technopolis group

March 2026

International Evaluation of Scientific Institutions' Activity

Expert Group Report: Social Sciences Expert Group 2

Professor Christofer Edling (chair), Professor Asta Pundziene, Professor Peter Neijens, Professor Cris Shore, Professor Maija Aksela, Professor Roland Dannreuther, Professor Aditya Goenka, Professor Ania Zalewska

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Abbreviations

AI – Artificial Intelligence
AR – Augmented Reality
BIA – Baltic International Academy
BSC – Baltic Studies Centre
DTIC – Defence Technology and Innovation Centre
ECA – European Christian Academy
EIT HEI – European Institute of Innovation & Technology Higher Education Initiative
EKA – EKA University of Applied Sciences
ERC – European Research Council
FEM – Faculty of Economics and Management
FESP – Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology
GHG – Greenhouse Gas
H2020 – Horizon 2020
HRM – Human Resource Management
Interreg – European Territorial Cooperation Programme
KPIs – Key Performance Indicators
LBTU – Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies
LIFE – EU LIFE Programme
MSCA – Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
NAF – National Armed Forces
NDAL – National Defence Academy of Latvia
PhD – Doctor of Philosophy
RIS3 – Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategy
SSE Riga – Stockholm School of Economics in Riga
SER – Self-Evaluation Report
TU – Turiba University
ViA – Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences
VR – Virtual Reality
VUAS – Ventspils University of Applied Sciences

1 Introduction

This document is one of a series of reports in the International Evaluation of Scientific Institutions' Activity, 2025. It presents the findings of the Social Sciences Expert Group 2 about the research performance and international competitiveness of the units in scope. It also considers the units' socio-economic impact and their potential for future development. These results of the evaluation are intended both to provide inputs to policymaking and to recommendations to help the units improve their performance.

The Social Sciences Expert Group 2 evaluated the following units:

- Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Social Sciences Research Unit
- Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia
- Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Study and research field of social sciences
- European Christian Academy
- EKA University of Applied Sciences
- Ventspils University of Applied Sciences / Field of Social sciences
- Baltic International Academy
- National Defence Academy of Latvia
- Turiba University
- Baltic Studies Centre
- RISEBA University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Business
- Stockholm School of Economics in Riga

The Expert Group evaluated the units using the following criteria:

- Quality of the research
- Impact on the scientific discipline
- Economic impact
- Social impact
- Research environment and infrastructure
- Development potential

The evaluation of each unit involved a documentary review and a site visit by the Expert Group to the units. The final evaluation of each unit published here represents the collective view of the Expert Group.

The analysis of each unit by the Expert Group is presented in the following sections.

Feedback on the Expert Group assessment received from the units is published in Appendix A.

2 Institution reports

S_4 Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia

2.2.1 *The unit*

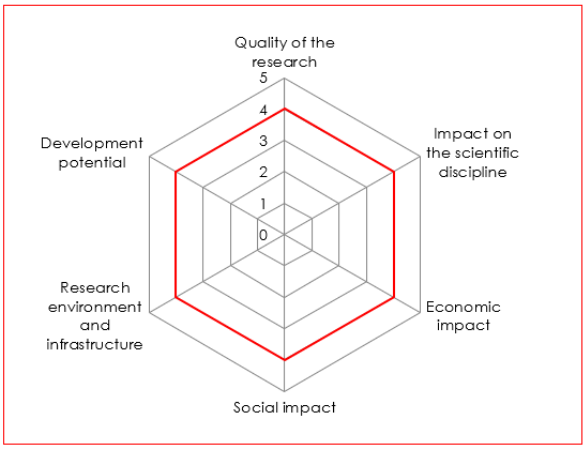
The Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology (FESP) is part of the University of Latvia. It consists of five departments, two research institutes, and two centres. FESP's mission is to promote sustainable development in Latvia by conducting interdisciplinary research in educational sciences, psychology, sports, and arts. The faculty aims to become an international platform for research and academic development through transnational collaboration and strategic partnerships. FESP organises its research around four main areas: education quality and environment, educational innovations and technologies for human development and well-being, solutions for the social environment and societal needs, and biopsychosocial development of individuals. The faculty emphasises interdisciplinary research, integrating psychology, education sciences, arts, and digital technologies.

2.2.2 *Expert Group evaluation*

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 1 Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	4
Impact on the scientific discipline	4
Economic impact	4
Social impact	4
Research environment and infrastructure	4
Development potential	4
OVERALL SCORE	**4**



Overall score
Score 4: very good

The Expert Group evaluates the research performance of the Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology (FESP) as very good. The unit conducts research underpinned by a clear strategic vision aligned with national and European priorities. The Faculty's research portfolio is substantial and interdisciplinary, integrating education, psychology, arts, and emerging technologies. The quality of research is assessed as very good; there is a high volume of peer-reviewed publications -including a substantial number in higher-ranked journals- and citations, and active participation in international projects and networks. The funding situation of FESP is adequate, with a strong position in competitive project funding. Its leadership in major comparative studies underscores its scientific impact. However, publications in higher-ranking journals such as Q1 journals in Web of Science (JCR) or Scopus (CiteScore) and the attraction of prominent international projects could be further strengthened.

FESP actively collaborates with both state and private-sector institutions in applied research addressing societal needs and facilitating public knowledge transfer. The unit's research is very important for the economy and society. Their interactions with the private sector stand out in terms of their extensive and dynamic nature.

FESP provides a solid and supportive environment for research. The unit has a modern infrastructure, including Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR and AR) laboratories. The research environment is very positive, including a clear research strategy with targeted incentives, strong administrative services and Human Resources Management policy. The Faculty shows very good development potential through plans to expand international collaboration and doctoral training. However, the unit faces certain limitations: a modest number of defended doctoral theses (average 4.5 over the evaluation period; 7.0 in 2024), challenges in attracting international doctoral candidates and early-career researchers, and limited success in securing leadership roles in large-scale international projects. With a continued focus on addressing these gaps, FESP is well-positioned to strengthen its position in the international scientific community.

Together, these considerations justify a "very good" overall score.

Quality of Research

Score 4: very good

The Expert Group finds that FESP produces research of very good international quality, particularly in education sciences and psychology. The unit contributes to areas such as technology-enhanced learning, teacher competence models, and mental health assessment. Interdisciplinary integration is a notable strength, combining educational research with digital technologies and psychological approaches.

The unit demonstrates a very good publication record, with a high volume of peer-reviewed articles of which, according to Elsevier data, over 40% appear in Q1 journals. Research addresses timely and important topics, including education in virtual and augmented reality, remote learning, promotion of health and physical activity in older adults, adolescent social-emotional skills, and virtual museums. The quality of publications is consistently high, with contributions to leading journals such as Computers in Human Behaviour, Virtual Reality, and Technology, Knowledge and Learning. The publications submitted to the Expert Group demonstrate a very high level of professional expertise, originality and methodological rigour. The articles utilise survey research, interviews, phenomenological approaches, and advanced analytical techniques.

FESP demonstrates strong integration into the global research environment through a combination of traditional and strategic international partnerships, including 110 bilateral agreements that encompass, for instance, joint research initiatives and joint grant applications with universities worldwide, participation in European research programmes like Horizon 2020. FESP is a member of the FORTHEM Alliance, one of the European University Alliances. Several of the papers submitted to the Expert Group were based on cross-country analyses and multi-country co-authorships, and published in international journals, reflecting both the international scope of the research and its internationally collaborative nature.

Overall, the Expert Group is of the opinion that research by the institution possesses a very good standard of quality in terms of originality and importance. It is a strong international player, but its strong performance is relatively recent, and more time and influential contributions are necessary to become a global leader.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 4: very good

Over the period 2019 to 2024, research papers from FESP had an average citation rate of 6.7, and a field weighted citation impact of 1.1, which is above the world average. While the publication growth over the period is solid, the number of articles in peer reviewed scientific edited journals and conference proceedings included in Web of Science or SCOPUS databases in 2024 are 49, distributed over 58 academic FTE's. This suggests that the unit should develop a more focused quality over quantity approach to publishing. Also, the number of high-ranking publications in psychology remains somewhat behind. FESP's researchers serve as guest editors and as members of editorial boards of respected international journals in their focus areas, for example, Frontiers in Public Health and Technology, and Knowledge and Learning. FESP actively participates in international projects, including Horizon Europe projects, applying for ERC grants, Marie Skłodowska-Curie, Erasmus+, CERV, and COST Actions. The unit maintains a solid international presence. However, the engagement is distributed over a large number of partnerships. For instance, FESP reports having over 110 bilateral mobility and cooperation agreements. The Expert Group is of the opinion that a more strategically selective approach to international partnership and exchange would strengthen the units' visibility and impact potential.

FESP demonstrates scientific impact through its leadership in large-scale international comparative studies such as OECD PISA, TALIS, TIMSS, PIRLS, ICCS and ICILS, where FESP researchers serve as national leads and long-standing representatives (*e.g.*, over 30 years of participation in IEA projects). This sustained involvement positions the faculty as a key contributor to global knowledge on educational quality and comparative methodology, influencing both European and international research agendas.

The Faculty's scientific impact is further evidenced by its role in generating internationally relevant research on technology-enhanced learning, artificial intelligence in education, inclusive educational environments, socio-emotional learning, adolescent mental health, and biopsychosocial development. Many of these projects - such as those on VR-based learning, digital childhood, and early childhood development screening (e-BAASIK) - contribute directly to advancing theoretical frameworks and applied research tools used beyond Latvia.

FESP holds only a limited number of leadership roles in international projects and consortia, preventing more global influence.

Taken together, the Expert Group considers the scientific impact of FESP to be very good. The unit is a strong international player, widely recognised in its discipline, and highly regarded as a partner in international research projects and networks. Importantly, the unit demonstrates equally good and internationally relevant performance across the sub-fields it covers, which distinguishes its performance from other large social science faculties covered by the evaluation.

Economic impact

Score 4: very good

FESP has a direct and indirect impact on the Latvian economy through its projects with industrial partners and governmental institutions, as well as through policy advice. The number of applied research reports has shown a steady increase during the assessment period, reaching 12 in 2024. Project topics include, for example, the development of mental-health programmes (in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Welfare), reducing risky driving behaviour, and developing methods for assessing employee–job fit and development potential in the workplace.

In addition to these examples, FESP's applied research portfolio demonstrates a broad and growing contribution to multiple sectors of the Latvian economy. Collaboration with private enterprises such as SIA Tet has resulted in the development of vocational interest assessments and employee–job fit methodologies, tools that are directly used by companies to improve HR decision-making and workplace productivity.

FESP's economic impact is also substantial in the public sector. The Faculty collaborates extensively with the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, producing feasibility studies and screening tools for early childhood development, research on fertility and family well-being, and assessments of children's socio-emotional and behavioural risks. These projects - several of which exceed budgets of €200,000 - directly shape the planning and implementation of government social programmes and influence long-term human-capital development strategies.

Internationally, FESP participates in major research initiatives, implementing OECD and IEA studies on topics such as computer and information literacy, international student assessment, and creative thinking. Through its involvement in international comparative education studies, FESP contributes to policy development and shapes public discourse.

Overall, the Expert Group is of the opinion that FESP's research is very important for the economy and that FESP is a highly valued and sought-after R&D partner for non-academic stakeholders. The institution's interactions with the private sector stand out in terms of their extensive and dynamic nature.

Social impact

Score 4: very good

FESP's research demonstrates significant societal relevance, influencing education policy, teacher development, and public understanding of science. The academic staff supports over 480 general education schools and provides professional development programmes widely adopted at the national level, such as the *School as a Learning Organisation* model. It serves as a strategic partner to the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Welfare, contributing to advisory boards and working groups on education, social policy, and cultural development. Public engagement is extensive, including the organisation of webinars, workshops, conferences, media contributions, and participation in European Researchers' Night.

FESP's societal contribution is deeply embedded within the national education and welfare systems. Faculty members play leading roles in developing primary and secondary education curricula and in creating scientifically grounded teaching materials used in Latvian schools for mathematics, biology, physics, language education, and sexual education. These materials are adopted at scale across the country, demonstrating sustained, research-based influence on classroom practice and contributing directly to improved educational quality and equity.

The Faculty's work in mental health holds particular national importance. Through long-standing collaborations with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Welfare, FESP researchers develop preventive and intervention programmes, screening tools, and assessment instruments that support early childhood development, school well-being, and adolescent mental health. Examples include the e-BAASIK early-childhood developmental screening platform and extensive training for autism assessment - initiatives that contribute to early detection, more equitable access to services, and improved long-term outcomes for children and families.

Overall, the Expert Group considers FESP's societal impact to be very strong. The unit's research is highly important for society, and the institution's engagement with the public sector and the wider public stands out for its breadth and dynamism.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 4: very good

FESP provides a solid and supportive environment for research. The unit has modern infrastructure, including VR and AR laboratories and digital learning platforms. Strategic planning for infrastructure development is evident, with concrete plans for a new building and expanded facilities. The research environment is highly positive and guided by a clear research strategy, which includes targeted incentives for attending international conferences and publishing in high-impact journals. In addition, FESP is updating its HR strategy in accordance with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

The unit offers strong technical and administrative support and has open-access and FAIR data principles. International partnerships and collaborations significantly strengthen FESP's research output, grant acquisition, and thematic focus. FESP currently maintains more than 110 bilateral mobility and cooperation agreements.

The Expert Group finds that FESP provides a very good research environment supported by modern infrastructure, good administrative systems, and clear strategic planning. The forthcoming new building is expected to further strengthen these conditions.

However, the unit faces several challenges. Balancing teaching and research workloads remains a concern, and the limited number of international doctoral candidates and early-career researchers indicates potential for strengthening the research training pipeline.

Taken together, the Expert Group considers FESP to offer a very good research environment and infrastructure.

Development potential

Score 4: very good

FESP has a very good potential to further strengthen its position as an international player. The unit has a clearly defined development strategy focused on enhancing research excellence, securing sustainable funding, expanding international collaborations, increasing the number of high-impact publications, increasing the number of doctoral graduates, and mentoring and motivating existing talent. It also aims to foster the next generation of researchers by advertising research positions internationally and leveraging its networks to attract global talent. This strategy, together with FESP's current high-quality research performance and staff, means that FESP is well-positioned to strengthen its standing in the international scientific community in the fields of education and psychology, to achieve an excellent level of scientific quality, and to become a highly regarded partner in international collaboration projects and networks.

