (English group study course description), Composition Basics, Marketing Basics and Management (English group study descriptions), Public Relations Strategy, Branding, Basics of Media Planning, Service Marketing, Event Scenario, Presentation Skills, Basics of Visual Communications (both in Part I and II), Career Development Theories, Corporate Culture and Communication, Visual Design of Events and Intercultural Communication the list of literature and additional sources of information should be reviewed, supplementing them with the latest literature, latest sources from industry and/or scientific research.

Review lists of literature and additional sources of information for study courses Introduction to Advertising, Advertising History, Public Relations Tactics, Creative Processes (only two literature sources mentioned), Development of Media Relations, Non-verbal Communication, Non-traditional

Advertising and PR Campaigns, Basics of Persuasive Communication, Event Marketing (available literature only in Russian), Types of Advertising, Practical Sales, Public Speaking Techniques, Development of Advertising Ideas by supplementing them with additional sources of information (especially in Latvian and English).

Review and arrange the description of the study course Event Production and the list of literature and information sources for it to correspond to the study content.

For study courses Introduction to Public Relations and Development of Post-Industrial Society, History of Public Relations review the list of basic literature and additional literature, as it mostly contains books in Russian and there are no sources in Latvian, which makes to question the correspondence of the content of the study courses to students' chosen study language. Taking into account that the study courses are also implemented in English (as indicated in the study course descriptions), the content of the descriptions of these study courses needs to be sorted out as a matter of urgency so that it is consistent in both languages of the study process.

Study courses Introduction to Semiotics, Introduction to Scientific Research, Legal Aspects of Business, Introduction to Mass Communication Theory, Business Etiquette, Intellectual Property and Legal Regulation of Public Event Production lack literature sources in English, moreover, considering that the study courses will be implemented in Latvian and English, it is necessary to focus on sources in study languages, not just Latvian or Latvian and Russian.

Study courses Theories of Public Opinion and Social Psychology are implemented in Latvian and are intended to be implemented also in English, but unfortunately, resources in Latvian are not available in literature and additional information sources. Experts recommend reviewing these sources, the range of topics to be covered in the study course and the possible information available in Latvian.

In the study course Public Relations Practice, literature is not relevant to the specific field and specifics of the work, it was published before 2000. Experts recommend carefully reviewing the list of literature and information sources for this study course and update literature and information sources, also using links to online sources.

As the students of the bachelor's study programme obtain a degree in advertising and public relations, the experts recommend to supplement the list of literature sources of the study course Communication Ethics with the codes of ethics of Latvian public relations professionals and journalists (Code of Ethics developed by LASAP) <https://www.lasap.lv/etikas-kodekss>, Code of Ethics developed by the Latvian Association of Journalists <http://www.latvijaszurnalisti.lv/etikas-kodekss/>). Given that this study course is also implemented in English, the list of information sources should be supplemented with international codes of ethics in the field of communication in order to develop students' understanding of this field (Latvian codes of ethics in the field of communication are available only in Latvian and applicable to our country professionals). Experts also recommend adding several sources to various international codes of ethics: Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics <https://www.prsa.org/about/prsa-code-of-ethics>, International Public Relations Association <https://www.ipra.org/member-services/code-of-conduct/>, Latvian Public Relations Professionals Code of Ethics is based on the Venice Code of Ethics [https://www.ipra.org/static/media/uploads/pdfs/ipra\\_code\\_of\\_venice.pdf](https://www.ipra.org/static/media/uploads/pdfs/ipra_code_of_venice.pdf), Athens Code [https://www.ipra.org/static/media/uploads/pdfs/ipra\\_code\\_of\\_athens.pdf](https://www.ipra.org/static/media/uploads/pdfs/ipra_code_of_athens.pdf) and the Brussels Code [https://www.ipra.org/static/media/uploads/pdfs/ipra\\_code\\_of\\_brussels.pdf](https://www.ipra.org/static/media/uploads/pdfs/ipra_code_of_brussels.pdf). Links to international codes of ethics can also be added to the study course Legal Aspects of Mass Communication Processes, which deals with the legal regulation of the field. The informative materials of the study course must also be accompanied by links to the standards of professionals in the field, for example, the standard of the head of public relations approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in February 2020 (for bachelor's level graduates) <https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-130.pdf>, strategic communication manager standard (for master's level graduates) <https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-131.pdf>. Experts also

recommend adding links to public relations professional associations – LASAP [www.lasap.lv](http://www.lasap.lv) and the Latvian Communication Association page [laka.ngo](http://laka.ngo). Experts see challenges in the quality of the content of the study course Communication Ethics in relation to the field of public relations, because the independent tasks (works) of the study course are related to the advertising industry. Therefore, the individual works of the mentioned study course should be supplemented with tasks that are closer to the field of public relations, not only to the field of advertising, as mentioned in the description of the study course. Experts would also recommend considering the possibility of analysing films that reflect the work of public relations and advertising professionals and analysing aspects of communication ethics.

The study course Crisis Communication is an important cornerstone for future professionals in the field of communication. In the course various crises are analysed that have occurred not long ago, therefore experts recommend revising the list of literature sources recommended in the study course, supplementing it with literature published after 2004. High-quality books on crisis communication are available in Latvian and English, which can be used in the implementation of bachelor's study programmes. Experts recommend assessing whether in the study course description books in Russian, published almost 20 years ago should be left and whether those are appropriate for current communication professionals working in the European Union. In this course, it is recommended to add information about scientific articles / research related to crisis communication. Among Latvian authors, experts recommend adding Olga Kazaka's "First PR Book" (Pirmā PR grāmata) - this book is available at RISEBAs library, "Risks and Crisis Communication" (Riska un krīzes komunikācija) by Jaakko Lehtonen, Ruta Siliņa and Baiba Ābelniece. In the list of information sources, experts recommend to add links to the professional standards of the public relations sector, as students have the opportunity to form a link with the requirements of the labour market, which is expected from future professionals in the field.

In the study courses Legal Aspects of Mass Communication Processes and Crisis Communication, experts would recommend as one of the aspects of the courses consider the General Data Protection Regulation and how it relates to the content of these courses and the topics covered, especially in the digital communication environment, aspects of potential crisis communication in the event of the breach of the Data Regulation (for example, customer WhatsApp groups, unauthorized video surveillance, customer data leaks, cyber-attacks, etc.).

In the study course Text Formation in PR it is also necessary to add literature sources related to the grammar of the Latvian language, as this is an important aspect in creating correct texts. In addition, given the professional standard in the field of public relations, which emphasizes the set of grammar skills, this aspect should play an important role in the study process of future communication professionals.

Experts see similarities in study courses of Planning and Management of Public Relations Campaigns, Public Relations Practicum, Public Relations Strategy, Public Relations Tactics, where the topics acquired in one of the mentioned courses overlap. In turn, the topics and tasks covered in the study course Non-traditional Advertising and PR campaigns are more focused on the advertising industry, moreover, taking into account the content of other study courses, such as Planning and Management of Public Relations Campaigns, Public Relations Practicum, Public Relations Strategy, Public Relations Tactics various aspects of the PR industry are already being covered.

Analysing the Event Production study courses, the experts see similarities in the study courses Event Direction and Event Scenario, where the scenarios and types of events are widely analysed in both and the theme overlaps.

In the study courses Public Relations Strategy and Development of Media Relations there are similar topics on media relations, on the principles of cooperation. These topics related to the development of media relations are also covered in other courses of Public Relations field, for example, Crisis Communication, etc. Experts, assessing the overlap of these topics, see an unnecessary waste of resources, given that media relations can be integrated into public relations specialization courses.



The topic of communication barriers and aspects related to them are covered in three different study courses. The head of the study programme must review the content of the mentioned study courses again and decide which study courses can be combined, which topics can be integrated into other study courses, so that students would not have too many fragmented courses or courses with overlapping topics.