The Faculty's recent achievements, such as doubling the number of publications in Q1/Q2 journals between 2018–2020 and 2021–2023, and securing more than €6.6 million in competitive project funding, demonstrate a strong upward trajectory that supports its future growth. FESP's active involvement in large-scale international consortia (e.g., PISA, TALIS, TIMSS, ICCS, ICILS), as well as in major EU-funded projects in digital learning, mental health, STEM education, and educational innovation, provides a solid platform from which to further expand its international profile.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

In 2024, the UL Doctoral School (DS) was established to coordinate doctoral studies across the university. FESP offers three doctoral programmes, each designed to develop high-level expertise and to contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge. The employment rate of UL doctoral graduates in 2022 was high. FESP doctoral graduates play a vital role in Latvia's sustainable economic and societal development, as they are education experts who support progress within the national education system. The doctoral students interviewed by the Expert Group were highly motivated, felt well supported, and confident about their future prospects.

The limited number of defended doctoral theses (average 4.5 over the evaluation period; 7.0 in 2024) remains a concern. The management of the unit expects that Latvia's new doctoral funding model will improve the completion rates of the doctoral programmes, including through enhanced international recruitment. The Expert Group assesses FESP's potential to offer doctoral studies as very good.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

FESP's research is well-aligned with RIS3, contributing to Latvia's strategic goals in digitalisation, education and wellbeing development. For example, FESP contributes to RIS3 through research and innovation in educational technology and technology-enhanced learning solutions. The unit leads multiple projects focused on the digitalisation of education. Projects include *Creating Interactive SDG Classrooms,* integrating augmented reality, gamification, and comics to enhance environmental education, and *Anxiety-Free Mathematics Education with Robotic Applications*, which develops blended learning tools to improve student engagement and reduce mathematics-related anxiety. These projects align with the ICT specialisation by introducing technological innovations in education, supporting technology-enhanced learning, developing digital skills, and promoting inclusive learning environments.

FESP also plays a key role in preparing specialists in RIS3-priority fields by training teachers, offering professional development, and conducting research that strengthens the education sector. Furthermore, it contributes to research on mental wellbeing in the digital age, a critical horizontal component for the sustainable development of RIS3 areas and digital innovation.

The unit also hosts the unique master's programme *Technology Innovation and Design for Education*, which fosters innovation in technology-enhanced learning. Through the integration of ICT in education, the promotion of STEM learning, and advances in digital pedagogy, FESP supports the knowledge economy and workforce development, thereby contributing to sustainable innovation and societal progress.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

A combination of faculty-level initiatives that support research and University of Latvia (UL) centralized efforts, such as the UL Scientific Excellence and Commercialization Support Programme, provides a strong foundation for high-quality research, fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence and increase in Q1 and Q2 publications.

FESP collaborates with governmental institutions and industry to support Latvia's economic and human capital development.
Internationally, FESP engages in major research initiatives, implementing OECD and IEA studies on educational quality. FESP fosters partnerships through Erasmus+, Nord Plus, the Latvia-Lithuania-Taiwan cooperation framework, and collaborations with Ukraine and Estonia. FESP academic staff actively engage in mobility programmes, with 1,471 outgoing exchanges.

Strategic science communication efforts, including conferences, expert discussions, and media engagement, strengthen evidenced-based decision making in the public education

sector through strategic collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science. Faculty members have played a key role in developing primary and secondary education curricula and have produced a wide range of scientifically based educational materials used in Latvian schools across multiple disciplines, such as mathematics, biology, physics, language education, and sexual education.

FESP's research supports talent development, girls' achievement in STEM, teacher competence models, and early childhood development assessments.

Recommendations

The Expert Group notes that FESP has already implemented a very good overall strategy and research policy, is effectively managed, and has demonstrated high research performance. Both the Expert Group and FESP's own SWOT analysis identify several areas for improvement, including the need to improve doctoral completion rates and attract more international early-career researchers.

FESP has formulated clear objectives to address these challenges. The unit aims to further enhance research excellence, expand international collaboration, increase participation in competitive funding schemes (including Horizon Europe), and foster the next generation of researchers.

The Expert Group fully supports these objectives. Recognising that it may not be feasible to pursue all goals simultaneously without making trade-offs, we offer the following recommendations:

- Prioritise quality over quantity when selecting international partners. FESP should focus on building deeper, long-term collaborations with a smaller number of strategically aligned international partners rather than expanding its network broadly. Concentrating on partnerships with high-performing institutions will strengthen the Faculty's visibility and open access to more impactful research opportunities. This selective approach will also allow staff to invest more time and resources into meaningful joint projects that advance FESP's scientific objectives.
- Prioritise quality over quantity in the publication strategy. For example, strong international co-authorships may enhance impact on the discipline.
- Prioritise quality over quantity when seeking editorial positions. Taking on fewer but more prestigious editorial positions will amplify the Faculty's academic influence without overstretching staff capacity. This approach also ensures that editorial service contributes meaningfully to careers.
- Limit efforts aimed at economic and social impact within Latvia, focusing only on high-value or strategically important initiatives. Given the Faculty's already substantial societal engagement, efforts should be concentrated on initiatives with the highest potential for transformational impact or strong alignment with national priorities. Narrowing the scope of applied projects will prevent staff overload and allow more time for high-quality scientific work. This prioritisation will help FESP maintain a balanced portfolio that supports both academic excellence and meaningful contributions to society.

S_6 Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Study and research field of social sciences

2.2.3 *The unit*

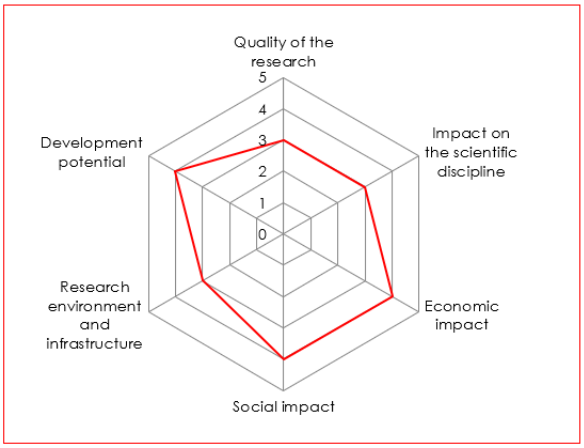
The Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA) is a university of applied sciences located in Valmiera, Latvia. The institution operates under the vision of being an international, regionally relevant, and sustainable driving force for knowledge, research, and innovation. Its strategic goals for 2023–2028 include conducting excellent interdisciplinary research addressing social issues, engaging in international innovation communities, and commercialising science for regional and societal sustainability. The study and research field of social sciences is organised around the main research directions of media and communication and business and economics, including specialisations on tourism business, and the economic history of the 21st century. The institution places a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary research, integrating social sciences with engineering and technology. ViA collaborates internationally through projects and alliances such as the E³UDRES² European University Alliance, focusing on themes like sustainable economy, digitalisation, and creative industries. The university has established a joint Research Institute (with the Doctoral School) at ViA to support interdisciplinary efforts and enhance its international research capacity.

2.2.4 *Expert Group evaluation*

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 2 Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Study and research field of social sciences– Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	3
Impact on the scientific discipline	3
Economic impact	4
Social impact	4
Research environment and infrastructure	3
Development potential	4
OVERALL SCORE	**3**



Overall score
Score 3: good

The Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA) demonstrates strong progress in solid research performance, with a clear focus on topics of high regional relevance. Research funding, research staff numbers, the share of high-impact publications, and basic research activity have all increased during the evaluation period. The research conducted is of unquestionable importance and consistently good quality.

ViA is highly active in international research collaboration through global and European partnerships, the E³UDRES² University Alliance, and the Baltic Sea Region network, complemented by strong national and regional links. Most scientific publications are co-

authored with international partners. The university's position and visibility within the international scientific community are well established and continue to grow. Its applied and basic research activities exert theoretical and disciplinary impact; however, publications in top-tier journals remain somewhat limited compared with leading international institutions in the field.

ViA's economic and social impact is considerable. The university contributes to addressing urgent and emerging challenges such as regional and societal sustainability, the green economy, tourism, and media policy. Its infrastructure is of high quality, including laboratories for virtual and augmented reality, robotics, and automation. Researchers also benefit from access to the facilities of ViA's international partners. This is further strengthened by support from a capable and professional administrative team.

The institution deserves recognition for its active and coherent research policy, which reflects a strong commitment to continuous improvement, internationalisation, and societal engagement. Together with the recent establishment of a doctoral school and a joint research institute, ViA shows very strong potential to further develop as a significant international research player.

Quality of Research

Score 3: good

The Expert Group assesses the quality of research at ViA as good. The university is a strong national player with solid and growing international recognition. Its research agenda focuses on media and communication as well as business and economics and is largely shaped by external funding opportunities.

During the assessment period, ViA produced 111 scientific publications, many of which address topics relevant to Latvia, sometimes from a comparative perspective. Highly regarded journals in which the authors publish include *Journalism Studies*, *Media, Culture & Society*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, and *Body Image*. Most publications are co-authored with international partners, and the share of high-impact papers has grown steadily. Approximately half of all publications are open access, reflecting the university's commitment to open science. The studies are sound and conducted with professional expertise. Data collection methods include (longitudinal) surveys, semi-structured interviews, field experiments, and literature and document analysis.

Research themes include the role of student field trips to dark tourism sites (places associated with death, suffering, tragedy, or disaster) in higher education, psychological mechanisms (e.g., the Dunning–Kruger effect), tourism myths, the Latvian economy in the 1930s, journalism ethics in Latvian media, Latvian migration, pro-environmental behaviour, and several studies on scale development (e.g., the Body Appreciation Scale, Nature Exposure Scale, Connectedness to Nature Scale, and Media Literacy Skills Scale). This list demonstrates that the topics are highly relevant and situated within an international context, thereby enhancing the quality and scope of the studies. Furthermore, although ViA is a university of applied sciences with a strong focus on applied research, the evaluation period also provided room for basic research, for instance, through the further development of various theoretical concepts (e.g., media literacy, patriotism and nationalism, and psychological phenomena related to sustainable practices and resource management).

At the same time, while a small number of top-tier publications are present, research across individual themes is still developing, with limited critical mass and continuity. Impact varies across themes and is often concentrated in a few flagship papers, and alignment would benefit from further strengthening in terms of conceptual coherence, cumulative development, and a more clearly articulated long-term trajectory.

The university seeks to focus its research efforts on a smaller number of fields of expertise, as recommended during the previous evaluation: health, well-being and social inclusion in regions; digitalisation and deep-tech technologies; sustainable economy and innovation for regions; and creative industries for regional identity. The current Expert Group appreciates this strategic alignment.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that ViA demonstrates solid and improving research quality and that the university is a strong national player with increasing international visibility and credibility. However, for the reasons given above, the Expert Group considers the quality of the research to be good rather than very good or outstanding.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 3: good

The Expert Group assesses the impact of ViA within its main scientific disciplines -Media and Communication, and Business and Economics- as good.

ViA's international orientation has strengthened considerably during the evaluation period. The university is highly active in international research collaboration through global and European partnerships, as a founding member of the E³UDRES² University Alliance, and through its participation in the Baltic Sea Region network. The E³UDRES² Alliance has become a notable international actor in higher education, research, and innovation, bringing together universities of applied sciences from Austria, Portugal, Romania, and Belgium. The Baltic Sea Region network includes partners such as Vilnius University, the University of Tartu, and the Stockholm Environment Institute. ViA also hosts two UNESCO Chairs -one in Biosphere and Man and another in Media, Information Literacy and Scientific Literacy - which further underline its academic credibility and global engagement. In addition, ViA is a partner at the MSCA Doctoral Network project through which international doctoral students are enrolled.

The university's position and impact within the international scientific community are well established and continue to grow. It's applied, and basic research exerts theoretical and disciplinary influence, although publications in top-tier journals and publication impact statistics remain somewhat limited compared with leading international institutions in the field.

The selected full-text paper presented to the Expert Group illustrates this well. The study examines changes in the use of holy springs as religious tourism resources in India and the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). The study employs qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and content analysis. In its conclusions, the authors offer recommendations for alternative approaches to promoting spring tourism at religious sites. This is a solid study published in a Q1 journal, the *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that although the impact on the scientific discipline is not yet systemic, ViA is a respected and recognised centre of competence, and a strong national player with a stable and visible position in the international scientific community.

Economic impact

Score 4: very good

The Expert Group considers ViA to be of great importance to the national and regional economy, creating impact across government, business, community, and education sectors. This impact is reflected, for example, in the funded research (private and competitive industry collaboration funding) that ViA conducts for and with industrial partners, regional institutions, and governmental organisations. These include the Latvian Convention Bureau, the Latvian Real Estate Association, and several government bodies such as the State Chancellery, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education and Science, Valmiera Municipality, the Nature Conservation Agency, and NATO. Project funding has doubled during the evaluation period, with approximately 70% of ViA's income derived from external sources.

Key projects focus on the knowledge-intensive bioeconomy, green economy, circularity, and sustainable and wooden building. Collaboration with industry includes projects such as *SIPAS* (Advancing Sustainability and Technology in Tourism, Hospitality, and Services Studies through Strategic Industry Partnerships), *Interactive Gardens*, and *Change (K)now!* on food delivery systems in cities in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Expert Group met several of ViA's key collaboration partners, among them the advisor to the Minister of Justice and representatives of the State Chancellery, the tourism business cluster, the Latvian Real Estate Association, the Baltic Media Excellence Center, the Vidzeme Planning Region Development Council, and the Nordic CLT (cross-laminated timber) company. All partners interviewed expressed strong appreciation for their collaboration with ViA.

To promote research commercialisation and regional sustainability, ViA co-founded the Vidzeme Open Innovation Hub in 2024 together with the Vidzeme Planning Region. The Hub plays a key role in strengthening the regional business environment and supporting export capacity. ViA's Innovation Co-Creation Laboratory, where entrepreneurs, students, and researchers work together, addresses societal challenges such as sustainable service development.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that the university's research is highly relevant to the economy and that its interaction with the private and public sectors is extensive, dynamic, and mutually beneficial.

Social impact

Score 4: very good

ViA's research actively addresses key social issues through projects that promote higher education, social equality, integration, and welfare. Other initiatives contribute to the sustainable development of social sectors, the strengthening of national identity, democratic structures, and culture, and national security.

The university plays an important role in fostering social engagement and knowledge exchange by informing and educating policymakers, sectoral stakeholders, civil society, and young people in Latvia. ViA hosts two UNESCO Chairs in Media and Information Literacy and in Science Literacy, Biosphere and Man- reflecting a strong commitment to societal development and global cooperation.

ViA also organises international conferences and events, such as the 26th Nordic Intercultural Communication Conference (2019), the International Conversation Laboratory on Media Literacy, the 11th International Conference on Monitoring and Management of Visitors in Recreational and Protected Areas (2022), the 10th International Tourism Association Conference (2024), and the conference Media Literacy and Cognitive Aspects in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (2024).

In addition, ViA organises public events on topics such as cultural diversity and the European Green Deal in tourism, and participates in the European Researchers' Night, thereby bringing science closer to society. The university also supports a science communication programme broadcast on the national television channel ReTV. ViA employees are active members of the Independent Society for Education, contributing to policy-making processes and participating in its annual summer school for school students.

Science communication is considered a core element of ViA's institutional identity, supported by an extensive policy framework and active use of social media channels.

Overall, the Expert Group finds that ViA's research makes a highly valuable contribution to society. The university's interactions with the public sector stand out for their breadth, depth, and dynamism.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 3: good

The Expert Group assesses ViA's research environment as good. The university possesses a modern and well-equipped research infrastructure, including a multimedia lab, TV studio, spatial research lab, and laboratories for virtual and augmented reality, robotics, and automation. ViA has also secured access to databases and material collections from both academic and non-academic partners, nationally and internationally. For example, the university shares infrastructure within the E³UDRES² Alliance.

ViA has an active, motivated, and ambitious management team, demonstrating a strong commitment to continuous improvement, internationalisation, and societal engagement. Policies have been developed to implement the recommendations from the previous evaluation. The university has recently established a research institute and a doctoral school. The unit also promotes open science. ViA has clear ethical guidelines, an Ethics Commission, and provides ethical training for researchers. ViA supports its research policy with incentives for staff to become editors and reviewers for academic journals and conferences.

The development of the project portfolio is monitored continuously at several levels. Each new research project idea is discussed at the institute level, then reviewed in the monthly Development Meeting led by the Rector, and subsequently presented to the University Board. At each stage, alignment with ViA's strategic goals, the balance of funding sources, and other relevant aspects are evaluated. When co-funding is required, the Board is responsible for making the final decision.

The unit fosters an inclusive, supportive, and dynamic research environment that promotes career development, academic excellence, and the overall well-being of research and innovation staff. In 2024, ViA launched the application process for the HR Excellence in Research Award. ViA's action plan focuses on key areas such as academic career development, academic leadership and mentoring, professional growth, and strengthening the overall academic and research culture. ViA will also implement the new national career development model for academic personnel in Latvia. The university exceeds the national average salary level for academic staff, offering approximately 87% of the average market

rate, which helps attract and retain talent. Staff members report high satisfaction with the support they receive from the institution.

The development of the scientific environment and human resources has been supported by Horizon Europe projects. ViA participates in the European Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, aimed at improving working conditions and career opportunities for research staff.

At the same time, ViA's research infrastructure and environment are somewhat constrained by structural factors. These include a strong dependency on project funding, a limited number of established researchers, and the still limited reputation and visibility of its doctoral programmes. The Expert Group considers it unlikely that the unit will become a leading international research institution in the near future, which justifies a score of "Good" for its development potential.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that ViA provides a good and supportive research environment, with strong infrastructure, committed management, and effective policies for human resource development and scientific advancement.

Development potential

Score 4: very good

ViA's strategy, leadership, and performance are very good and the university has addressed the recommendations from the previous evaluation. During the evaluation period, ViA has increased its external funding, research staff, and the number of high-quality publications. The university has expanded its basic research and international collaborations and has made significant investments in research infrastructure. In recent years, ViA has established a doctoral school (2024) and a joint research institute for social sciences and engineering & technology (2025). The joint doctoral programme in Business and Economics -developed with two other Latvian higher education institutions- has completed its first full cycle, from student admission to the awarding of the PhD degree by a Joint Doctoral Committee with international reviewers (from Portugal and the USA). Two graduates from this programme have already been appointed as research staff at ViA. Initiatives to promote open science, safeguard ethical research practices, and implement a structured academic career model have been launched and are ongoing.

An example of ViA's active and forward-looking policy is the development of the sub-brand *New Building School*, which focuses on sustainable and wooden construction and builds on earlier work in education and training. For social scientists, this direction offers excellent opportunities for further research on sustainability-related topics.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that these (recent) developments and investments give ViA a clear potential to establish itself as a recognised and respected player in the international scientific community within its core disciplines of Media and Communication and Business and Economics. It is expected that over the next 5-10 years, ViA will achieve an excellent level of scientific quality and influence and will become a highly regarded partner in international collaboration projects and networks.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

Together with RTU Rezekne Academy of Technologies and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, ViA established a joint doctoral programme in Economics and Business in 2020. The programme participates in the international Horizon MSCA Doctoral Networks, a consortium that includes partners from Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and Latvia. Doctoral students also benefit from Erasmus+ mobility opportunities.

The programme has completed its first full cycle, from student admission to the awarding of the PhD degree by a Joint Doctoral Committee with international reviewers from Portugal and the USA. Two graduates from this programme have already been appointed as research staff at ViA. Doctoral students interviewed by the Expert Group expressed high satisfaction with the programme and the quality of supervision.

For the next evaluation period, ViA aims to establish a mentoring network involving ViA alumni, E³UDRES² representatives, and members of the CoARA network. This network will promote mutual support, share best practices, and strengthen both local and international researcher engagement. The university is also actively working to recruit international students for its doctoral programme, although, as a regional university, ViA has limited financial and non-financial instruments to attract (including international) PhD candidates. ViA embraces the new Latvian PhD model and expects that it will lead to more target-oriented and focused research activities.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that ViA demonstrates very good potential in providing doctoral education.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

The Expert Group is of the opinion that ViA demonstrates a strong alignment with Latvia's Smart Specialisation Strategy, as illustrated below.

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences has made significant contributions to the RIS3 priority area of knowledge-intensive bioeconomy through several projects focused on researching and developing the circular economy. These include Business and Wellness from Green Economy Growth (NatureBizz), Change (K)now!, and Assessment of Resources and Processes for Implementing Circularity and the Green Deal in the Tourism System (CirToS). To further support the national Smart Specialisation Strategy, ViA has developed the Building School, which focuses on sustainable and wooden construction.

The Unit's Multimedia Laboratory and Spatial Research Laboratory serve as key platforms for innovation and development in the RIS3 priority area of information and communication technologies (ICT). Major interdisciplinary ICT-related projects include:

- Climate Neutrality Decision Models in Action (State Research Programme project)
- Interactive Gardens - Integrated System for Interactive Public Garden Development in the Baltic Sea Region (ERDF Interreg BSR project)
- Baltic100 - Quantitative Data on Social and Economic Transformations in the Regions of the Three Baltic States Over the Last Hundred Years for the Analysis of Historical Transformations and Overcoming Future Challenges (digital open-access database, EEA Baltic Research Programme project)
- Tourism Intelligence Latvia (postdoctoral project)
- Models of Assessment in the Digital Learning Environment (postdoctoral project)
- Next Generation Micro Cities of Europe (ERDF project)

The Vidzeme Open Innovation Hub (VOIH) strengthens the regional business environment and supports export capacity. In 2024, VOIH organised the Innovation Co-Creation Laboratory (ICL), focused on Forest Resources for the Creation of Sustainable Services. The ICL is planned as an annual event addressing various smart specialisation topics. During the co-creation process, entrepreneurs, students, and researchers from multiple scientific disciplines collaborate to identify and solve industry-relevant challenges.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

The Expert Group is of the opinion that ViA demonstrates strong alignment with Latvia's scientific and technological development agenda, as reflected in its contributions to building a knowledge-based society, engaging with industry and the public sector, promoting internationalisation, and implementing human resource policies.

The university's research infrastructure provides robust support for its two major smart specialisation areas, including advanced facilities such as the Spatial Research Lab and the Robotics and Automation Laboratory.

The Expert Group considers ViA highly important to the national and regional economy, generating impact across government, business, community, and education sectors. To promote research commercialisation and regional sustainability, ViA co-founded the Vidzeme Open Innovation Hub in 2024 in collaboration with the Vidzeme Planning Region. The Hub plays a key role in strengthening the regional business environment and supporting export capacity.

ViA's international orientation has strengthened considerably during the evaluation period. The university is highly active in international research collaboration through both global and European partnerships.

Its HR action plan focuses on key areas such as academic career development, leadership and mentoring, professional growth, and the overall enhancement of academic and research culture.

Recommendations

The Expert Group has formulated two recommendations for ViA:

- The first concerns consolidating the university's position as a strong national player with a solid international network, focused on interdisciplinary research addressing societal challenges and funded through regional and European projects. The Expert Group notes that ViA has already implemented an effective research policy, strong management, and demonstrated high research performance. It is recommended that the university continue along its current trajectory, further developing recently launched initiatives such as the doctoral programme, research institute, academic career model, and open science practices. In addition, strategies should be devised to increase the number of research talents, possibly through post-doc programmes and internationally funded applied projects, high-impact publications, established researchers, and master's and doctoral students, for example, through greater participation in international consortia, structured visiting scholar programmes, and enhanced reputation and visibility of the doctoral programmes. Besides, the presence of ViA researchers in academic societies (e.g., EURAM, EGOS, etc) should be strengthened.

The second set of recommendations outlines a pathway toward developing an internationally recognised centre of excellence with strong disciplinary impact. Given current constraints in time, funding, and staffing, implementing this approach across the full breadth of ViA's fields

may not be feasible at present. ViA could therefore consider starting on a smaller scale, focusing on a carefully selected sub-programme in fundamental research within either media and communication or business and economics, one that extends beyond Latvian or Baltic topics and prioritises the quality rather than the quantity of publications.

The Expert Group envisages that this sub-programme would establish collaboration with one or a small number of leading European institutions in one of ViA's core disciplines, seek to secure prestigious ERC grants, and strengthen international visibility by enabling its researchers to obtain prominent editorial positions in top-tier international journals.

The Expert Group acknowledges that this pathway may come at the expense of other university responsibilities and carries a risk of failure. Ultimately, it is for the management to determine whether this strategy is, all things considered, feasible and desirable.

S_7 Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies - Social Sciences Research Unit

2.2.5 *The unit*

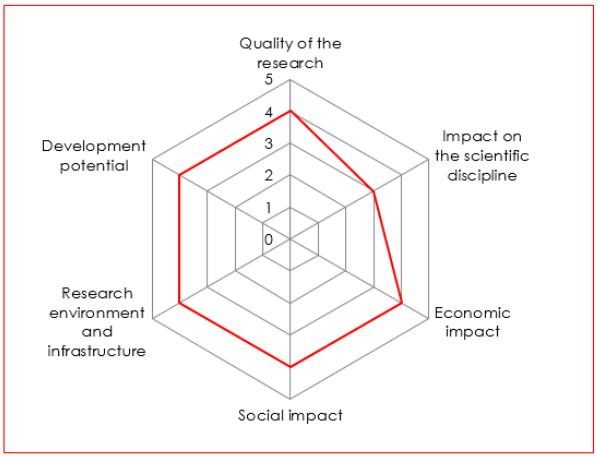
The Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU) is one of Latvia's four science universities, specialising in the sustainable use of natural resources to improve societal quality of life. The mission of the LBTU Social Sciences Research Unit is to contribute to a sustainable world through high-quality research and knowledge dissemination, focusing on bioeconomy, territorial development, and sustainability. The Unit aligns its goals with the University's strategy, aiming for international research excellence, societal impact, and innovation capacity. Research at the LBTU Social Sciences Research Unit is organised around three main themes: Circular Bioeconomy, Sustainable Territorial Development, and Sustainability-Centred Business and Society. The unit emphasises interdisciplinary research, integrating fields such as environmental engineering, agricultural and veterinary sciences, earth and related environmental sciences, biological sciences.

2.2.6 *Expert Group evaluation*

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 3 Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies - Social Sciences Research Unit – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	4
Impact on the scientific discipline	3
Economic impact	4
Social impact	4
Research environment and infrastructure	4
Development potential	4
OVERALL SCORE	**4**



Overall score
Score 4: very good

The Expert Group finds that the unit has developed a coherent research profile closely aligned with national and European priorities in bioeconomy, sustainable territorial development, and sustainability-centred business and society. Over the assessment period, the unit has strengthened its research capacity, expanded its international cooperation, and made notable contributions to national policy processes. The quality of research is assessed as very good, with several areas demonstrating strong methodological competence and clear policy relevance. The research environment is well structured and supportive, and the unit shows a strong ability to secure externally funded projects, particularly in Horizon Europe, LIFE, Interreg, and national programmes.
The unit's disciplinary impact is assessed as good rather than very good. While the unit is active internationally and participates in recognised research networks, the overall visibility of its work

in high-impact journals and major disciplinary debates is still developing. The unit's economic and social impact is strong, with clear evidence that research outputs inform national strategies, sectoral policies, and regional planning practices. Development potential is also assessed as very good, reflecting a realistic strategic vision, growing international engagement, and an improving staff profile. The overall score of 4 reflects strong results in research performance, societal engagement, research environment, and development potential, alongside a more moderate but improving disciplinary impact.

Quality of Research

Score 4: very good

The Expert Group assesses the quality of research as very good. The unit has established a distinctive position in applied social sciences related to circular bioeconomy, sustainable territorial development, and sustainability-centred business and strategy. The self-assessment report states that more than sixty externally funded research projects were undertaken during the review period, many led by the unit, which demonstrates its active role in developing and implementing research programmes. Many of the projects are funded through competitive Horizon Europe, LIFE, Interreg, and national programme awards.

Research strengths are particularly visible in environmental policy modelling, functional land-use management, GHG emissions assessment, and bioeconomy systems analysis. Notable contributions include the development of the LASAM agricultural sector model, functional land-use approaches in collaboration with Wageningen University, and innovative evaluation tools guiding Latvia's climate and agricultural policies (e.g., LULUCFtool, AgriMACCv3). These outputs are aligned with Latvia's national climate and agricultural strategies and are valued by public institutions. The unit's publication record shows a clear shift toward higher-quality Q1 journal outputs, with a growing share of articles in Scopus and Web of Science indexed journals and a fourfold increase in citations during the period. The best outputs demonstrate very good originality and significance within the applied research areas where the unit is most active.

At the same time, research quality is not uniformly strong across all thematic areas. Among the three thematic areas, Sustainability-Centred Business and Society appears the weakest from a combined research-quality and impact perspective. While societally relevant, it is conceptually broad, less tightly anchored to the university's core strengths, and produces more diffuse research outputs and impact than the other two themes. This is perhaps because some staff have limited research time and outputs remain concentrated among more research-active members. These factors explain why the score is 4 – very good, rather than 5 – outstanding, which would require global disciplinary leadership.

Overall, the unit demonstrates clear strength in interdisciplinary research spanning social sciences, environmental sciences, earth sciences, and biological sciences, and its applied orientation is coherent and relevant to national needs.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 3: good

The unit's impact on its scientific disciplines is assessed as good, consistent with the score definition describing a strong national player with some international recognition. The unit participates in international networks including SCAR, AGMEMOD, and partnerships with Wageningen University & Research (Netherlands), Thünen-Institut (Germany), LUKE (Finland), INRAE (France), and the European Forest Institute (Finland). These collaborations enhance the unit's capacity to participate in international research and provide a platform for joint publications and project development.