Some study courses have public relations terminology that is not used in the field, for example, in Part B of the study course Information Recording and Interpretation Practice, one of the topics that students need to learn is working with public relations products. It is not clear to experts what the term "public relations products" (*sabiedrisko attiecību produkti*) means. In turn, in the Development of Media Relations two topics are related to the term "informative reasons" (*informatīvie iemesli*), which is also not used in the field of communication. When creating the content of study courses in one of the three fields, the teaching staff must make sure of the terminology in the respective language (Latvian or English).

In the part B of the study course New Information (media) Technologies, which looks at various Internet technologies and their possibilities in the communication process, both individual works are related to Google environmental products and Google functions. The individual works do not test students' skills to act / create content on the Internet platforms viewed in the course, which is more important in further professional work, such as blog content creation, email marketing creation tasks, podcasts or website platforms. Experts recommend reviewing the tasks of this study course and adjust them according to future work skills, referring to the professional standard of the public relations manager.

Assessing the content of study courses and compliance with three specializations - Public Relations, Advertising and Event Production, experts estimate that the content and tasks of HEI's Advertising course are most developed and are closer to the requirements of the labour market in this field. Almost equal to Advertising courses content is the specialization of Public Relations, but in some study courses there is still a lack of balance between the two specializations in order to have a 50:50 correlation of the content. When evaluating the courses relevant to the specialization of Event Production, experts see shortcomings, as there is a lack of content that would provide the knowledge and skills mentioned in the face-to-face interview by the event industry representatives - digital event management skills and technology skills. It is difficult to analyse the percentage distribution of study courses between specializations according to the descriptions of study courses, because they do not mention the specializations for which the specific study course is implemented. The experts base their assessment of the content of the study courses on personal professional experience, regulatory framework and knowledge of the field. All three study specializations lack the aspect of financial planning of communication - how the costs of inhouse or agency services are formed, how to create estimates for services, what forms of business to implement for communication professionals etc.

After the 2nd year of studies, the professional bachelor's programme "Public Relations and Advertising" offers to specialize in one of three directions - PR, advertising or event production. Until the previous accreditation, two specializations were offered - advertising and PR. As this is a professional bachelor's study programme, the study process should be based on the professional standards of the field. When evaluating the documents attached to the SAR and on-site visit interviews with the management of the study field, the experts managed to obtain only the professional standard of PR manager. This standard has been in force since March 2020 and is publicly available. The draft of advertising manager standard submitted for evaluation and adoption in the Trilateral Cooperation Council of the Ministry of Education and Science was also available, however at the time of assessment procedure it has not been officially approved. In turn, the Event producer profession standard, the preparation of standard has not yet started and therefore is not available. Experts evaluate the content of studies in accordance with the available approved standard, consider content of studies for advertising manager according to the possible standard

(draft provided by RISEBA during the assessment procedure), whereas express an opinion on the specialization of event producer in accordance with the wishes of employers – what is expected from these specialists in the future. In case, the professional standard of event producer in the bachelor programme is developed and approved, analyse whether the current title of the programme will be in line with all three specializations.

As the bachelor's programme of the study field offers three specializations, RISEBA has to consider how many specializations are provided each year - whether they are developed according to the number of students or the requirements of the labour market in a particular year. Although the representatives of the HEI emphasized that the division into groups takes place based on individual interviews, the experts received information during the on-site visit interviews with students that not all students are satisfied with the provision of specializations in all study programmes. Due to the small number of students, a full-time student is offered a specific specialization only in evening studies, or the Latvian or Russian flow has to be changed in order to acquire the desired specialization. Experts' opinion is that HEI can offer all three specializations in this study programme only under conditions, if students, when they have to choose specialization after 2nd study year, could stay at the same study form (if they studied day, than continue day studies but no evening studies, if they studied latvian flow, than continue Latvian flow but not switching to Russian flow), how they entered the HEI. are provided with the study process according to the conditions (study form, language, etc.) they have entered the HEI.

According to the requirements of the professional undergraduate programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management", students should complete several internships to receive 20 credit points (SAR, p. 138). Students showed satisfaction with the internship. Several graduates pointed out that their internship place became an employment place. Internship (traineeship) is available for foreign students as well. Several students and industry representatives pointed out that they had the opportunity to do an internship in English, especially with those industry representatives who are internationally oriented.

Industry representatives are also involved in the implementation of the study programme. Through on-site interviews, students and graduates expressed satisfaction with the study programme, its contents and with the recognition of RISEBA diploma on market labour. Students even pointed out that they enrolled in this study based on the recommendation of older colleagues. The students and graduates themselves said that they have chosen the programme because of the content and teachers, they consider that they are all professionals. Graduates pointed out that they would like to have more practical workshops during the studies because such workshops provide them with an example of acquired theoretical knowledge and practical simulation of real situations in the profession. For instance, graduates pointed out that they have missed practical knowledge on how to organize events.

The study work planned at the end of each study year is a gradual preparation of students for a bachelor's thesis which is an example of good practice. When evaluating students' final theses (bachelor's theses), experts see challenges for the future of PR direction, because a lot of students choose to write theses in advertising specialization. Through the interviews, the graduates pointed out that they had great help from their mentors in writing the paper and considered the qualification exam, which is an integral part of the State examination process, useful. Based on what the experts saw during the visit to the HEI, the final thesis are of good and satisfactory quality, and the topics of the final papers are very diverse (SAR, pp. 140-142). The State Examination Commission evaluates the bachelor's thesis. To improve the quality of final theses, the Commission recommended to pay more attention to aligning research methods with the topic of the thesis, as well as the quality and originality of the creative part; to incorporate more statistical data into the theses, and place an increased focus on the study and the link between the brand and the target audience basing the creative part on research results; to a greater extent use academic sources in the overview of the theory (SAR, pp.142-143). The experts group encourages the RISEBA to monitor the implementation

of these guidelines, and if necessary, to organize additional methodological preparations for students before starting to write a paper, but also for teachers who will be mentors on bachelor thesis.

Based on the SAR (p. 131) and interviews with the Programme Director the content of study programmes (subjects and internships) changes in accordance with the results of surveys conducted among students, graduates and employers. However, not all surveys are done annually. Given the results of the research listed in SAR (p. 144-146) students are not satisfied with the usage of platform e.riseba.lv (especially with the efficient usage of the platform itself) so it is recommended that RISEBA see how the usage of the platform can be raised to a higher level, in particular how to encourage teachers to publish teaching materials and literature on a regular basis. However, it should be noted that a number of changes in the usage of the platform itself were made during the coronavirus pandemic.

The time of the lectures is adjusted to the status of the students, where classes for part-time students are held in the evening, which the students and graduates themselves praised because it allows them to work during the day. In the on-site visit interviews, they also pointed out that it means a lot to them that the classes were exclusively during the week, but not on weekends, which they like to save for private obligations. But at the same time they said that compared to the full-time students they receive much less information (due to the reduced scope of teaching) and that it is a pity because they feel that the experiences and examples of teachers with practical experience would be very useful to them. During the on-site interviews some students pointed out that due to the small number of students, sometimes dividing groups into their selected qualifications can be problematic. For instance, some of them had to switch to part time studies because of the small number of students. Such things should be told to students before enrolling in the study programme, but it is recommended that the HEI sees how in the future it is possible to implement all study courses in which students show interest, in the status that students want, not be forced to choose between full time and part time given the number of students.

The content of study programmes (subjects and internships) changes are made in accordance with the results of surveys conducted among students, graduates and employers. However not all surveys are done annually, the results of the surveys are not publicly available and not all stakeholders are sufficiently familiar with the quality assurance system.

Both teachers, students and graduates, pointed out that the teaching process is oriented towards students. For instance many teachers themselves initially conduct their own mini-research to see what students expect from the course and then orient the whole class accordingly, especially so as not to overlap the content with other courses. Teaching staff has no limitations of technical nature in the implementation of their intended teaching methods and the latest technologies are increasingly being introduced in the study process (SAR, p. 138). Both students and teachers showed great satisfaction with the implementation of the teaching process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quality of Internet connection at their own homes was the main problem for some. They believe that after the initial difficulties, the teachers coped very quickly and adapted to the whole situation. There is a family atmosphere between teachers and students - students can call lecturers, mobile numbers are available - which does not always have to be good and positive - because it can lead to a loss of authority and the disappearance of the boundaries between the professor-student relationship. During the COVID-19 students pointed out that they have received repeated emails about the availability of resources.