The unit organises and co-organises several recurring international scientific conferences, including Economic Science for Rural Development, Research for Rural Development, Rural Development, and Trends in Regional Development in the EU Countries, which provide stable platforms for international exchange within Nordic–Baltic and EU research communities. Staff also contribute extensively to international conferences through invited presentations and high overall participation volumes, with more than 1,000 presentations reported over 2019–2024. The unit participates in multi-country Horizon and Interreg projects, and staff serve on editorial boards of established journals. These activities demonstrate growing international engagement. However, the unit is not yet widely recognised as a disciplinary reference point at the European level, and its presence in high-impact disciplinary journals remains modest. Citation indicators and co-authored international publications are improving but still developing. The disciplinary impact is strongest in specialised niches (bioeconomy, land-use policy, sustainability assessment), where the unit is becoming well recognised. The unit should aim to publish more consistently in high-impact field journals.

For these reasons, the Expert Group considers the unit to be a strong national actor with emerging international visibility, but not yet at the level of sustained international disciplinary influence expected for a score of 4.

Economic impact

Score 4: very good

The unit demonstrates a very good level of economic impact. Its research outputs directly inform national and sectoral policy frameworks, particularly in agricultural economics, land-use planning, and climate policy. Examples include major contributions to the National Energy and Climate Plan and LULUCF sector measures (Ministry of Climate and Energy; Ministry of Agriculture), assessments of VAT reform and agricultural support schemes shaping large-scale fiscal decisions (e.g., VAT5food), economic rationale studies for two €1 billion wood-processing industrial investments, demonstrating modelling capability and industry relevance, leading methodological tools such as LASAM, the LandUp model, and multiple spatially explicit decision-support systems used directly in government and industry policy formulation. The unit's modelling tools and datasets are actively used by ministries, advisory bodies, and industry partners.

Collaboration with enterprises and sectoral associations further demonstrates the applied relevance of the work. The Expert Group finds that the unit plays a valued role as a source of analytical expertise for Latvia's bioeconomy and rural development sectors. The score is not higher because, although economic impact is strong nationally, sustained international economic influence remains limited.

Social impact

Score 4: very good

The Expert Group finds that the unit's social impact is very good. The unit contributes to initiatives supporting social inclusion, lifelong learning, civic participation, and rural community development. Examples include participation in Interreg projects focused on integrating youth, women, and unemployed individuals (ActiveMoms, WomenOnline, RegOpportunities, SucceedInBusiness), collaboration with municipalities, NGOs, and professional associations, and leadership roles in advisory councils for climate policy, revenue service, rural entrepreneurship, and bioeconomy strategy development. The unit also undertakes extensive public-facing communication with over 1000 conference presentations over the evaluation period, over 130 public outreach events, and extensive media visibility.

The unit's expertise is regularly sought by government ministries and public bodies. These contributions indicate a strong alignment with national social needs. The score remains at 4

because, while societal impact is substantial within Latvia, sustained international social impact is more limited.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 4: very good

The research environment is assessed as very good. The unit benefits from a well-defined governance structure, with centralised administrative support covering project development and management, financial administration, reporting requirements, and support for doctoral and early-career researchers. Dedicated administrative staff assist researchers with grant preparation, budget planning, contractual arrangements, and compliance with institutional and external funding rules, thereby reducing administrative burden and supporting effective project implementation.

The technical research infrastructure is well developed and appropriate to the unit's research profile. Researchers have access to approximately 25 major international databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and SciVal, supported through EzProxy remote access. Digital research infrastructure includes institutionally managed servers, secure data-storage solutions, and advanced modelling, statistical, and analytical software relevant to applied economic, environmental, and territorial research. The unit also participates in the national federated research data repository, supporting responsible data management and compliance with open-science principles.

Physical research infrastructure is functional and adequate for current research activities. The unit benefits from dedicated office space for academic staff, seminar and meeting rooms that support collaborative research work, and access to shared university facilities for teaching-related and applied research activities. Computing facilities and network connectivity are sufficient to support data-intensive and modelling-based research. At the same time, the self-assessment report acknowledges that parts of the physical infrastructure would benefit from further renewal and modernisation, particularly in relation to workspace flexibility and specialised research facilities. As in many applied institutions, relatively high teaching loads may limit the amount of protected research time available to some staff.

The environment is strong. However, in comparison to that of world-leading units, LBTU seems to lack a dynamic internal research seminar culture, which would be expected of an excellent research unit.

Development potential

Score 4: very good

The Expert Group finds that the unit has very good development potential. The institutional strategy is realistic and forward-looking, with clear priorities aligned with national and European research agendas. The unit shows strong momentum in securing external funding, with many new projects initiated recently. Staff capacity is improving, and the unit attracts international partners and students. There is international mobility, growing international student numbers (from 18 in 2019 to 100 in 2024), and a positive trend in staff retention. There is a balanced age structure among researchers and robust support frameworks for young scholars and doctoral students.

Participation in Horizon Europe, Interreg, and LIFE positions the unit well to strengthen its international role. Plans to expand doctoral training opportunities and deepen collaboration with leading European institutions reinforce development potential.

The score is not higher than 4 because structural constraints—such as uneven research time and limited penetration into top disciplinary journals—may slow progress toward international leadership.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

The Expert Group finds that the unit has a credible foundation for contributing to doctoral-level education in the medium term. The university maintains an established doctoral school infrastructure, and the unit benefits from experienced senior researchers, growing involvement in international projects, and a well-developed research environment that includes modelling tools, data resources, and centralised administrative support. These factors indicate that the unit has the structural elements needed to support high-quality doctoral training.

At the same time, certain limitations remain. Research activity is uneven across staff, and doctoral-level supervision capacity is stronger in specific thematic areas than in others. The unit's publication profile is improving but does not yet consistently reach the level typically expected of institutions offering extensive independent doctoral programmes. These factors explain why the Expert Group considers the unit to have *potential* rather than fully realised capacity at this stage. The unit should develop two different external seminar series. The first is an internal seminar series where doctoral students present their work annually to other students and faculty members as both a training mechanism and to gain feedback from faculty members who are not on the supervisory committee, and an external seminar series where invited researchers present their research, rather than training seminars, which are already taking place. External seminar series can be expensive to run, and this can be hosted with other universities in rotation or could be an online series, which reduces cost.

As the entry to the doctoral programme is competitive and most current students have done their master's degree, further systematic training does not seem to be followed. However, in line with the best doctoral programmes, there should be a core curriculum that every student is expected to be proficient in.

Overall, the Expert Group considers that strengthened international collaborations, increased protected research time, and further consolidation of thematic research groups would position the unit well to expand its role in doctoral training through co-supervision arrangements and, in the longer term, through structured doctoral provision aligned with its strongest thematic areas. Co-supervision within the university should also be institutionalised.

The entry to the doctoral programme is competitive and rigorous. However, most of the doctoral students seem to be graduates of the university. The pool from which these students are recruited can be diversified.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

The Expert Group finds that the unit's research aligns well with Latvia's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3). The unit contributes substantially to the *knowledge-intensive bioeconomy* priority through applied research on agricultural systems, sustainable land use, environmental governance, and climate mitigation. Research on land-use modelling, farm-level economics, and territorial planning provides clear analytical support to this RIS3 domain.

The unit's work also contributes to the smart energy and mobility priority by developing tools for assessing greenhouse gas mitigation options, land-use sector emissions, and climate resilience strategies. These outputs are closely connected to national climate policy implementation and regional development planning.

As horizontal priorities, the unit's contributions in social sciences—particularly in regional development, governance, and sustainability transitions—further reinforce its alignment with RIS3 objectives.

The Expert Group considers this alignment to be strong and appropriate. Looking forward, the unit may further strengthen its RIS3 contribution by maintaining its focus on applied modelling and land-use governance while exploring emerging international trends such as digital monitoring of land-use change, circular bioeconomy frameworks, and integrated climate–biodiversity policy evaluation.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

The Expert Group finds that the unit's research profile and knowledge-exchange activities are consistent with the broader objectives of Latvia's science and innovation system, particularly in areas related to agriculture, bioeconomy, rural development, and territorial sustainability, as reflected in the thematic focus set out in the self-assessment report. The unit's contribution is primarily realised through applied research, recurring policy-oriented conferences, and engagement with regional and sectoral stakeholders rather than through direct participation in national policy design.

The unit maintains regular collaboration with economic and sectoral actors, including organisations in agriculture, forestry, and rural development. These activities support knowledge transfer and applied innovation and are in line with national ambitions to strengthen links between higher education institutions and economic actors, even if formalised university–industry research partnerships remain limited in scale.

The unit is also embedded in international academic and professional networks and participates in multi-country research collaborations. While these activities enhance visibility and learning opportunities, the Expert Group finds that further progress could be made in strengthening joint publications and leadership roles in competitive international projects.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that the unit contributes in a supportive and complementary manner to Latvia's science and innovation landscape, particularly through applied, regionally relevant research and knowledge dissemination, rather than through direct alignment with or implementation of state-level science and technology policy instruments.

Recommendations

The Expert Group recommends that the unit prioritise the following actions during the next evaluation period:

- Consolidate thematic focus. The unit should concentrate on its strongest research areas—bioeconomy modelling, sustainable land-use governance, and climate policy evaluation—to enhance disciplinary coherence and improve publication depth. The unit should also consider how to align the research impact of the thematic area of sustainability-centred business and society with its strengths in the two other thematic areas.

- Strengthen research capacity. Increasing protected research time and supporting staff to publish in higher-impact journals would help address uneven research activity. Recruitment of early-career researchers and targeted succession planning for senior experts would also strengthen long-term capacity. The recruitment should not be just from its own graduates, but should consider other institutions as well.

- Enhance international collaboration and publication visibility. The unit should build on existing partnerships by pursuing joint publications and working-package leadership in Horizon Europe and LIFE projects. Internal peer review and proposal development workshops may support this.

- Develop doctoral training capacity. The unit should expand co-supervision arrangements with strong European partners and develop structured training modules to prepare for a gradual increase in doctoral activity. Follow international best practice of having a supervisory committee, with a main supervisor and either one or two co-supervisors in the committee.

- As the unit seeks to strengthen its research capacity and expand doctoral-level activity through co-supervision and international collaboration, consideration could be given to the gradual development of dedicated or shared workspace for doctoral and early-career researchers, in order to support integration into the research environment and facilitate day-to-day research interaction.

- Continue modernising infrastructure. The unit should maintain investment in modelling tools, server capacity, and digital research infrastructure, while addressing remaining areas requiring renovation or technical upgrades.

- The unit would benefit from a more structured approach to documenting and communicating impact pathways, for example, through selected case studies that link applied research and conference activity to outcomes for regional development, practice, or stakeholder learning.

- Concentrating social and economic impact efforts on a smaller number of priority areas where research strength and stakeholder engagement already coincide (notably rural development and bioeconomy) would help enhance coherence, visibility, and depth of impact.

- Strengthen national collaboration. Greater collaboration with other Latvian research institutions—particularly in data sharing, modelling platforms, and climate policy research—would support efficiency and increase national research coherence.

- Building more sustained and formalised partnerships with public-sector and sectoral actors could support co-produced research, improve continuity beyond individual events or projects, and increase the traceability of impact.

- While impact activities are currently strongest at the regional and national levels, greater integration into international applied research networks and joint dissemination with international partners would help broaden the reach and learning effects of the unit's work.

These recommendations are intended to support improvements in research quality, deepen disciplinary impact, and enhance the unit's role in Latvia's research and innovation system.

S_8 European Christian Academy

2.2.7 *The unit*

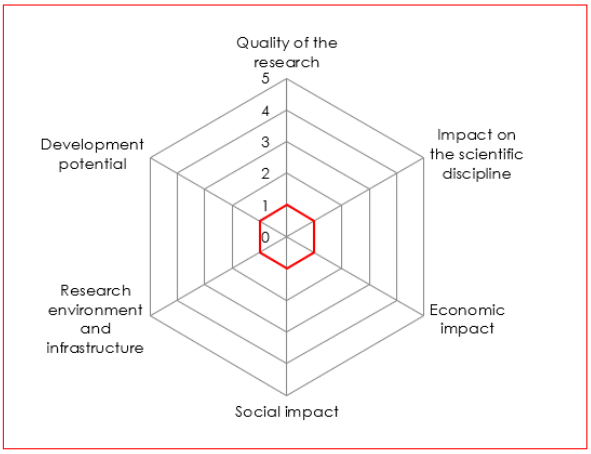
The European Christian Academy (ECA) is a university of applied sciences with a focus on social sciences. The institution is dedicated to providing innovative, interdisciplinary education and research, aiming to address the anthropological identity crisis in modern society. ECA's mission is to integrate ancient knowledge with contemporary social agendas to foster social welfare professions, primarily social work. ECA organises its research around several key themes, including the development of the European social model, patristic anthropology, social welfare studies, social work macro development. The academy also focuses on translating ancient anthropological texts, contributing to the broader understanding of historical knowledge in modern contexts. This approach supports the development of new professions, such as Caritative Social Work, and promotes the integration of ancient insights into contemporary social welfare systems.

2.2.8 *Expert Group evaluation*

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 4 European Christian Academy – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	1
Impact on the scientific discipline	1
Economic impact	1
Social impact	1
Research environment and infrastructure	1
Development potential	1
OVERALL SCORE	1



Overall score
Score 1 - poor

The European Christian Academy (ECA) is a small private higher education institution of applied sciences, employing approximately three full-time equivalent academic research staff and operating on an annual budget of about €400,000. The institution receives no core public funding and functions with highly constrained resources. ECA has a distinctive academic profile, emphasising "innovations from antiquity" through the study of patristic anthropology (4th–8th centuries), integrating theology, sociology, axiology, and the European Social Agenda. Its principal academic domains are social welfare and "patristic anthropology", with particular attention to art therapy for individuals with special needs and autism.

The Expert Group acknowledges the distinctiveness of ECA's scholarly focus and the dedication and motivation of its academic staff. Nevertheless, the evaluation found scant evidence of social science research within the unit. Historical-theological investigations of Orthodox anthropology, church development in Latvia, and translations of patristic texts, while unique in the Latvian context, cannot be regarded as social science research. The social welfare studies submitted for this evaluation fall within the social sciences but are very limited

in scope and predominantly conducted by researchers whose primary affiliation is with other institutions, notably Klaipėda University. The impact of these studies on the (inter)national social sciences is very limited, as evidenced by a modest publication record and the absence of outputs indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, with the exception of a single publication in 2022.

ECA contributes to society and education through its study programmes in social work and art therapy, whose graduates serve as welfare professionals in Latvia. Nonetheless, there is no demonstrable evidence of significant economic or social impact resulting from ECA's social science research.

ECA's research environment and infrastructure supporting the social sciences are minimal. Although the Academy maintains an extensive international network, including the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) and Klaipėda University, the relevance of these collaborations for social science research conducted at ECA remains very limited.