During the mobility period in a foreign HEI, the student should choose courses that are similar to courses offered by RISEBA. The chosen courses should be approved by the Programme director and the learning outcomes achieved during such mobility are recognised. The number of students who decide on outgoing mobility is not large. The number of incoming and outgoing mobility should certainly be increased in the future, especially when the study programme begins to be conducted in English, which is very commendable. It can be seen from the interviews with HEI representatives

that RISEBA prepares both teachers and students for this transition by organizing English language courses and introducing English as a compulsory subject in the study programme.

The HEI itself predicts that the trend of decreasing the number of students, especially full-time students, will continue in the future, so it is necessary to analyze the reasons for declining student numbers, and then develop a plan to attract more new students and retain those who already enrolled the study programme (e.g. extension of repayment plan, transition from full to part time studies, special advisors for people starting to lag behind in resolving their obligations, etc.). Experts are aware that the number of students is decreasing in all HEIs with similar programmes, but RISEBA should see opportunities to attract more students, especially international ones when they start with programmes in English, because this will be important for the financial sustainability of RISEBA as well.

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

### **Conclusions:**

The descriptions of the study courses/ modules need to be improved based on the analysis (design, grammatical errors, obligations for full-time and part-time students, outdated literature). In the specialization of Event Production there is a lack of content that would provide the knowledge and skills important for the event industry (digital event management skills and technology skills). Through interviews, students and graduates expressed satisfaction with the study programme, its contents and with the recognition of RISEBA diploma on labour market. The content of study programmes changes in accordance with the results of surveys conducted among students, graduates and employers. However not all surveys are done annually, the results of the surveys are not publicly available and not all stakeholders are sufficiently familiar with the quality assurance system. This definitely needs to be improved. Both teachers, students and graduates pointed out that the teaching process is oriented towards students. RISEBA should see opportunities to attract more students, especially international ones when they start with programmes in English, because this will be important for the financial sustainability of RISEBA as well. The number of incoming and outgoing mobility should certainly be increased in the future. Learning outcomes achieved during such mobility are recognised. The situation with the choice of specializations currently is an issue and causes student dissatisfaction due to the fact that not all three specialisations can be offered each year due to the small number of students.

### **Strengths:**

- Great enthusiasm, ie. satisfaction with the programme of current students and graduates.
- Involvement of industry representatives in the implementation, but also in changes of study programmes.
- Student-centred learning.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Study course descriptions are not unified (based on the language and full-time vs part-time students), grammatical errors were noted, the literature on many courses is outdated or is exclusively in Russian.
- In the specialization of Event Production there is a lack of content that would provide the knowledge and skills important for the event industry (digital event management skills and technology skills).
- All three study specializations lack the aspect of financial planning of communication.
- Due to the small number of students in some study specializations, students are sometimes forced to change their status from full-time to part-time student.

- Small number of outgoing and incoming mobilities.
- The issues with providing opportunities to choose the desired specialization causes student dissatisfaction.

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

#### Analysis

The main financing source for the study programme “Public Relations and Advertising management” is tuition fees and as stated previously RISEBA funds study process only from tuition fees. More than half of the programme's yearly budget is allocated for academic staff and visiting faculty salary, the second largest expense is wear and tear of fixed assets and intangible assets (SAR, p. 155).

0.7% of the study programmes yearly budget is allocated for scientific activity support for students and corresponding academic staff involved in this study programme. The Annual student's research and artistic creation conference is organized. Financial support is also provided for publication of the best student work in this conference and also RISEBA partner universities conferences. Support in scientific and creative research is provided for academic staff by allocating the available amount of money to the respective departments which oversee the expenditure of it by competitive procedure. Departments may attract extra funding via EU grants (SAR, p.155).

During previous evaluation of the study field and study programmes it was stated that RISEBA library resources do not meet the needs of study programme content and results. The 2017/2018 alumni survey also showed results of insufficient library resources for the study programme (SAR, p. 150). The HEI management is aware of the situation and is making continuous effort to improve library content each year. The RISEBA library provides study materials in English, Latvian and Russian languages, subscriptions to databases and specifically for the students of this study field subscriptions to some of the largest press publications in Latvia and abroad (SAR, p. 157). During the on-site visit interviews with students and alumni of the study field no dissatisfaction with available library materials was expressed and by evaluating student survey results (According to SAR p. 144-152, tables 2.3. to 2.7.) it can also be seen that overall satisfaction with material provisions for this study programme is great. Experts also see that the amount of titles in English provided by the RISEBA library is a good base for the implementation of the study programme's English stream in coming years.

It must be noted that attention must be paid to improve programmes study course primary source and additional source content as in a lot of cases these lists include dated literature. Experts group suggests overweighing all courses and updating source's information but especially paying attention to these study courses (all parts if course is in parts): Basics of Compositions, Business communication, Integrated marketing, Basics of Media Planning, Basics of Persuasion Communication, Basics of Visual Communication, Creative process, Service marketing, Unconventional Advertising and PR Campaigns (SAR, Annex No. 6). For all study courses mentioned, the newest source is ten years old as of 2021. Experts group recommends reviewing all course descriptions. Descriptions of study courses should include references to the latest scientific articles related to the specific nature of the sector as well.

As stated previously the general state of RISEBA premises is of great quality and is thoroughly appropriate for the overall study process. The study process of the study programme “Public Relations and Management” is carried out at all three RISEBA buildings – two at Meza street 3 and H2O centre at Durbes street 4. Most of the classes are happening at Meza street while practical courses in photography, videography, computer graphics and acting skills happen at Durbes street 4 where there is all necessary equipment and rooms are arranged accordingly (SAR, p. 156).

Overall the available technical provisions meet the needs of the study programme content and goals. RISEBA auditoriums are equipped with audio visual technology that is used in the study process by both academic staff and students during their class presentations. The photo, video and

sound studios have all the necessary infrastructure and as mentioned before, RISEBA provides their academic staff and students with the appropriate technical equipment as well. Cameras, lighting, sound recording equipment, screens and other equipment are located in the according teaching facilities and some of the equipment can be loaned for work outside of class. Students learn necessary basic graphic design knowledge with Adobe programmes. Video, photo editing and computer graphics software is available on computers located at HEI premises. Students agree that they have almost all necessary computer programmes to complete coursework on their personal computers but suggest that they miss official Adobe programmes, especially with remote learning when HEI premises can not not be visited as frequently. There is conflicting information whether the official Adobe programmes are available for students on their personal computers. The students provide information that they were suggested by academic staff to acquire the programme by their own means but the HEI management present that there is the possibility for all students to access all official computer programmes needed via remote desktop. It is advisable to clarify this detail among students which probably is caused by insufficient information.

E-learning platform E-RISEBA (based on MOODLE) is used in the study process but as stated previously and as seen in the results of student surveys 2018/2019 (SAR p. 144-147) the overall efficient use of this platform still has room for improvement for some study course groups of this study programme. As mentioned by management of the HEI during the interview, members of academic staff are not obliged to use E-RISEBA for their courses which might be one of the reasons for dissatisfactory use of the platform. Experts group recommends making the use of the E-RISEBA platform mandatory for all courses and to continue encouraging and educating academic staff on the use and benefits of this platform through methodological seminars.

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

Conclusions:

The financial and infrastructure provision of the study programme is good. By evaluating student survey results (According to SAR p. 144-152, tables 2.3. to 2.7.) the overall score for required literature and materials for all course groups is above 4 which indicates overall satisfaction with material provisions for this study programme, too. The experts group also can conclude that most of the provisions for this study programme completely or almost completely meet the needs and goals. Some improvements should be addressed regarding library resources and e-RISEBA use. The study course descriptions need to be reviewed and improved.