While the unit demonstrates commitment, integrity, and thematic coherence in its scholarly endeavours, its small scale and limited financial resources make it highly vulnerable. These factors, together with ECA's constrained quality and capacity in the social sciences, significantly limit the development of social science research within the institute.

Overall, the Expert Group assesses the quality of social science research at ECA as poor.

Quality of Research

Score 1 - poor

ECA's research has two principal aims: (1) historical-theological studies of Orthodox anthropology, church development in Latvia, and translations of patristic texts, studies that are unique within the Latvian academic context; and (2) social welfare research informed by patristic thought, intended to provide insights relevant to regional policy development and professional practice.

The most significant publications highlighted in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) address topics such as the situation of youth and migrant groups, charitable and social work professions, higher education opportunities for persons with disabilities, and the principles of fraternity in Eastern Christianity as a basis for modern caritative social cohesion, alongside broader reflections on contemporary Christianity.

The evaluation found scant evidence of social science research within the unit. For the purposes of this evaluation, mainstream social sciences are understood as disciplines concerned with the systematic study of social phenomena, employing empirically grounded, theory-informed, and methodologically explicit approaches to examine social structures, processes, and practices. Research in these fields typically aims to contribute to cumulative and broadly transferable knowledge within recognised social science disciplines. Within this framework, scholarly work such as historical-theological investigations of patristic anthropology, analyses of church development in Latvia, and translations of patristic texts may represent valuable contributions to theological, historical, or philological scholarship. However, their primary focus and methodological orientation place them adjacent to, rather than within, mainstream social science research as defined in this evaluation. The volume and quality of published social welfare studies conducted by ECA researchers are extremely limited. The selected full-text publications presented to the Expert Group were authored by researchers affiliated with Klaipėda University, focused primarily on the situation in Lithuania, and were published in *Tiltai*, a journal of Klaipėda University.

Overall, the Expert Group evaluates ECA's research as poor. The institution is a minor national actor in the social sciences, and its research does not contribute significant new scientific knowledge in this field.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 1 – poor

The impact of ECA on the field of social sciences is assessed as poor. During the evaluation period, ECA produced approximately 30 publications (two in 2024). The impact on the field is minimal, as evidenced by the absence of outputs indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, except for a single publication in 2022. FWCI of the papers submitted by ECA is below the world average (0.8). The selected full-text publications presented as showcased to the Expert Group were authored by researchers not affiliated with ECA, but with Klaipėda University. The thematic orientation of ECA's research, centred on patristic anthropology, translations of early Christian texts, and reflections on church development, does not align with the methodological and theoretical expectations of contemporary social science research.

Although ECA participates in the EZA (European Centre for Workers' Questions) and related organisations and seminars, the absence of engagement in recognised international academic social science research networks, conferences, or disciplinary fora limits the visibility and uptake of its social sciences research. Without active integration into these scholarly communities, the institution is unable to shape disciplinary conversations or contribute to the development of social science theory, evidence, or methodological innovation. Consequently, its impact on sociology, social work, and welfare studies remains significantly limited.

Overall, the Expert Group considers ECA's publication profile to be very weak, resulting in extremely limited national and international impact in the social sciences.

Economic impact

Score 1 - poor

Neither the SER nor the site visit provided substantial evidence of economic impact resulting from ECA's social science research. Consequently, the unit's economic impact is assessed as 'poor'.

The applied studies presented in the SER are few in number, narrow in scope, and do not demonstrate meaningful uptake by social service providers, welfare agencies, NGOs, or government actors in Latvia. Without demonstrable evidence that research findings have shaped programmes, interventions, or resource allocation, there is no basis on which to claim measurable economic influence.

Social impact

Score 1 – poor

ECA's contribution to social impact derives from its bachelor's and master's graduates who conduct social work–related research in collaboration with municipalities and who subsequently enter welfare professions, including adult day care and support services for former prisoners. The Expert Group appreciates the positive social impact of ECA's education, but this lies outside its remit as a social sciences research evaluator.

ECA also seeks to contribute to society through studies on social welfare professions, career development, and the development of policy frameworks and educational programmes. These insights are disseminated through publications, notably in journals such as *Tiltai* (a journal

published by Klaipėda University) and ECA's *Scientific Proceedings*, as well as through professional conferences and seminars. However, the Expert Group could not find evidence of any tangible social impact from ECA's research during the evaluation period. The Law on Social Enterprise was initiated outside the evaluation period (2017), and the attempt to include social entrepreneurship as a profession in the Occupational Classification was unsuccessful.

Overall, despite these valuable contributions to society, the Expert Group found very little evidence of significant social impact arising from the *social science research* conducted at ECA.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 1 – poor

The SER's section on infrastructure was left blank, and the site visit provided no evidence of adequate infrastructure, including research equipment, computer resources, databases, material collections, archives, support services, or technical staff. ECA also lacks an infrastructure management plan to guide actions and activities for better coordination and co-utilisation of advanced research infrastructure. The SER further indicated that no funding was secured for infrastructure and institutional development during the assessment period.

The environment for social sciences research is further constrained by ECA's limited funding and research capacity. The potential for doctoral studies is correspondingly constrained, resulting in poor potential for doctoral studies. In collaboration with Klaipėda University, the University of Cologne, and guest professors from Finland and Germany, ECA offers preparatory courses for doctoral students intending to pursue their studies and graduate at the University of Lapland. However, no ECA students are currently enrolled in the doctoral programme at the University of Lapland, as ECA concluded that 'nobody was ready for innovative research'.

Overall, the Expert Group evaluates ECA's research environment and infrastructure as poor. The institution is still in the process of developing an internationally competitive research environment and infrastructure.

Development potential

Score 1 – poor

While the unit demonstrates commitment and thematic coherence, the Expert Group found no evidence indicating realistic growth potential in social science research. ECA's small scale, limited financial resources, constrained infrastructure, and the small number of students qualified for doctoral studies, pose significant obstacles to establishing a sustainable social sciences research programme. These constraints hinder the unit's ability to attract external funding, supervise doctoral students, and participate meaningfully in international research networks. Without these essential foundations, the unit is unlikely to consolidate or expand its research activities in ways that would enhance its national or international standing.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that ECA has very limited potential to strengthen the quality and international reputation of its social sciences research at this stage.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

ECA, Klaipėda University, and Lapland University initiated a doctoral programme in social work, which was intended to be offered in Klaipėda and Lapland. ECA invited social workers who had graduated from its master's programme to participate in preparatory courses for this programme; however, it became evident for the unit that none of the candidates were sufficiently prepared for doctoral-level study.

In light of the current quality and scale of ECA's research, the limited research infrastructure, and the qualification of its students, the Expert Group concludes that the institution is not yet in a position to offer a doctoral programme.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

This section was not addressed in the Self-Evaluation Report, and the Expert Group found no evidence of the unit's contribution to RIS3.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

The SER notes that ECA aims to enhance the social and economic impact of its research by establishing innovation hubs, strengthening its research infrastructure for welfare studies, and developing innovative knowledge in European social work practice. ECA's research also seeks to advance the academic framework for social work careers in Latvia and to foster internationalisation and innovation within social work research. The financial and staffing constraints of ECA make it difficult to achieve these objectives.

Recommendations

Given ECA's limitations in financial resources, staffing, and research capacity, the institution's current strategy of conducting social sciences research on social work and social workers in collaboration with foreign institutions, particularly Klaipeda University, is understandable. However, to strengthen social sciences research at ECA, the Expert Group offers the following recommendations:

- Develop a well-defined five-year research programme in social work and welfare, encompassing clearly articulated social science research questions relevant also in an international context, rigorous study designs, secured funding arrangements, and a detailed specification of the disciplines contributing to the interdisciplinary studies.
- Establish formal collaboration with another university in Latvia. One option would be to assess the feasibility of integrating ECA into a larger Latvian university. This could enhance the quantity, quality, and sustainability of social sciences research, while simultaneously mitigating the institution's financial vulnerability by providing access to shared infrastructure and economies of scale. The Expert Group is aware that such integration may entail risks, including the potential need for ECA to share or cede decision-making authority over its educational provision, research priorities, and human resource management. Remaining an independent institution is another option; however, this choice would limit the institution's capacity to further develop research in social work and welfare in Latvia and to achieve international visibility and impact in the social sciences.

S_9 EKA University of Applied Sciences

2.2.9 *The unit*

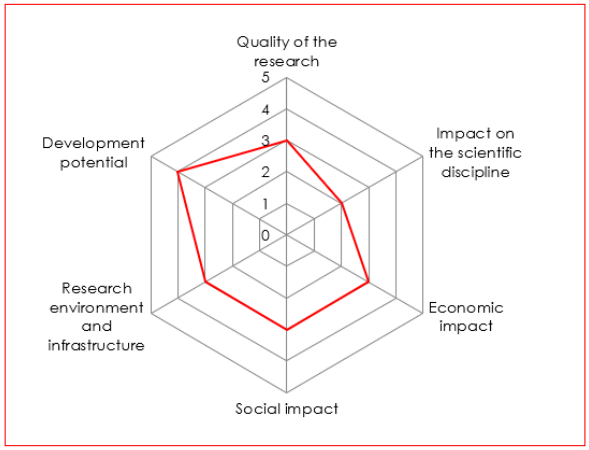
The EKA University of Applied Sciences is a private higher education institution established in 1998. EKA's main research directions are focusing on social sciences, particularly economics and business. The institution's vision is to inspire change and innovation through quality education and research, emphasising diversity and sustainable development. EKA's mission is to support research that positively impacts the economy and society. The institution's funding primarily comes from student fees, EU projects, and collaborations with industry partners. EKA organises its research around strategic specialisations, including sustainable development and circular economy, future of education and competences, social impact research, well-being in life and well-being at work, economics, business administration and marketing, digital economy and business digital transformation, and inclusivity and diversity in higher education.

2.2.10 *Expert Group evaluation*

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 5 EKA University of Applied Sciences – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	3
Impact on the scientific discipline	2
Economic impact	3
Social impact	3
Research environment and infrastructure	3
Development potential	4
OVERALL SCORE	**3**



Overall score
Score 3: good

EKA University of Applied Sciences is a strong national player with some international recognition and development potential. It presents a coherent and steadily developing applied-research profile, shaped by its mission and by a clear strategic emphasis on social and economic relevance. Although the overall research volume is modest, the institution demonstrates a growing ability to participate in international networks, deliver applied research outputs relevant to Latvia's policy priorities, and contribute to the development of skills and innovation capacities. The trajectory of recent years shows noticeable strengthening in publication quality, infrastructure, and research governance.

The university's strategic documents articulate a clear vision of how research should support the institution's applied mission, and these ideas are reflected in its thematic research directions, project engagement, and collaborations with public and private partners. EKA's applied orientation allows it to make meaningful contributions in areas such as digital transformation, sustainability, circular economy, education innovation, and social entrepreneurship - areas with strong overlap with national and European strategic agendas.

Some limitations remain, especially a moderate level of research activity. In practice, this means the institution produces a relatively small number of top-tier research publications, runs mostly small nationally funded projects, and is not yet strongly involved in international research networks. As a result, it does not yet have the scale needed to compete regularly for major international funding (e.g., Horizon Europe, ERC, etc.) or to be highly visible at the international level. At the same time, the institution is clearly making progress, understands its challenges well, and has a realistic and well-structured plan to improve its research capacity. Taken together, this supports an overall assessment of the institution as a strong national player with some international recognition (score 3).

Quality of Research

Score 3: good

EKA's research quality is uneven but steadily improving, with a rising number of quality publications in Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed journals, including the AJG list and increasing involvement in international research activities. The overall number of publications decreases, especially under the category "not included in Web of Science or SCOPUS databases"; instead, EKA succeeded in publishing in AJG 1 and 2* journals (e.g., Business Process Management Journal), which shows the emerging international quality of the research. The best outputs in Q1 journals demonstrate a solid applied focus in areas aligned with institutional strengths such as sustainability, social entrepreneurship, education technologies, and digital transformation. These topics are relevant both locally and internationally, and the institution's work shows increasing methodological sophistication and engagement with contemporary debates.

Nevertheless, research output remains concentrated among a limited group of more active staff, and citation impact remains modest. This reflects the small size of the institution and the fact that many staff retain heavy teaching responsibilities, which limits the time that can be devoted to research and scaling of research outputs and impact. Despite these constraints, EKA has taken steps to strengthen research support structures, including the development of a research laboratory, expanded access to databases, and internal mechanisms that encourage publication and international collaboration.

Interdisciplinary research—often rooted in practice-based inquiry—is a natural strength for an institution of EKA's scale. However, further progress requires more systematic approaches to building research teams, developing methodological training, and supporting early-career researchers. Overall, EKA's research quality is assessed as adequate to good, reflecting both current constraints and a positive trajectory.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 2: adequate

EKA maintains an active and expanding network of international ties, particularly within Europe, and demonstrates a clear institutional commitment to internationalisation through its Internationalisation and Modernisation Strategy 2024–2028 (IMS2028). The institution holds an Erasmus+ Charter and participates consistently in Erasmus+ activities, with cooperation agreements across multiple European countries. The Baltic University Programme PhD Award shows an international level of doctoral students' research. EKA also hosts international conferences and thematic events, participates in Erasmus+ KA220 and other collaborative projects, and maintains bilateral agreements that facilitate joint activities and mobility. EKA is a member of European Digital Learning Network (DLearn), European Marketing and Management Association (EUMMAS), European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI), European network on cultural management and policy (ENCATC), Euclid Network, European School of Sustainability Science and Research (ESSSR). These engagements position EKA as a visible and reliable partner within European applied and pedagogical networks.

When assessed specifically in terms of impact on scientific disciplines through research outputs, the contribution remains limited. While EKA academics produce some international publications, including in AJG-listed and Scopus/WoS-indexed journals (Q1–Q3), these outputs originate from a small group of faculty and do not yet constitute a coherent or influential disciplinary research profile. The institution's international collaboration networks translate only partially into co-authored research publications or participation in competitive international research programmes. Much of the international activity is oriented towards mobility, teaching innovation, and smaller-scale applied initiatives rather than sustained disciplinary research capable of shaping international scholarly debates.

External metrics reinforce this assessment, e.g, EKA's citation footprint over 2019–2024 is modest (385 total citations; average 5.1), indicating limited recognition and uptake of its research within wider disciplinary communities. There is currently little evidence of research that has demonstrably influenced theoretical developments, methodological advances, or substantive discussions within specific scientific fields.

Overall, EKA can be characterised as an internationally engaged applied institution with a growing portfolio of collaborative activities. However, its impact on scientific disciplines is still emerging, with only sporadic reference points in international research and insufficient critical mass to establish sustained disciplinary influence. At present, EKA demonstrates acceptable international activity but limited disciplinary impact, with scope for significant strengthening of its research profile and international scholarly contributions.