Strengths:

- Great material and infrastructural provisions that meet the needs and goals of the study programme.
- Good amount of library materials in English which can be a great base for study programme's implementation in English in the upcoming years.

Weaknesses:

- Dissatisfactory use of the e-RISEBA platform.
- Dated study course materials and an overwhelming amount of literature in Russian language.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

In 2020, 18 elected staff members were involved in the implementation of the study programme (compared to 24 staff members in 2013), and 40 guest lecturers (40 also in 2013). In the SAR (p.

164) it is stressed that the changes in the composition of the academic staff must be considered as significant. This is related to the fact that the planned implementation of the study programme was cancelled in the RISEBA's branch in Daugavpils, but in the report prepared for previous accreditation, the prospective staff members from Daugavpils branch had been included in the report. For several staff members the participation in the implementation of the study programme has been terminated during the previous accreditation period. Several previously elected staff members have become guest lecturers, and one has remained elected as researcher. Seven new staff members with doctoral degrees have been involved in the implementation of the study programme during the previous accreditation period, and this has raised the overall proportion of elected staff members with doctoral degrees that now exceeds 50%. The academic staff composition for full time and part time studies does not differ significantly. Since it is a professional bachelor's study programme, the involvement of industry professionals as guest lecturers is justified and highly important. The selection principles of academic staff members is based on the need to ensure the provision of skills, knowledge and competences according to the three specializations that are established in the study programme: PR manager, advertising manager, event producer. The decision of establishing three specializations explains the high number of guest lecturers involved in the implementation of the study programme.

It can be said that the qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme in general complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses. However, currently there is a disbalance between highly qualified staff members from the fields of PR and advertising, and it could be improved by involving more qualified PR and strategic communication scholars and professionals in the implementation of the study programme and by establishing cooperation with the professional associations of this field. Speaking about the plans to start implementing the study programme in English, the experts' opinion is that the academic staff members who are going to be involved in teaching in English are ready for this development, and this is also assured by the institution itself that the staff members have at least the level B2 (Annex No. 10 to the study programme analysis in the SAR).

Experts see challenges for independent expertise for the evaluation of the study process and namely for the Study Programme Council, which consists massively of HEI lecturers and not independent industry experts. To ensure the link with the labor market, as well as independent expertise, it is necessary to involve external experts in these study programme councils in the future.

A detailed analysis about the involvement of the academic staff in the scientific research and artistic creation, can be found in Part I, Chapter 4 of this report. Here the main challenges for the study programme and the study field in general are the following: RISEBA has developed strategy and means for stimulating research activity among academic staff members, but currently, the actual research achievements at the ICS study field are partially compliant to the ambitious goals. Research activity mainly happens in the subfields of marketing and advertising, while there is lacking research activity in the directions of communication and PR, and also event management. Artistic creation among academic staff members mainly is related to the specialization of event production. There are many scientific papers published in conference proceedings during the previous accreditation period, but the number of high level academic journal publications is low (SAR, Annex No. 10). More active engagement in international research networks is advisable in order to raise the number of international research projects and co-authored publications with foreign researchers. The results of the research are integrated in several study courses.

There is a mechanism in place that ensures mutual collaboration between the faculty members to ensure the interconnection of study courses. Peer evaluation is organized in each academic year. As the experts' group learned during the visit, teaching staff members evaluate the peer hospitalation as a positive and fruitful experience. As a good practice the coordination between the supervisors of

students' Bachelor thesis can be noted that allows to solve any issues that appear in the process and harmonizes the supervision practices, as well as create links between the theoretical and creative parts of the thesis since these are supervised by different staff members.

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

Conclusions:

The composition of the teaching staff has changed significantly during the previous accreditation period, but this is mostly related to the fact that the implementation of the study programme was not launched in the Daugavpils' branch. Except for the PR and strategic communication field, the number and qualifications of the academic staff is compliant with the content and results of the study programme. In the field of PR, it is advisable to involve more qualified PR and strategic communication scholars and professionals to balance the number of academic staff members from the field of advertising. The involvement in international research projects is currently not high. The results of the research are integrated in the content of the study programme. The system of academic staff cooperation, mutual hospitiation, coordination among the supervisors of bachelor thesis is in place and working well.

Strengths:

- There are many industry professionals involved in the implementation of the study programme, however, mainly from the field of advertising and event production.
- There is good cooperation and peer evaluation happening on the level of the study programme.

Weaknesses:

- Currently, involvement of qualified PR and strategic communication scholars and professionals is lacking, if compared to the involvement of marketing, advertising and event management professionals.
- Academic staff member research activity in the fields of PR, strategic communication and event production is low, compared to advertising and marketing fields.

## **5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Public Relations and Advertising 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:** Annex No. 7 of SAR. The professional qualification Event Producent awarded as a result of the study programme does not exist (Event Producent profession standard does not exist) but the professional qualification Advertising Manager awarded as study programme currently is not approved (profession standard is developed, but not approved).

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:** Annex No. 8 of SAR. RISEBA has signed a cooperation agreement with Turība University and provides the possibility to continue studies in the professional bachelor study programme “Public Relations”. And Annex No. 9 of SAR (document, the rector signed letter to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (No. 20/1.1-15/57, signed on 06.03.2020)) confirming that RISEBA provides the possibility to continue studies in RISEBA’s professional bachelor study programme “Audiovisual Media Arts”.

- 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 No. 9 of SAR (the rector signed letter to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (No. 20/1.1-15/57, signed on 06.03.2020)) confirming that students are guaranteed compensations for losses.

- 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:** Annex No. 17 of SAR (the rector signed letter to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (No. 20/1.1-15/61, signed on 12.03.2020)) confirming that the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme in Latvian are proficient in the official language. Experts have noticed challenges with the usage of the state language that can be seen in the descriptions of study courses, which can be observed especially in the descriptions of study courses prepared by teachers whose mother tongue is not Latvian.

- 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 No. 10 of SAR (the rector signed letter to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (No. 20/1.1-15/59, signed on 06.03.2020)) confirming that the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2 level knowledge of related foreign language (in common to European regulations).

- 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:** Annex No. 11 of SAR - The contract on acquisition of education complies with mandatory provisions to be included, but there the HEI has to change the bachelor degree from Professional bachelor degree in public administration to the Professional bachelor degree in Advertising and Public Relations.

- 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:** Evaluating the descriptions of programme's study courses, many shortcomings can be seen in them, which need to be improved in the near future. There are issues with primary and additional information sources, mostly these materials are offered in Russian language (not English), in some study course descriptions are issues with main information sources as well.

- 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:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** There is only one valid professional standard for Public Relations Manager specialization; the professional standard for Advertising Manager specialization is only a draft, currently not approved, but the professional standard for Event Producer specialization is currently not developed. Therefore experts can not evaluate the bachelor study programme in this aspect fully and compare it to the professional standard. The study programme specialization in PR complies with the professional standards "Public Relation Manager".

- 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:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** Annex No. 2 of SAR "Compliance to the State educational standard of the professional Bachelor's study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management". Here is only one valid professional standard for Public Relations Manager specialization; the professional standard for Advertising Manager specialization is only a draft, currently not approved, but the professional standard for Event Producer specialization is currently not developed.

- 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:** Elected staff members have publications in reviewed editions or have artistic creation achievements.

- 15 P5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** The main issue is the lack of all three specializations' professional standards. There is only one valid professional standard for the Public Relations Manager specialization. The professional standard for Advertising Manager specialization is only a draft, currently not approved, but the professional standard for Event Producer specialization is currently not developed. Therefore experts can not evaluate the bachelor study programme in this aspect fully and compare it to the professional standard.

RISEBA has signed a cooperation agreement with Turība University and provides the possibility to continue studies in the professional bachelor study programme "Public Relations". RISEBA provides the possibility to students to continue studies in RISEBA's professional bachelor study programme "Audiovisual Media Arts" in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued or they are guaranteed compensations for losses.

The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme in Latvian are proficient in the official language, and the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme in English have at least B2 level knowledge of related foreign language (in common to European regulations). Elected staff members have publications in reviewed editions or have artistic creation achievements.

The description of the study courses have been prepared in Latvian, Russian and English. There are issues with primary and additional information sources in the study course descriptions - many literature sources are offered in Russian language (even for study courses to be taught in English), in some study course descriptions are issues with main information sources as well - they are outdated, the available latest literature is not included.

## Requirements (R6-R8)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** RISEBA has all the necessary infrastructure, material and technical provisions, additional resource improvement possibilities as well as a clear financing system in order to offer and maintain high quality material support to the study programme, except for physical accessibility of some of the study premises.

- 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 number and qualifications of the academic staff is compliant with the content and results of the study programme. In the field of PR, it is advisable to involve more qualified PR and strategic communication scholars and professionals to balance the number of academic staff members from the field of advertising.

- 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

Conclusions:

The main issue is the lack of all three specializations' professional standards for the study programme. By the time of the experts' visit, there is only one valid professional standard for the Public Relations

Manager specialization. The professional standard for Advertising Manager specialization is only a draft, currently not approved, but the professional standard for Event Producer specialization is currently not developed. Therefore experts can not evaluate the bachelor study programme in this aspect fully and compare it to the professional standard. RISEBA has all the necessary infrastructure, material and technical provisions, additional resource improvement possibilities as well as a clear financing system in order to offer and maintain high quality material support to the study programme. The description of the study courses have been prepared in Latvian, English and Russian. There are issues with primary and additional information sources in the study course descriptions, for some reason many materials are offered in Russian language, in some study course descriptions are issues with main information sources as well, the latest available literature is not included in the reading lists (even in cases, when the books are available at RISEBA's library). Except for the PR and strategic communication field, the number and qualifications of the academic staff is compliant with the content and results of the study programme. In the field of PR, it is advisable to involve more qualified PR and strategic communication scholars and professionals to balance the number of academic staff members from the field of advertising.

#### Strengths:

- The overall compliance with the legal requirements of the state is mostly achieved in several parameters.

#### Weaknesses:

- The qualification awarded as a result of the study programme does not fully comply with the valid professional standards.
- The quality of the study course descriptions is insufficient - there are issues with information sources in Russian and with the outdated information sources.
- There is a disbalance between academic staff in all three qualifications and between the opportunities to do research in various fields - currently the field of advertising dominates and is promoted with various means (one example - the annual scientific conference with the sub-section devoted only to advertising, but not to public relations, strategic communication, event producing).
- In spite the fact that all elected staff members are involved in scientific or artistic creation, the number of high-quality publications is low.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

### **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management"**

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

Create a better balance between the highly qualified staff members from the fields of PR, advertising and event production.

It is recommended to include more practical workshops in the study programme.

It is necessary to analyze the reasons for declining student numbers, and then develop a plan to attract more new students and retain those who already enrolled the study programme (e.g. extension of repayment plan, transition from full to part time study, special advisors for people starting to lag behind in resolving their obligations, etc.). Keep working on effective strategies to prevent students who cannot pay for their studies from being left out.

Experts group suggests overviewing all courses and updating source's information but especially paying attention to these study courses (all parts if course is in parts): Basics of Compositions, Business communication, Integrated marketing, Basics of Media Planning, Basics of Persuasion Communication, Basics of Visual Communication, Creative process, Service marketing, Unconventional Advertising and PR Campaigns.

In case, the professional standard of event producer in the bachelor programme is developed and approved, analyse whether the current title of the programme will be in line with all three specializations.

The quality of academic staff publications could be raised, focusing on less in numbers but higher level publications.

It should be clarified amongst students and academic staff where and how to remotely access computer programmes on personal computers for learning and teaching purposes, especially Adobe programmes.

Develop mechanisms for student involvement in the Study Programme Council.

Taking into account the management of the specific study field and the fact that one employee is responsible for it and if all three qualifications will be implemented in future, consider the possibility to include more representatives of employers in the council of the Public Relations and Advertising bachelor's study programme - for example 6 in total, representing each specialization - 2 public relations practitioners (one from public relations agencies, one practitioner), 2 advertising industry practitioners (one from advertising agencies, one so-called in-house practitioner) and 2 event industry practitioners (one from event agencies, one industry practitioner).

## **Long-term recommendations**

Encourage the staff members to involve more in international research projects, to exploit more effectively the wide networks and partnerships with academic institutions from different countries that RISEBA has created over years to ensure that research activity develops in all specializations of the bachelor study programme.

Monitor the implementation of State Examination guidelines related to bachelor thesis, and if necessary, organize additional methodological preparations for students before starting to write a paper, but also for teachers who will be mentors on bachelor thesis.

The use of the E-RISEBA platform should be made mandatory for all study courses on bachelor level and academic staff must be continuously encouraged and educated on the use and benefits of this platform through methodological seminars.

## **II. "Public Relations Management" ASSESSMENT**

### **II. "Public Relations Management" ASSESSMENT**

## 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

### Analysis

The RISEBA professional master study programme "Public Relations Management" (47342) has two scopes of the programme. Variant one brings together students from the branch of knowledge of the social sciences. For persons with previously acquired professional higher education in the field of communication (with profiling education) are admitted to the study programme with the total amount of 60 CP (90 ECTS). Persons with previously acquired academic higher education in the field of communication (with profiling education) are admitted to the study programme with the total amount of 80 CP (120 ECTS).

Variant two is indicated for students with a bachelor's degree in other disciplines (not social sciences or other related sciences) and includes 10 CP as an introductory module that students must complete within the first year of study. This variant has a total volume of 80 CP (120 ECTS).

In the admission requirements it is explained that if the student enrolls in variant two, that is, the one designated for those who do not come from the social sciences branch, the student agrees to take the introductory leveling course (10 CP) during the first year of studies (p.182 of the SAR). The admission requirements provided in the RISEBA Admission Regulations and the corresponding selection of applicants are appropriate and sufficient for each matriculated student to be able to achieve the intended results of the study programme.

The purposes of this master's programme are to prepare highly qualified, competent and competitive managers according to the profession standard of strategic communication manager for work in enterprises, public administration and local governments, non-governmental organizations, to promote development of student's creative potential and analytical abilities during the studies and later, to provide an opportunity to continue doctoral studies after the completion of the programme.

The title of the study programme, the degree to be acquired (Professional Master's degree in Public Relations) and the professional qualification (Strategic communication manager) to be acquired correspond to the programme objective, tasks, results to be achieved and the content of the programme, which are mutually coordinated and result from the programme mapping. At the end students develop a master's thesis, which reflects all the achievable results of the programme and are assessed by the State Examination Commission. The achievement of the learning outcomes is ensured after completion of both 60 and 80 CPs.

RISEBA envisages to implement the study programme in the form of full-time presence studies in Latvian and English. Commencement of implementation of the study programme in English is planned for 2021/2022 academic year. On the web, it is already offered as studies in English.

Information on training complements, as well as their price, is available on professional Master's programme "Public Relations Management" website (<https://www.riseba.lv/en/students/postgraduate-studies/public-relations-management>).

It is worrying the few students who were studying in this course 2020/21: only 6 students, of which 3 are in the study programme implemented in Latvian language, and the other 3, in the study programme implemented in Russian language, continuing their studies in this language because they were admitted before changes in legislation. No new students were admitted in this programme in 2020/2021. In the 2019/2020 academic year, 18 students enrolled. It is recommended to make efforts to achieve a higher enrollment in the professional Master's programme "Public Relations Management", despite the total number of students studying in public relations master's degree programmes in ICS in Latvia tends to decrease (table 1.2 of the SAR, p. 185-186).

It is recommended to promote the enrollment of foreign students to promote synergies between countries, within the field of public relations management. This would have a positive impact on the group of employers and students when carrying out their internships.