Economic impact

Score 3: good

EKA is positioned as an applied higher education institution whose research and knowledge-exchange activities address the needs of economic actors, particularly in services, finance, social entrepreneurship, and emerging green sectors. Its economic impact is strong at the national level, with selected international elements, and the institution has developed a distinct and credible niche in social entrepreneurship and circular economy, areas of growing relevance for Latvia's economic transition.

A central mechanism supporting economic impact is the EKA Business Incubator, which provides structured support for student and graduate start-ups. The incubator combines business-plan development, mentoring by industry representatives, creative workshops, networking opportunities, and access to workspace. Students engage directly in prototype development, early-stage sales, and innovation activities. Participation in externally funded initiatives, such as the "Journey to the ECO" component of the EU Future Heroes programme, further reinforces this environment by exposing students to green-transition challenges and supporting practical solution development.

EKA's study programmes and research themes are well aligned with emerging economic sectors, particularly the green and social economy. The master's programme in Circular Economy and Social Entrepreneurship exemplifies this orientation, preparing specialists to develop and scale socially and environmentally oriented business models. These efforts are reinforced through cooperation with ecosystem partners such as the Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia and NGO organized programme "International Social entrepreneurship accelerator NewDoor", which provides entry points for students and staff into applied innovation activities.

Evidence from the site visit confirms systematic collaboration with economic actors, including the Bank of Latvia, Latvian Space Industry Association, Riga Energy Agency, and the Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia. Partners consistently characterised EKA as practical, open to innovation, and effective at engaging citizens and communities, often contrasting it favourably with other Latvian HEIs. Firms and organisations reported using EKA as a partner for

recruitment, joint projects, hackathons, and data collection, indicating that the institution contributes directly to firms' innovation processes.

These partnerships support applied, interdisciplinary research that intersects economics, management, sustainability, public policy, and technology. Notable examples include student–faculty collaborations with the Bank of Latvia on economic and financial research, joint hackathons and teaching initiatives with the Latvian Space Industry Association, contributions to global entrepreneurship data collection with the Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia, and cooperation with the Riga Energy Agency on sustainability and citizen-engagement challenges. Despite limited resources, EKA succeeds in embedding students and staff in real-world problem-solving, consistent with its mission and SDG-related focus.

EKA's economic impact is also strengthened through national and international projects that promote student–business collaboration, such as the MaKE IT initiative and related entrepreneurship programmes. These activities enhance entrepreneurial competencies and foster incremental innovation within partner firms. Although formal research commercialisation (in terms of patents or licensable IP) remains limited—reflecting both the institution's social-science profile and modest research volume—its applied research outputs in social entrepreneurship, circular economy, and organisational innovation are directly usable by firms, NGOs, and public bodies.

Overall, EKA has developed into a valued and practice-oriented partner for industry, public agencies, and the social economy, with a strong track record of involving students in innovation activities and responding to real economic needs. While opportunities remain to strengthen commercialisation pathways and systematise impact documentation, the Expert Group assesses EKA's economic relevance and impact as Good (Score 3): a strong national performer with growing international visibility in specific applied niches, particularly social entrepreneurship and circular-economy innovation.

Social impact

Score 3: good

EKA's research demonstrates a clear and consistent focus on themes central to Latvia's social development, particularly social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility (CSR), social value creation, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices, and social inequalities. The dedicated research direction, Social Impact Research, targets topics such as social enterprise business models, CSR and business ethics, non-financial and integrated reporting, ESG issues, and student competencies for managing the social aspects of business. These priorities align directly with SDG 8 ("Decent Work and Economic Growth") and SDG 10 ("Reduced Inequalities"), as well as with the Latvian National Development Plan 2021–2027, which emphasises social trust, equal opportunities, and a high-quality living environment.

The relevance of EKA's research to social equality, integration, and welfare is high. The institution's strongest area of demonstrable impact is its contribution to evidence-based policy for the social economy. EKA researchers are active in empirical studies on social entrepreneurship in Latvia, covering themes such as social inequality, the competencies required of social entrepreneurs, and social innovations in service delivery. Many of these studies are published in internationally indexed journals (e.g., Sustainability, European Integration Studies, Business: Theory and Practice, Business, Management and Economics Engineering, Public Policy and Administration).

EKA's policy influence is further evidenced by recognition from the OECD and the European Commission: joint research by EKA and the Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia is cited in the 2025 OECD/EC policy report on labels for the social economy, indicating international acknowledgement of its contributions. Collaboration with public authorities and sectoral

partners is extensive and structurally embedded. EKA works closely with the Ministry of Welfare and the Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia on ESF-funded initiatives such as Support for Social Entrepreneurship, which underpin legislative and policy developments in the sector. EKA also engages the wider public in debates on sustainability and resilience. Participation in public discussions such as the Apritprasme podcast episode with the Riga Energy Agency on circularity and urban sustainability demonstrates how research themes are translated into accessible formats and contribute to public understanding of climate adaptation, the circular economy, and community resilience. This work indirectly supports national security by promoting social trust, civic engagement, and informed responses to climate and energy challenges.

In the cultural and educational domains, EKA's programmes in Culture Management and International Cultural Project Management, alongside its international conference Emerging Trends in Economics, Culture and Humanities (etECH), promote research and dialogue on the role of culture and creative industries in social cohesion and sustainable development.

Overall, the Expert Group finds that EKA's research delivers clear and tangible social impact at the national level, especially in social entrepreneurship, CSR, inequality reduction, and sustainable development. Its contributions are visible in policy formation, ecosystem development, and public engagement. International recognition is emerging through participation in European networks and OECD/EU policy work. EKA's social impact can be characterised as that of a strong national player with developing international influence.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 3: good

The research environment at EKA University of Applied Sciences is underpinned by a structured and increasingly coherent governance framework, appropriate for an applied higher education institution. There is clear evidence of institutional effort and strategic intent, though progress is moderated by scale, resource constraints, and heavy teaching workloads.

Organisation and management of research are relatively well developed. A dedicated Research Department, operating under the Vice-Rector for Science, provides centralised coordination and oversight of research activities. Responsibilities are formally distributed across the Scientific Council, the Research Administration Unit, and research direction coordinators, enabling systematic implementation of the Development Strategy for Science and Creative Activity 2024–2028 (ZRDAS2028). This governance architecture is a notable strength, providing clarity of roles and an institutional centre of gravity for research management.

Long-term strategic and resource planning is supported by a comprehensive suite of institutional documents, including the EKA Strategy 2028, ZRDAS2028, the Internationalisation and Modernisation Strategy (IMS2028), the Diversity and Inclusiveness Strategy (DIS2028), and a Human Resources Development Strategy. These frameworks demonstrate a realistic and self-critical understanding of current limitations. However, the implementation capacity is weaker: strategic ambitions outpace available financial and human resources. The absence of full-time research posts and limited protected research time constrain the university's ability to operationalise its plans and develop a more research-intensive culture.

Goal orientation of research work is one of EKA's strongest features. Research is clearly aligned with national and European priorities such as NAP2027, Horizon Europe, the SDG, and the institution articulates a coherent vision of itself as a research- and innovation-oriented applied university by 2028. This alignment provides direction and coherence even within a small-scale environment.

The availability and quality of research infrastructure and support services reflect targeted investment. Library resources include access to major international databases through the

National Library of Latvia, ensuring coverage of international literature—an important strength for an applied HEI of EKA's size. The Research Laboratory, comprising the Consumer Behaviour Lab (eye-tracking) and VR Neurotechnology Lab (developed with CleverPoint), is strategically aligned with EKA's applied research focus and materially enhances capacity for interdisciplinary empirical work. Nevertheless, infrastructure remains modest in scale: limited workstations, constrained technical support, and high demand may restrict usage. Support ecosystems, including the Researcher Guide, Science Club, internal workshops, and annual international conference, strengthen research culture, but methodological skills among staff and students remain uneven. Combined with heavy teaching workloads and the absence of doctoral studies, these factors limit EKA's ability to deepen research engagement.

EKA's approach to open access is comparatively well developed. The institutional publications repository and the Research Data Repository provide transparent access to research outputs and underlying datasets. Participation in The Collaborative Library expands public-facing science communication. These constitute clear strengths in open science. A more explicit institutional open-access policy and systematic monitoring mechanisms would further strengthen this area.

In summary, EKA's research environment exhibits several strong elements: structured research governance, coherent strategic planning, clear goal orientation, solid access to literature, targeted infrastructure investments, and a well-developed open-access ecosystem. EKA is able to provide a research environment that is comparable to globally recognised academic institutions in its discipline. The score of 3 reflects the fact that the weaker elements are primarily structural and systemic, rather than a lack of strategic intent or awareness. Specifically, limited research capacity, high teaching workloads, the absence of full-time research positions and doctoral programmes, modest administrative support for securing external funding, and uneven methodological skills directly constrain the institution's ability to scale up research activity and compete at a higher level under this criterion. These constraints are recognised in EKA's strategic documents and represent the principal challenges for developing a more research-intensive institutional environment.

Development potential

Score 4: very good

EKA has a carefully considered and realistic approach to managing its strengths and structural constraints, supported by a strong set of strategic documents and a self-critical understanding of its development needs. The institution employs more than 100 staff, including 43 academic positions, with 56% holding a doctoral degree. A substantial share of doctorate holders have expert status from the Latvian Council of Science, indicating recognised competencies across economics, education, law, IT, and the humanities. The presence of PhD candidates among programme directors and research coordinators contributes to generational renewal and demonstrates clear pathways for career progression. Strategic documents, including DIS2028, reflect a sustained institutional investment in staff development and a shift towards a more research- and innovation-oriented culture.

These factors provide a solid platform for strengthening EKA's scientific environment over time. However, the absence of internal doctoral programmes and full-time research posts will continue to limit the pace at which a research-intensive environment can be built. Staff remain heavily engaged in teaching and project-based activities, which constrains the development of deeper, long-term research agendas.

EKA's student body of approximately 1,100 learners, about one-quarter of whom are international, and its bilingual programme offer demonstrate the institution's ability to operate in a multicultural context and to attract students from diverse regions. While its capacity to host doctoral candidates and international researchers remains more limited, ZRDAS2028 and the Research Policy articulate explicit ambitions to bring researchers and doctoral students into the

institution as staff, guest supervisors, and members of international research teams. The Erasmus+ Charter and a wide network of partner institutions strengthen opportunities for staff and student mobility, which remain important mechanisms for external capacity building.

Evidence from the 2024/2025 academic year suggests a notable upward trend in research output: 27 scientific publications were produced, including 15 articles in internationally peer-reviewed journals indexed in Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIH+, with five appearing in Q1–Q2 outlets. This demonstrates that, within its size constraints, EKA is increasingly capable of competing in recognised international journals. Priority research directions like digital transformation, sustainable development and circular economy, social entrepreneurship and social impact, well-being, diversity and inclusion in higher education, and e-learning technologies are well aligned with global agendas and increase the likelihood that EKA's research will remain relevant for both academic and policy debates.

EKA's international project activity is a key lever for its future development. The institution is an active partner in Erasmus+ KA2 and related initiatives (e.g., Circular STEM and digital-education projects with DLEARN) and participates in international conferences such as "Bridging Digital Gaps: Empowering Learners through Green and Digital Skills," hosted at EKA. Membership in the QN Alliance and leadership within the Baltic Hub of the Network IQ Alliance under the EIT HEI programme further demonstrate EKA's ability to contribute to competitive European consortia. These engagements strengthen institutional expertise and integration into international networks, and they offer structured pathways for developing high-potential research themes such as digital education, green skills, ESG, and circular economy.

Although EKA does not yet have a substantial record of participation in Horizon Europe research projects, its growing portfolio of Erasmus+ and EIT HEI activities represents a promising foundation. If EKA continues to leverage these collaborations and systematically translates project participation into high-quality publications, methodological training, and doctoral co-supervision arrangements with partner universities, it will strengthen its position in international competition.

The institution also shows emerging flexibility and responsiveness in opening new research directions. ZRDAS2028 and the 2024/2025 report identify new areas—sports law, brand identity and value creation, digital games research, e-learning technologies—which are consistent with EKA's study portfolio and respond to evolving labour-market and societal needs. The presence of the Research Laboratory, with specialised equipment for consumer behaviour and VR/neurotechnology research, combined with active participation in digital- and green-transition networks, provides an applied infrastructure base that supports further development.

Overall, EKA's development potential for the next 5–10 years is good. The institution has a coherent strategy, realistic self-assessment, internationalising staff and student profiles, and growing participation in European networks focused on socially and economically relevant themes. Structural constraints—particularly the lack of doctoral programmes, limited full-time research positions, and modest national research funding—remain significant and will limit the speed and depth of development. Nevertheless, if EKA maintains its strategic direction, leverages its expanding project portfolio, and systematically links project work to research outputs and doctoral training with partner universities, it has a credible and achievable trajectory for strengthening its research environment, enhancing international competitiveness, and expanding its societal and economic impact.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

EKA University of Applied Sciences demonstrates moderate but growing potential to develop doctoral (third-cycle) studies in the medium term. The institution's ambition to strengthen its research profile is clearly articulated in its Strategy 2028, the Science and Creative Activity

Development Strategy (ZRDAS2028), and the Research Policy 2024. These documents acknowledge present limitations while outlining a realistic pathway for expanding research capacity, integrating students into research, and building international research teams—foundational elements for future doctoral provision.

EKA's strengths include a structured research governance system, an active Research Department and Scientific Council, and expanding research infrastructure supported by open-access publication and data systems. A significant share of academic staff hold doctoral degrees, including several with expert status from the Latvian Council of Science, and the institution increasingly participates in international cooperation projects (Erasmus+, EIT HEI, Circular STEM, DLearn). These engagements help broaden networks, develop supervisory experience, and strengthen the research environment necessary for doctoral-level training. Taken together, these factors provide a credible basis for staged development towards third-cycle studies, particularly through joint supervision with partner universities.

At the same time, several constraints limit EKA's ability to establish an independent doctoral programme in the near term. Research volume remains modest, external funding is limited, and the institution has no full-time research positions, making it difficult to sustain intensive research activity. Academic staff carry high teaching loads, and EKA currently lacks a doctoral school, structured research-training modules, and established systems for doctoral governance. ZRDAS2028 also notes gaps in research-active staff in some fields and limited collaboration in international publications—issues that must be addressed for sustainable doctoral provision.

Given this configuration of strengths and constraints, the most realistic pathway is a phased approach: expanding joint doctoral supervision; developing formal research-training components; deepening involvement in competitively funded international research; and gradually consolidating supervisory capacity in priority areas such as digital economy, sustainability, circular economy, social impact, and applied digital learning. If EKA continues to strengthen its research environment and embed project-based research into academic careers, it could credibly establish niche, applied doctoral programmes within the next 5–10 years.

Overall, EKA shows good potential to offer doctoral studies in the medium term, provided that strategic plans are implemented consistently and research capacity continues to grow in a systematic and sustainable manner.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

EKA's research profile is well aligned with key areas of Latvia's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3). Latvia's RIS3 defines five main smart specialisation areas: (1) Knowledge-intensive bioeconomy; (2) Biomedicine, medical technologies and bio-pharmacy; (3) Smart materials, technologies and engineering systems; (4) Smart energy; (5) Information and communication technologies (ICT), with Social Sciences and Humanities as a horizontal field. EKA's priority research directions – "Digital Economy and Business Digital Transformation", "Sustainable Development and Circular Economy", "Social Impact Research", and "Future of Education and Competences" directly support:

- Information and communication technologies (ICT) – through research on digital transformation of business and digital learning, and participation in Erasmus+/EIT projects on digital skills and green/digital transitions.
- Smart energy and mobility / sustainable environment – via work on circular economy, sustainable entrepreneurship, and green transition (including the MSc in Circular Economy and Social Entrepreneurship.
- Horizontal Social Sciences and Humanities – through social impact, inequality, social entrepreneurship, and education research that underpin inclusive, innovation-driven growth.

Overall, EKA's research aligns with Latvia's RIS3 in ICT and Smart Energy, with strong horizontal SSH contributions. Given international trends (digitalisation, green transition, social innovation), EKA could further sharpen its specialisation by concentrating resources on the digital economy and circular/social entrepreneurship as its core RIS3 niche, while avoiding dispersion into areas (e.g., biomedicine) where it lacks critical mass.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

EKA's research and development activities conform well to Latvia's state objectives for science, technology, education, and innovation. The Science, Technology Development and Innovation Guidelines 2021–2027 set the goal of fostering "a smart, technologically advanced and innovative society in Latvia", while the National Development Plan 2021–2027 (NAP2027) and the Education Development Guidelines 2021–2027 emphasise productivity growth, innovation, digital transition, and high-quality, inclusive education.

EKA's priority research directions – Digital Economy and Business Digital Transformation, Sustainable Development and Circular Economy, Social Impact Research, Future of Education and Competences, Inclusivity and Diversity in Higher Education – directly support these policy aims and Latvia's research policy objective to align with the European Research Area and Smart Specialisation Strategy.

Regarding systemic problems of Latvia's research system:

- Human resources – EKA actively works to attract and develop students (including international) and involves them in research and innovation projects (e.g., digital transformation in education, social impact of HE), thus supporting the pipeline of future researchers and innovation-oriented graduates.
- Collaboration with industry – EKA contributes to national innovation and industrial policy objectives through research on university–industry cooperation and participation in projects such as ERDF "Innovation Grants for Students" / MaKE IT, which link students, universities, and companies and strengthen knowledge transfer.
- Internationalisation – EKA systematically broadens its collaboration network via Erasmus+ partnerships and international projects and conferences (e.g., DLEARN "Bridging Digital Gaps" on green and digital skills), reinforcing Latvia's goal of integrating into ERA and boosting international research cooperation.

In summary, EKA's research aligns with the objectives of the Science, Technology Development and Innovation Guidelines 2021–2027 and the Education Development Guidelines 2021–2027, contributing to digital transformation, innovation capacity, sustainable development, and social inclusion. The institution could further strengthen this contribution by concentrating resources on its most competitive niches—digital economy, green/circular and social entrepreneurship, and education innovation—in line with evolving international trends.

Recommendations

EKA has strong development potential but requires targeted investment in research talent, infrastructure, competitive funding participation, and doctoral capacity. With focused effort over the next six years, EKA can evolve into a nationally strong and internationally visible applied research institution with the capability to offer high-quality doctoral programmes in its strategic niches.

- Research Staff Development & Human Resources. Increase the number and capacity of research-active staff. Introduce protected research time for staff with strong publication potential. Prioritise recruitment of international researchers and early-career

postdocs in EKA's core research areas. Implement succession planning for senior staff and identify future research leaders.

- Strengthen researchers' methodological competencies. Offer structured annual training in research methods (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods), data analysis, and academic writing, especially at EU universities. Develop internal peer-review and mentoring schemes for publications and project applications. Assure the possibility of the researchers joining international research societies as EURAM, AOM, and others. Set a seed fund for a small-scale international research project with at least one international university.
- Research Scope Consolidation. Consolidate and clarify institutional research priorities. Streamline the current research directions to 3–4 core areas where EKA has the strongest capacity and RIS3 alignment (e.g., Digital Economy and Business Transformation, Sustainable and Circular Economy, Social Impact and Social Entrepreneurship, Future of Education and Digital Pedagogy). Ensure annual review and staff-wide consultation to maintain alignment with Strategy 2028 and Latvia's RIS3.
- Strengthen operational research management. Formalise research group structures with clear annual deliverables (e.g., quality publications (e.g., AJG or FT50 list), projects, partnerships). Introduce KPIs and incentives linked to quality publications, externally funded projects, and supervision contributions. Expand the responsibilities of the Research Department by introducing a Research Funding Officer and an International Research Development Officer.
- External Funding and Competitiveness. Significantly increase participation in competitive funding. Target Horizon Europe Missions (e.g., Cities, Adaptation, Climate) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions through partnerships with stronger EU universities. Strengthen participation in EIT HEI, Erasmus+ KA2/KA3, and Interreg Baltic Sea programmes. Implement internal seed funding for teams preparing competitive grant proposals. Create a grant-writing support system. Provide professional editing for proposals, budgeting support, and matchmaking with international partners. Establish an annual "Project Development Week" to build consortia and prepare applications.
- Collaboration & Partnerships. International Collaboration. Build long-term research partnerships with 3–4 strategic universities. Aim for joint publications, shared labs, staff mobility, and joint supervision of PhD students. Focus on institutions strong in sustainability, digital economy, and social innovation. Move from participation to leadership in international projects. Identify experienced staff to take WP leader roles; within 3 years, aim to coordinate at least one EU-funded project.
- National Collaboration. Strengthen collaboration with Latvian science universities and research institutes. Share infrastructure (e.g., labs, research software, data access) with Riga universities and applied sciences institutions. Develop joint research/Doctoral programmes in social entrepreneurship, public governance, wellbeing, and digitalisation.
- Doctoral Training & Long-Term Capacity. Develop the foundation for launching doctoral studies. Start by co-supervising doctoral students through MoUs with Latvian or EU Universities (e.g., MSCA DN measure). Introduce a doctoral skills programme and develop a doctoral-support ecosystem. Introduce training modules for research ethics, advanced methodology, academic writing, and project management accessible to staff and prospective doctoral candidates. Create a Doctoral Development Portal for co-supervised PhD students.

S_10 Ventspils University of Applied Sciences / Field of Social sciences

2.2.11 The unit

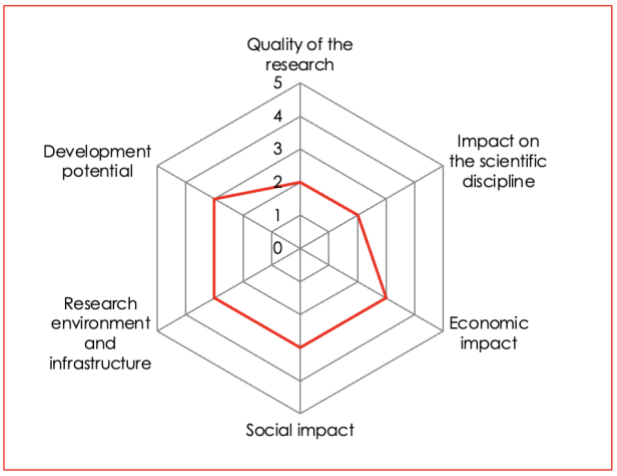
The Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VUAS) is a university of applied sciences, and the Faculty of Economics and Management (FEM) is one of its three faculties. VUAS has the vision to be a digitally open and accessible European-level university, contributing significantly to the national economy and science. VUAS has a strong regional focus, with most students and graduates contributing to regional development in the Kurzeme region. The university's research funding comes from various sources, including state research programmes, EU funding, and municipal funding. Research at VUAS is organised around four strategic areas of specialisation: innovation, entrepreneurship, regional economy, and economics. The university emphasises interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly through projects like COLOURS, ENDORSE, and VPP4, which involve both national and international partnerships.

2.2.12 Expert Group evaluation

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 6 Ventspils University of Applied Sciences / Field of Social sciences – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	2
Impact on the scientific discipline	2
Economic impact	3
Social impact	3
Research environment and infrastructure	3
Development potential	3
OVERALL SCORE	**3**



Overall score

Score 3: good

The overall score for the Faculty of Economics and Management (FEM) at the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VUAS) is 3, indicating that VUAS is a strong national player with some international recognition. Strengths of this research include its economic impact, which was judged to be good, with evidence of extensive engagement and interaction with local and regional economic stakeholders. The broader societal impacts were also judged to be good. The Expert Panel also viewed positively the development potential for the unit, supported by an effective senior management pursuing realistic plans for ensuring research resilience over the next 5-10 years. The main areas for improvement are in enhancing the critical mass and quality of its research outputs, publishing more articles in internationally recognised journals, and expanding the number and scale of its national and international research projects and collaborations.

Quality of Research

Score 2: adequate

The research of FEM is uneven, with a generally stable number of publications in Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed journals, though with a decline relative to the numbers of publications in 2019. There is some involvement in international research activities. The best outputs demonstrate a solid applied focus in areas aligned with institutional strengths, such as entrepreneurship, innovation, the regional economy and professional development. These topics are relevant both locally and internationally, and the institution's work demonstrates engagement with contemporary debates.

However, according to the bibliometric data, of the 60 outputs during the reporting period, 54 were in the form of conference proceedings and 5 were peer-reviewed journal articles. Journals like Economic Science for Rural Development are also published by local institutions. In addition, research output remains concentrated among a limited group of more active staff, and citation impact was low with 26 citations, with average citations of 0.9 for the period 2019-23. This reflects the small size of the institution and the fact that many staff retain heavy teaching responsibilities.

The institution has yet to reach the level where research is carried out by an international team of researchers, leading to international recognition for the originality and significance of its research. To achieve this and obtain a higher score, the unit will need to publish more high-quality peer-reviewed and indexed journal articles. The journal articles that were provided by the unit, notably the two articles in *Education Sciences,* demonstrate how this can be done through collaboration in national and international research projects.

Interdisciplinary research, often rooted in practice-based inquiry, is a natural strength for an institution of FEM's scale. However, further progress requires more systematic approaches to building research teams and supporting early-career researchers.

Overall, FEM's research quality is assessed as adequate, reflecting current constraints and the need for enhancement of research activities.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 2: adequate

FEM maintains an expanding network of international ties, particularly within Europe, and has had some success in being included as a partner university in the European University Alliance COLOURS in 2024. This should enhance the potential for interdisciplinary research, and the hosting of the first *Colabs* open science event at VUAS is recognised to be a significant advance. The other major national and internationally funded research projects undertaken by FEM during this period, such as the professional development of adults (VPP4) and the enhancement of entrepreneurship affected by brain drain (ENDORSE), also indicate a growing capacity for engagement through national and international research collaboration.

However, the institution's networks translate only partially into co-authored research publications or participation in competitive international research programmes. Much of the international activity is oriented towards mobility, teaching innovation, and smaller scale applied initiatives rather than sustained disciplinary research capable of shaping international scholarly debates. These national and international research collaborations, including a few memberships in editorial boards of leading scientific journals, remain at a relatively low level from an international research perspective. The unit has a few outputs in Q1 journals (6,3%). There is currently little evidence of research that has demonstrably influenced theoretical

developments, methodological advances, or substantive discussions within specific scientific fields. FEM's work is generally not cited in international policy documents or by leading scholars, showing limited recognition beyond Latvia. Building greater capacity to prepare and implement funding applications as well as carry out international research studies should help to have greater success in securing external grants and in enhancing the unit's impact on the wider scientific community.

The impact of the unit on the scientific community is assessed to be adequate, with FEM occupying a stable position in the national scientific community with some international activity but limited disciplinary impact, with scope for significant strengthening of its research profile and international scholarly contributions.

Economic impact

Score 3: good

The Expert Group was impressed by the economic impact of the research undertaken in FEM and judged that the research of the unit was important for the local and regional economy, though its international impact was more limited. The engagement with the private sector is dynamic and extensive, such as with Freeport of Ventspils, "Bucher Municipal" Ltd, "Hansamatrix Ventspils" Ltd, and "Bio Venta" Ltd who provide internships for the students and scholarships. VHTP (Ventspils High Technology Park) cooperates with FEM in various projects. Various applied research projects, such as Kurzeme Innovation Grants for Students (KinGS) and Vidzeme Innovation Program for Students (VIPS) have contributed to establishing a local start up ecosystem and to support technology transfer. However, membership in committees and scientific advisory boards of business companies is rare and FEM's international profile remains limited. This indicates emerging recognition of the FEM expertise for business, but there is still further progress to be made. The self-evaluation document highlighted that FEM's research focuses on developing a 'culture of entrepreneurship', which is achieved through regular interactions with entrepreneurs in the city of Ventspils and the Kurzeme region, promoting the implementation of modern management science approaches through collaborative research projects. These claims were confirmed during the site visit of the Expert Group and the meeting with industry representatives and cooperation partners who were supportive of the value and significance of the research cooperation with FEM. FEM's strength is in promoting integration with the real-world business environment through active international cooperation and its emphasis on entrepreneurship, new venture development and applied research projects. These activities are supported by Erasmus+ programmes.

The support provided by the Ventspils Municipality, including significant contributions to the university's budget, is to be commended, particularly the financial support provided to doctoral students. The role that students play in collaborative research with local industry, and the active role of employers in supervising dissertations and reviewing programmes, was also noted positively.

Social impact

Score 3: good

The social impact was evaluated as good, with the unit's interactions with the public sector at a level to be expected of a recognised national academic institution. The Expert Group was favourably impressed by this social engagement, which has the same qualities, if at a lower intensity, as engagement with economic stakeholders. The contributions of the research undertaken, such as the study on 'brain drain', have a significant impact on promoting the quality of life in the region's education and workforce. It was noted that FEM's social engagement focuses on local education representatives, such as teachers, high school students, and VUAS students, and that this was valued, as corroborated by the on-site meeting

with partners. Major collaborators of FEM are Ventspils City Municipality, Ventspils County Municipality, Ventspils City Education Board, Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), and The Confederation of Latvian Employers (LDDK), responsible for students' internships, joint projects like COLOURS, and seminars. VUAS, together with the social partners, make efforts to build a talent pool for the region. This includes various events that are organized, which allow students to apply their theoretical knowledge to solve real-world problems, as well as various opportunities to apply for grants to finance their business ideas. Another example is the hackathon organised through the ENDORSE programme.