The exmatriculation rate of students in the programme is small and in recent years does not exceed

12 % of the total number of students (SAR, p.185). According to the data provided by the SAR (p. 185), only two students were expelled for not continuing their studies after a break in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The profile of the student of the professional Master's programme "Public Relations Management" is that of a person who already works in this field and wants to acquire a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allows engaging in highly qualified professional activities in the respective area and be able to continue studies in doctoral programmes.

Despite the fact that the Professional Master's Degree in Public Relations prepares and enables students to study a PhD, during the interviews with students and graduates, they showed no interest in continuing along the path of research. It is recommended to promote it through the teaching staff so that they motivate their students to continue for the doctorate. After the meeting with graduates, many praised the possibility of publishing their first research articles thanks to their final master's thesis.

For the admission of students to the programme in English, a test in that language is requested, unless they have a B2 certificate or higher. It is recommended that official certificates recognized by the European Union are always requested. For foreign applicants, they must take a specific test, called the RISEBA admission test. All the information on this test, as well as on the admission processes, is publicly available on the Master's website, it is intuitive and accessible.

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

### **Conclusions:**

The RISEBA professional master study programme "Public Relations Management" (47342) has two scopes of the programme. Variant one brings together students from the branch of knowledge of the social sciences. For persons with previously acquired professional higher education in the field of communication (with profiling education) are admitted to the study programme with the total amount of 60 CP (90 ECTS). Persons with previously acquired academic higher education in the field of communication (with profiling education) are admitted to the study programme with the total amount of 80 CP (120 ECTS). The admission requirements, as well as the complementary admission tests, allow the selection of the most suitable candidates to take the Master in Public Relations Management with quality and ensure that professional qualification is acquired through learning outcomes. The different workload translated into ECTS (CP) allows the student to take a customized Master's degree. Through the proposed study programme, students acquire the Professional Master's Degree in Public Relations. Study programme title, the degree and qualification to be obtained, objective, tasks, study results as well as the admission conditions are interrelated, they comply with the regulatory framework. As of the 2021/2022 academic year, this study programme will be offered in English. All information about the study programme is public and accessible on the studying programme website, which can favor the enrollment of future students. It is recommended to work on increasing enrollment.

### **Strengths:**

- The title of the study programme, the goals, the learning results, requirements for admission are compliant with the degree issued and the professional qualification that the students acquire at the end of their studies.
- Information about the programme is public, complete and accessible on RISEBA's website.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Very low enrollment, especially after taking a break from your studies.
- Students do not continue their training as a PhD.

- Few students from abroad (outside exchange programme framework) choose this study programme.

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

### **Analysis**

The mandatory content of the master's programme consists of the study courses, ensuring in-depth acquisition of the latest achievements in the sector in theory and practice and study courses in writing a research paper, creative work, designing and management science, an internship and state examination (SAR, p. 189). Although in SAR (p. 189) it is mentioned that "nearly all study courses involved analysis of real case studies taken from the professional activity of teaching staff and sector practitioners" graduates pointed out that they had too little practical exercises and believe that this should certainly be changed in the future. Namely, they said it would be great to have workshops where students work together with guest lecturers and are not evaluated, this removes some pressure, otherwise students are evaluated throughout their studies constantly. Graduates also pointed out that it would be great if the programme would be in English. They also pointed out that it would be great to have more international lecturers, to bring students international experience. Experts agree with them and recommend that the HEI in the future provide students with more practical workshops and guest lecturers from abroad with the aim of gaining international experience.

It is possible to pursue the professional master's study programme on a full-time basis. Full-time studies at RISEBA take place on weekdays from 18:00 to 21:00. Graduates were very satisfied with this way of holding classes because of the possibility of working during their studies.

Surveys are not conducted on an annual basis which is definitely recommended in the future. Revision of study programmes is carried out through the Study Programme Council in cooperation with professionals who are involved in the implementation of the internship, as visiting faculty members, supervisors and reviewers of master's theses, as well as members of the state examination commission (SAR, p. 189). At the end of each course students are surveyed to find out their opinion about the relevance of the specific course, adequacy of its scope and efficiency of teaching. In the interviews graduates also mentioned that students should be more encouraged to come up with their suggestions for the improvement of the study programme. Due to the small number of only 2nd year students in the interviews it is difficult to say is the teaching process student-centered in all aspects. However, graduates were satisfied with the student-centered teaching process. The opinions of students and graduates are taken into account when reviewing study programmes, especially when there is an overlap of content at the bachelor and master level (SAR, p. 201; interview with the Programme Director). That some contents overlap were pointed out by the graduates themselves. In the bachelor's study course Online Communication and in the master's study course Innovation in Communication in Social Media, taught by the same lecturer, experts see parallels, the mastered topics in both courses are the same. Such an overlap in study topics is not attractive to those students who graduate from HEI bachelor's studies and want to continue their studies in the master's programme, because they will have mastered these topics before. Overlaps in the content of bachelor and master study programmes should be prevented. Students should be more encouraged to come up with their suggestions for the improvement of the study programme.

Analysing the content of the master's programme in accordance with the standard of the profession of Strategic Communication Manager, experts assess that HEI has included several courses in the study process that strengthen the management skills and human resource management skills, etc. of future communication industry professionals. Taking into account the specifics of the field's work in recent years, experts recommend reviewing the possibility to include a study course on Crisis and Risk Communication also in the master's study programme in order to study this topic in depth,



which is very important for strategic communication managers.

The Master's study programme includes three different courses on aspects of branding (Brand Communication, Place Branding and Personality Branding), which provide information on similar topics and are taught by the same lecturer. Assessing the professional standards of the strategic communication manager and the needs of the labour market, experts recommend considering the content of these courses and, as far as possible, combine study courses. Also review what topics can be studied already in the bachelor's programme Brand Management Basics course, so that it would be possible to cover only the topics of strategics in the master's programme rather than introduction to the basics of branding.

In study courses Management Psychology, Strategic Management and Organizational Management there are topics that are very close or overlapping. As future strategic communication managers need not only management skills, but also skills in the field of public relations, the content of the offered courses should be reviewed so that it is proportionate not only to management skills, team management and to leadership skills, but also to the specifics of public relations.

Assessing the practical task of the master's study programme, where students have to develop a message for public relations needs on a specific topic, actual service or product, experts see that it does not meet the industry standard, which emphasizes strategic communication process management. For example, creating a task such as creating a message (audio; visual - poster, booklet, slideshow; video - presentation roll; live - action, speech, etc.) and the development of techniques (where, how, how often, at what time, in what way) to deliver the message to the audience is more suitable for bachelor's students than for master's students. The practical task, where the student has to master the management of public relations projects from basics to implementation, is also suitable for the bachelor's level, not for master's students who plan, supervise such processes, as well as advise either the team or clients on these issues. The basics must have been learned before or provided in the introductory model for those with no previous experience in the field or specialization.

The same challenges can be seen in the Master's study programme as in the Bachelor's study programme - the descriptions of study courses have incomplete lists of literature and information sources, Russian language literature dominates, there is a lack of recently published literature and information. The offered sources were published some 10 years ago. The experts observed that the list of literature and information sources should be supplemented in the study course Innovation in Communication in Social Media, Strategic Management, Public Relations Strategy in the Government, Private and Public Sector; Principles of Partnership in Government, Private and Public Sectors, by including the latest sources of industry or scientific articles.

The internship is present in both study years. If a student already works in a company, he/she may choose that company as a place of his/her internship. Tasks to be completed during the internship is the main criterion for finding a company suitable for the purposes of the programme (SAR, p. 196). Through conversations with graduates, it was evident that some of them did their internship in that way, with some pointing out that this job was the reason why they enrolled in the study programme. An internship of at least 26 credit points is provided for graduates of the academic bachelor's study programme, or of at least 6 credit points, if it is provided for graduates of the professional bachelor's programme (SAR, p. 191). During the professional internship a supervisor is assigned for the student from the company. Results of the student during internships should be presented in front of a special commission. During the meetings with students, not enough information was obtained on the internship of international students, however, the meeting with industry representatives highlighted the possibility of attending the internship in English, especially with those partners who are internationally oriented.

State Examination Commission assesses the quality of Master Thesis overall as good (SAR, p.198). During the visit, the experts' group evaluated them equally. The State Examination Commission have pointed on several shortages in the final papers: "the course of the study is not sufficiently

revealed, in certain cases hypothesis are not proposed in accordance with the description of the issue, recommendations are not always based on the data of conclusions and methods of acquisition of data and techniques of analyses are not always appropriate. In order to improve the quality of final papers, the commission recommends to draw bigger attention to the substantiation of the hypothesis, to establish stronger relation between data, conclusions and recommendations, to define more precisely the target audience of the study and to develop the skill to make conclusions" (SAR, p. 198). The experts' group encourages RISEBA to monitor the implementation of these guidelines, and if necessary, to organize additional methodological preparations for students before starting to write a paper, but also for teachers who will be mentors on master thesis.

The number of incoming and outgoing mobility should certainly be increased in the future, especially when the study programme begins to be conducted in English, which is very commendable. At the moment an immensely small number of students participated in mobility programmes (from academic year 2015/2016 only two outgoing mobilities - SAR, p. 202). Given the very small number of students enrolling in the master's programme, mobility is a potential way to increase the number of students and this should be one of the strategic goals of RISEBA in the future.

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

#### **Conclusions:**

Graduates are satisfied with the master's study programme. The descriptions of the study courses/modules need to be improved based on the analysis (design, grammatical errors, outdated literature, overlapping with the bachelor programme). Graduates pointed out that the teaching process is student-centered. It is recommended to include more practical workshops and international experts in the study programme. The content of study programme changes in accordance with the results of surveys conducted among students, graduates and employers. However not all surveys are done annually, the results of the surveys are not publicly available and not all stakeholders are sufficiently familiar with the quality assurance system. This definitely needs to be improved. The number of incoming and outgoing mobility should certainly be increased in the future, especially when the study programme begins to be conducted in English. At the moment an immensely small number of students participated in mobility programmes.

#### **Strengths:**

- Great enthusiasm, ie. satisfaction with the programme of current students and graduates.
- Involvement of industry representatives in the implementation, but also in changes of study programmes.
- Student-centred learning.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Lack of practical workshops in the study programme.
- Study course descriptions are not unified (based on the language), grammatical errors were noted, the literature on many courses is outdated or is exclusively in Russian.
- Certain overlaps of content with the bachelor's study programme.
- Insufficient incoming and outgoing mobility.

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

#### **Analysis**

The main financing source for the study programme "Public Relations Management" is tuition fees and as stated previously RISEBA funds study process only from tuition fees. More than half of the

programme's yearly budget is allocated for academic staff and visiting faculty salary, the second largest expense is wear and tear of fixed assets and intangible assets. (SAR p. 205)

Small percentage of the study programme's yearly budget is allocated for scientific activity support for students and corresponding academic staff involved in the study programme. The annual student's research and artistic creation conference is organized, though participation by students of this study programme is low. (SAR p. 205) Financial support is also provided for publication of the best student work in this conference and also RISEBA partner universities conferences. Support in scientific and creative research is provided for academic staff by allocating the available amount of money to the RISEBA Advertising and Public Relation Department which oversees the expenditure of it in accordance with the department's scientific research priorities. In case funding is insufficient competitive means may be applied and extra funding via EU funds can be attracted. (SAR p. 205)

During previous evaluation of the study field and study programmes it was stated that RISEBA library resources do not meet the needs of study programme content and results. The HEI management is aware of the situation and is making continuous effort to improve library content each year. The RISEBA library provides study materials in English, Latvian and Russian languages, subscriptions to databases and specifically for the students of this study field subscriptions to some of the largest press publications in Latvia and abroad. The content offered by RISEBA library is augmented regularly according to budget and needs of the study programmes, trial versions of databases and subscriptions are offered from time to time. (SAR p. 206, 207) During the meeting with students and alumni of the study programme no dissatisfaction with available library materials was expressed.

Some attention must be paid to study programme's "Public Relations Management" study course sources and literature as in a lot of cases it is outdated and should be replaced with more recent materials. For the following courses the most recent primary source material is ten years old as of 2021: Corporate Communication and PR, Public Relations Research Methods, Public Relations Strategy, Interaction Between Modern Journalism and PR, State, Private and Public Sector Partnership Principles. There are cases like this in the introductory course module as well. Study courses in need of review are: Personal Branding, Politics and Political Communication, Public Relations as Communication, Public Relations Case Analysis. (Annex 6 of SAR, Study Course Descriptions) Experts group recommends overviewing all study course source content and especially paying attention to previously mentioned study courses.

As stated previously the general state of RISEBA premises is of great quality and is thoroughly appropriate for the overall study process. The study process of the study programme "Public Relations Management" is carried in two of RISEBA buildings at Meza street 3 where all the classes take place. Overall the available technical provisions meet the needs of the study programme content and goals. RISEBA auditoriums are equipped with audio visual technology that is used in the study process by both academic staff and students during their class presentations. (SAR p. 205, 206)

Students of study programme "Public Relations Management" are also provided with the necessary computer software programmes for use in study courses and also scientific research. This software includes questionnaire creating and analysing programmes Webropol and different statistical analysis tools. This software is also available for corresponding academic staff. (SAR p. 206)

E-learning platform E-RISEBA (based on MOODLE) is used in the study process and student survey results from the 2018/2019 study year show that it is used efficiently. (SAR p. 200) No dissatisfaction with the use of E-RISEBA was expressed by the students of the programme during the interview. While the use of E-RISEBA platform looks to be efficient for this study programme, in order to prevent situation similar to Bachelor's study programme regarding E-RISEBA, experts group still recommends making the use of the platform mandatory for all courses and to continue encouraging and educating academic staff on the use and benefits of this platform through methodological seminars.

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

### **Conclusions:**

Student survey results from the 2018/2019 academic study year show almost complete satisfaction with material provision of the study programme. Overall experts group concludes that most of the resources for this study programme completely or almost completely meet the needs and goals. Improvements should be made regarding study course material content.

### **Strengths:**

- Great material and infrastructural provisions that meet the needs and goals of the study programme.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Study course materials are dated for some study courses.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

In 2020, 15 elected staff members were involved in the implementation of the study programme (compared to 18 staff members in 2013), and 15 guest lecturers (18 in 2013). In the SAR (pp. 210-211) it is stressed that the changes in the composition of the academic staff must be considered as significant. This is related to the fact that the planned implementation of the study programme was cancelled in the RISEBA's branch in Daugavpils, but in the report prepared for previous accreditation, the prospective staff members from Daugavpils branch had been included in the report. For several staff members the participation in the implementation of the study programme has been terminated during the previous accreditation period.

From Table 4.3 (SAR, page 209) it can be seen that most of the core strategic communication courses on master's level are taught by visiting staff members who do not involve in research at RISEBA. Therefore, for the study field, it is highly advisable to strengthen its capacity and visibility in wider PR and strategic communication research.

It can be said that the qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme, however, the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses only by strong reliance on visiting staff members. The study field would ensure much better sustainability of the study programme and also raise the research activity in the study field by having more qualified PR and strategic communication scholars and professionals as elected staff members. At the same time, since it is a professional master's study programme, the involvement of industry professionals as visiting lecturers is justified and highly important. It would be advisable to start systematic cooperation with the Latvian Association of Public Relations Professionals (LASAP) and have a delegated LASAP member who would be involved in the implementation in the study programme.

Assessing the range of lecturers of the master's programme, it is dominated by the permanent lecturers of the RISEBA, who do not have close ties with the field of public relations. As a strategic communication manager will work in this field after graduation, it is desirable to involve experts from the field in teaching study courses, for example, someone who manages a public relations agency on a daily basis / is a client director in the agency or works in-house as a communication manager. If it is not possible to attract such lecturers to permanent work, then more guest lectures and study work assignments / case studies offered by employers should be provided in the master's study programme. It is certainly possible to employ the unused resource - HEI graduates, who in on-site visit interviews mentioned that they would gladly cooperate.

Speaking about the plans to start implementing the study programme in English, the experts' opinion is that the academic staff members who are going to be involved in teaching in English are ready for this development, and this is also assured by the institution itself that the staff members have at least the level B2 foreign language skills (Annex 10 to the study programme analysis in the SAR). In the information, prepared during the visit upon experts' request, the director of the study field has confirmed that one staff member has C1 level of English language. During the visit, it was also confirmed by the management of RISEBA that new academic staff members will be attracted for implementation of the study programme in English.

There are no foreign guest lecturers, industry professionals who would be strategically important for the development of the professional master's programme if it were to be implemented in English.

A detailed analysis about the involvement of the academic staff in the scientific research and artistic creation, can be found in Part I, Chapter 4 of this report. Here the main challenges for the study programme and the study field in general are the following: RISEBA has developed strategy and means for stimulating research activity among academic staff members, but currently, the actual research achievements at the ICS study field are partially compliant to the ambitious goals. Research activity mainly happens in the subfields of marketing and advertising, while there is lacking research activity in the directions of strategic communication and PR. There are many scientific papers published in conference proceedings during the previous accreditation period, but the number of high level academic journal publications is low (SAR, Annex No. 10). More active engagement in international research networks is advisable in order to raise the number of international research projects and co-authored publications with foreign researchers. The results of the research are integrated in several study courses.

There is a mechanism in place that ensures mutual collaboration between the faculty members to ensure the interconnection of study courses. Peer evaluation is organized in each academic year. As the experts' group learned during the visit, teaching staff members evaluate the peer hospitation as a positive and fruitful experience.

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

### **Conclusions:**

The composition of the teaching staff has changed significantly during the previous accreditation period, but this is mostly related to the fact that the implementation of the study programme was not launched in the Daugavpils' branch. Except for the PR and strategic communication field, the number and qualifications of the academic staff is compliant with the content and results of the study programme. The high number of visiting staff members is justified by the fact that this is a professional master's programme. However, due to the fact that the professional qualification is given in strategic communication management, it is advisable to involve more qualified PR and strategic communication scholars and professionals as elected staff members to balance the number of academic staff members from the fields of economics and other related fields. The quality of academic staff publications could be raised, focusing on less in numbers but higher level publications. The involvement in international research projects is currently not high. The results of the research are integrated in the content of the study programme. The system of academic staff cooperation, mutual hospitation is in place and working well.

### **Strengths:**

- Good cooperation between academic staff members on the level of the study programme.
- High involvement of visiting staff members from the industry.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Low scientific activity in the field of public relations, strategic communication.

## 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Public Relations 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:** Annex No. 7 of SAR. The sample of the diploma complies with the procedure by which state-recognised documents of higher education are issued.

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:** Annex No. 8 of SAR. RISEBA has signed a cooperation agreement with Turība University and provides the possibility to continue studies in the professional master study programme "Public Relations Management".

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 No. 9 of SAR (the rector signed letter to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (No. 20/1.1-15/56, signed on 06.03.2020)) confirming that students are guaranteed compensations for losses.

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:** Annex No.17 of SAR (the rector signed letter to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (No. 20/1.1-15/61, signed on 12.03.2020)) confirming that the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme in Latvian are proficient in the official language.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** Annex No. 10 of SAR (the rector signed letter to the Ministry of Education and Sciences (No. 20/1.1-15/58, signed on 06.03.2020)) confirming that the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2 level knowledge of related foreign language (in common to European regulations).

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:** Annex No. 11 of SAR. The contract on acquisition of education complies with the mandatory provisions.
- 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:** Evaluating study course descriptions, there are issues with primary and additional information sources, mostly these materials are offered in Russian language (not Latvian or English), in some study course descriptions there are issues with main information sources as well.
- 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 study programme complies with the valid professional standard "Strategic Public Relations Manager".
- 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 No. 2 of SAR "Compliance to the State educational standard of the professional Master's study programme "Public Relations Management" confirms compliance with Professional Higher 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:** The compliance is formal. RISEBA has developed strategy and means for stimulating research activity among academic staff members, but currently, the actual research achievements at the ICS study field are partially compliant to the ambitious goals. Research activity mainly happens in the subfields of marketing and advertising, while there is lacking research activity in the directions of strategic communication and PR. There are many scientific papers published in conference proceedings during the previous accreditation period, but the number of high level academic journal publications is low (SAR, Annex No. 10).

#### 15 P5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** The programme generally complies with the legal requirements except the fact that there are issues with the study course descriptions - with primary and additional information sources, mostly these materials are offered in Russian language (not English), in some study course descriptions are issues with main information sources as well.

### Requirements (R6-R8)

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

**Justification:** RISEBA has all the necessary infrastructure, material and technical provisions, additional resource improvement possibilities as well as a clear financing system in order to offer and maintain high quality material support to the study programme.

- 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:** It can be said that the qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme, however, the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses is possible only by strong reliance on visiting staff members.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

**Justification:** The descriptions of the study courses need to be improved and there is insufficient compliance to the criterion from the perspective of the number of publications of the academic staff members specifically in the fields of public relations and strategic communication. Research activity mainly happens in the subfields of marketing and advertising, while there is lacking research activity in the directions of strategic communication and PR. There are many scientific papers published in conference proceedings during the previous accreditation period, but the number of high level academic journal publications is low

### Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

Overall, the programme complies with the legal requirements of the state but there are issues with the study course descriptions and with the overall dominance of advertising topics in the research activity of the academic staff. The study programme relies on visiting staff members to provide the study courses that lead to the alignment to the professional standard and professional qualification.



Strength:

- The overall compliance with the legal requirements of the state is formally achieved.

Weakness:

- Quality of the study course descriptions is insufficient.
- Cooperation links with the public relation professional association and highly qualified professionals is not sufficient and needs to be improved.
- The research activity of the staff members in the fields of strategic communication, public relations is low and needs to be encouraged.

## **Evaluation of the study programme "Public Relations Management"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

## **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Public Relations Management"**

### **Short-term recommendations**

Analysis of the study course descriptions needs to be carried out and especially paying attention to courses mentioned in section 3 of this report.

Cooperation links need to be developed with the public relations professional association.

Student involvement in the Study Programme Council must be ensured.

### **Long-term recommendations**

To ensure long term efficient use of the E-RISEBA platform use of the platform should be made mandatory for all courses and academic staff should be encouraged and educated on the use and benefits of this platform through methodological seminars.

More research activity need to be developed in the topics related to public relations, strategic communication.

The academic staff members should be encouraged to aim for less in quantity and more for quality in publishing. More high level publications will support the ambitious goal of the study programme for internationalization and involvement in foreign markets.

More opportunities need to be provided to the students to involve in research in the fields of PR, strategic communication (currently, as mentioned in the report, most research activity happens in the field of advertising).

## **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	RISEBA has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education, however the system is not working fully and improvements in various parts of the quality assurance system are necessary.
R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.	Fully compliant		49 cooperation agreements with European and third country universities about mobility of students and the faculty, as well as other cooperation possibilities and open-ended agreements with different organisations for the provision of places of practice for RISEBA ICS study field students (SAR, Annex No. 11, List of cooperation agreements). The list contains a variety of companies, both agencies and associations.
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).		Partially compliant	There is very limited research activity in the field of strategic communication and PR and insufficient means of encouraging students and academic staff members to do research in this direction (e.g., the only annual internal conference panel is devoted to advertising), compared to advertising and marketing, which affects the implementation of the master's study programme in which the qualification of Strategic communication manager is given, but it was observed that students mainly do their thesis on topics related to marketing and advertising.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation			Comment
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		Out of six recommendations that have been described in the SAR, three can be evaluated as implemented, while two recommendations are partly implemented, and with one the ICS study field has decided not to proceed.

### 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	Public Relations and Advertising Management (42342)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Not relevant	Average
2	Public Relations Management (47342)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good

### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

---