Overall, FEM plays an important role within the city and region in promoting social equality, integration, and welfare, and in promoting the value of higher education and the public understanding of the significance of scientific activity. However, the social engagement is predominantly local and relatively small in scale, with a lower intensity than the unit's economic engagement. Social impact can be expected to increase as the scale and intensity of this engagement grow over time.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 3: good

The research environment and infrastructure were assessed to be good, with FEM being a strong national player, providing a supportive research environment in its respective disciplines. The senior management demonstrated capable leadership, recognising the challenges of a relatively small unit in a regional setting and having longer-term strategic and financially resilient plans for enhancing research. The research environment incorporates a good understanding and projection of its core priorities and the 'niches' in which its research can have the greatest local, regional and international impact.

The resources available for conducting research, such as the Ventspils library, computer networks, and databases, were also judged to be adequate. The fact that everything is located within one campus also strengthens the sense of a cohesive research environment. However, as research ambitions develop and grow, there will be a need to invest more into the resources and infrastructure for research, particularly specialized databases in the areas of finance and management.

However, the unit's small scale limits opportunities for structured research support, such as grant-writing assistance, methodological training, or research management expertise, which are essential for building a more ambitious research portfolio.

Development potential

Score 3: good

The unit has already demonstrated its high standing in the local, regional, and national settings, though it has focused on the originality and significance of its research in those contexts. VUAS Strategy for 2021–2027 does cover measures to address current weaknesses in the quality and scientific impact of the research, in attracting competitive funds, and in attracting internationally recognised researchers. To achieve a 'very good' development potential, the challenge is to internationalise this research by engaging in more comparative international research projects with other regions in Europe and other parts of the world, where the research findings from within the region can have a wider international impact. The self-evaluation report provides a realistic assessment of the challenges that this will involve. These include the capture of a larger number of externally funded national and international research projects; retaining and attracting high-quality researchers, including foreign researchers; ensuring that the doctoral programme strengthens research skills and capacities; and providing the conditions and research culture that nurtures and develops academic staff's capacity to publish internationally recognised research outputs.

The building blocks for these ambitions are in place to ensure an upward progression of the research quality at FEM. The challenge is in the sustained and successful implementation of these research plans.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

There is considerable potential in developing the doctoral studies programme in FEM. An innovative joint programme with Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and RTU Rezekne Academy of Technologies has a unifying element in the study of entrepreneurship. In 2024, three students from VUAS graduated from this programme. It is also notable that all PhD graduates have continued to work in the faculty, which directly strengthens its research capacity. In addition, the new doctoral studies model, currently being implemented, should provide greater economic security for doctoral researchers, thereby ensuring higher completion and graduation rates. However, several PhD students remain on the old more precarious model and there is the challenge to ensure that the new model is sustainably financed. Also, concern remains on the capacity of the FEM supervisors to lead a new generation of research, if the quality of the research projects and outputs does not advance. The Expert Group was reassured that active measures are being taken to secure such funding.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

There is generally a good alignment between the research undertaken in FEM with the RIS3 objectives. This includes its specific contributions to developing a skilled workforce that aligns academic programmes and applied research with the demands of local industries. The unit provides an in-depth analysis of the regional context for a sustainable national development that creates synergies between education and economic needs. There are also contributions to the sustainable development of cities and regions, and research that underlines effective professional development for adults in the Latvian context.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

The research undertaken in FEM contributes to the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia 2030 and the National Development Plan of Latvia 2021-2027 by developing human capital and advancing research in regional development. The research also contributes to the Regional Policy Guidelines 2021-2027 by supporting municipalities in developing the business environment, raising productivity and attracting human resources to the regions and building regional innovation and knowledge systems. VUAS has a notable role as one of the two higher educational institutions in the Kurzeme region, thereby critically supporting the scientific potential of the region.

Recommendations

The Expert Group recognised that the self-evaluation report provided a realistic understanding of the unit's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats facing the unit in terms of its future development. The recommendations made here seek to support this vision for enhancing the quality of research over the next six years. These include the need:

- To increase the quality of research outputs through targeting more publications in peer-reviewed international journals, as well as other high-quality publications. This requires improving the research skills of existing staff, attracting high-quality researchers to the unit, and providing institutional support, including financial support, to upgrade the quality of research outputs.
- To increase the quantity and research quality of international research projects and collaborations at both the national and the EU/European level. This requires further developing the 'research niches', such as research in regional economic development, that the unit offers to make its research contributions attractive to other

national and international partners. In addition, the internal institutional support for research planning and grant applications should be strengthened.

- To devise an effective strategy to retain and upgrade the research skills of existing academic researchers, e.g, through becoming visiting scholars in internationally acknowledged universities, and to offer incentives to attract high-quality researchers to VUAS, including foreign staff and researchers.
- To take advantage of the new national doctoral model as a means to strengthen the longer-term research capacity of VUAS and the competence of the supervisors. Internationally acknowledged co-supervisors can be invited to join the team.
- To continue expanding engagement and interaction with external economic and social partners, and to build its international reputation for innovative solutions to major contemporary economic and societal challenges.

S_12 Baltic International Academy

2.2.13 The unit

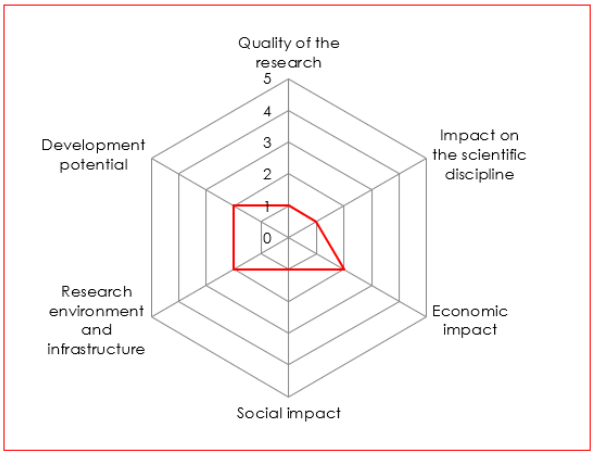
The Baltic International Academy (BIA) is a higher education and scientific institution located in Riga, specialising in social sciences. BIA's mission is to provide competitive higher education and qualifications aligned with international standards, develop lifelong learning programmes, and conduct applied research to support the national economy. BIA aligns its activities with broader societal needs by fostering collaboration with other educational and research institutions, as well as industry stakeholders. Research at BIA is organised around several main fields, including psychology, law, hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation, management, administration and real estate, and European studies.

2.2.14 Expert Group evaluation

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 7 Baltic International Academy – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	1
Impact on the scientific discipline	1
Economic impact	2
Social impact	1
Research environment and infrastructure	2
Development potential	2
OVERALL SCORE	**2**



Overall score
Score 2: adequate

The overall score for the Baltic International Academy is 2, indicating that the level and quality of the unit's research are adequate but could be improved. The Expert Group clearly saw that the unit was struggling with a worsening financial situation but was unable to determine the underlying causes during the on-site visit. The BIA produces a reasonable number of scientific papers, but little of its published work is of an international standard. Pure research is underdeveloped. There are some papers with limited national impact in lower-ranked journals including *Review of Economics and Finance* and *International Comparative Jurisprudence*, but the impact and importance of these academic outputs is modest. Papers submitted for evaluation show little evidence of quality or originality. As BIA undertakes a few international activities, its international status and impact are limited. It participates in a few research consortia beyond Latvia. The unit recently closed its two doctoral programmes and currently offers none. It aims to develop a new PhD programme in social sciences but lacks a plan to achieve that goal or to improve the quality and standing of its research.

Quality of Research

Score 1: poor

The scientific quality of research produced by BIA academics is low. Work submitted as part of the review demonstrates little evidence of originality, international impact, or engagement with the wider scientific community. The unit's self-assessment records 151 articles in Scopus and Web of Science and 82 articles in Erih+ since 2019. According to the BIA's report, the number of academic staff (professors, associate professors, docents, lecturers and senior researchers) fell from 110 (or 27.8 FTE) in 2019 to 65 (or 17 FTE) in 2024. Elsevier bibliometric data provided to the Expert Group shows that the overall total number of citations for its outputs over this six-year period is 183, while the average citation per paper is 3.8, indicating low scientific impact. This level of research impact is also reflected in its low "0" score for Highly Cited Papers and its 8.3% score for papers published in Q1 journals. The unit's research performance has fallen since 2022-2023.

Members of the unit participate in a small number of international partnerships, notably with Kharkiv National University (Ukraine), Siedlce University (Poland), and other parts of Europe. They are also partners in three international collaborative research projects. As a private HE institution, the BIA is not eligible to receive state funding, and the unit is having to come to terms with a substantial decline in student numbers and in the provision of taught Russian language courses.

Overall, the Expert Group assesses the BIA to be a national player with low research impact. The institution's research does not engage substantively with international debates within the scientific community. By international academic standards, the quality of the research is poor.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 1: poor

Most of the BIA's research is applied. Its main areas of research are economics and management, psychology, law, European studies, and tourism. Members of the unit are involved in a small number of international research partnerships, including the EU ERASMUS KA2 program titled 'Cooperation for Innovation and the exchange of Good Practices Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training'. Among the key articles by BIA academics are those on the digital economy, the FinTech industry, smart agriculture, and the integration of Latvia's ethnic minorities. The BIA publishes two in-house scientific journals, '*Administrative and Criminal Justice*' and '*Baltic Journal of Legal and Social Sciences'*. Since 2023, both have been included in the European Reference Index for the Humanities (Erih+) database, but neither is included in Scopus or Web of Science. BIA researchers regularly participate in national and some international conferences, and the institution attracts, on average, three early-career foreign researchers annually. In the self-assessment of its research in Management, the BIA benchmarks itself against international competitors, including the London School of Economics and Royal Holloway, University of London. It also identifies the study of social cognition and attitude changes as a niche scientific specialism. Little evidence was provided to substantiate either of these claims.

Overall, the Expert Group assesses the scientific standing and impact of BIA's research as low, with a declining position in the international and national scientific community. The unit would need to do considerably more work to become a recognised contributor to the international and national scientific community.

Economic impact

Score 2: adequate

BIA research is oriented towards developing the social and economic spheres, particularly in areas such as digital banking, money laundering, banking compliance, civil rights, and tourism. The unit produces research relevant to economic actors, and its level of interaction with audiences outside academia is adequate. Examples of this include contributions to Latvia's National Electronic Encyclopaedia – an open-access online resource; training personnel for roles in the tourism industry; and providing expertise on national-level issues such as financial regulation, crypto-exchanges, and ethnic minority integration. While these indicate areas where the institution's research is significant to the national economy, evidence of engagement with industry and commerce is limited. Some of the examples (e.g. contribution to an encyclopedia) are not research-based.

Overall, the Expert Group judged the BIA to be a satisfactory national player in terms of its economic impact. Some of BIA's research is important to the economy.

Social impact

Score 1: poor

The BIA has a social impact mainly through its teaching programmes and its students' contribution to employment. Research activities aim to focus on addressing societal problems, including national security, social cohesion, organisational management, money laundering, and tourism. Examples include work by BIA researchers on banking across different countries; work for the accreditation commission of the Research Centre for Industrial Development Problems of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and work for the National Economy Committee and the Finance and Budget Committee of the Latvian Saeima.

Despite these sporadic individual contributions, the Expert Group found very limited evidence that BIA's research has produced tangible or sustained social impact at a national level. The activities described are largely individual engagements rather than structured, research-driven interventions capable of shaping policy, informing public services, or influencing social outcomes. Furthermore, the social relevance of the research is undermined by weaknesses in research quality and the absence of evidence demonstrating that findings have been adopted or used by public-sector institutions, NGOs, or community organisations.

Overall, the Expert Group assesses the unit's social impact as poor.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 2: adequate

The research environment and infrastructure were assessed as adequate, and BIA provides a research environment comparable to that of other small private higher education institutions. Its provision of office space, lecture rooms, laboratories, computers, and relevant software is reasonably good. Its library provides adequate space and resources for staff and students, and

its collections host several thousand titles and journals in several languages (Russian, Latvian and English). The institution has a coherent, long-term strategic plan for resourcing and staffing that continues to support its well-defined key areas of research expertise. There is, however, less evidence of plans to develop new areas of research or to respond to emerging challenges and research themes. One area of infrastructure investment has been BIA's support for creating a small laboratory which provides encephalographs, computing hardware and other equipment for researchers and graduate students involved in the study of implicit attitudes and neurocognition. The BIA reports that it can provide financial support for overseas trips for its researchers, and that a high proportion of MA students participate in the unit's scientific research activities. However, data on the availability and quality of research support services is missing, and there is little evidence of a coherent research culture and internal research seminars.

The lack of sufficient funding for research and the lack of motivation among some academic staff with heavy teaching loads to engage in scientific research are significant challenges. Funding for research comes mainly from internal reserves and from student tuition fees, and supporting the high costs of publishing scientific articles in Scopus and Web of Science journals is challenging.

Overall, the research environment and infrastructure of the unit are adequate. The institution could do more to develop its internal research environment to create a more vibrant research culture.

Development potential

Score 2: adequate

Despite the fall in student enrolments and considerable funding challenges, BIA has reasonable developmental potential, especially with regard to the economic and societal impact of its research and teaching. Researchers can participate in international networks, particularly in other Baltic states and in Ukraine, as well as with some UK and German universities. The unit has some potential to become a stronger national player in research areas where staff have expertise, particularly in management and finance, tourism and hospitality, and law. Heavy teaching loads and falling income, however, pose serious challenges for researchers. BIA appears to have developed a strategy for attracting overseas researchers with an average of 21.5 visiting professors and lecturers each year since 2019. It also has the potential to support doctoral-level studies in its areas of expertise, some of which are highly topical, although it no longer offers doctoral programs. Raising competitive funding will always be a challenge for any small research institute, particularly in the absence of significant public funding opportunities. BIA's plan for developing its research standing includes intensifying efforts to obtain funding from Latvian and European grants and campaigning for the Baltic Journal of Legal and Social Sciences in the Scopus database. The strategy, however, is not particularly innovative or creative and does not indicate any new strategic directions or coherent future vision.

Overall, the unit is visible as a national player in its areas of research expertise, and its activities sometimes contribute to wider national debates and to the international scientific community.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

In the period 2019-2024, the institution oversaw the successful completion of 16 PhD theses. Until 2024, BIA offered two doctoral programmes, in Economics and Entrepreneurship and in Law. These doctoral programmes, however, are no longer accredited and have therefore closed. Currently, BIA students continue their studies in doctoral programmes at other universities in Latvia, while some students have retained the same scientific supervisors previously approved at BIA. At present, the unit shows little evidence of having the potential to increase or enhance the provision of doctoral research.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

Some of the unit's research aligns with the Smart Specialisation Strategy, particularly research that is oriented towards practical and policy-based issues and finding solutions to societal problems. Examples include work on Regional Compliance Issues in Latvia's Commercial Banks, Identity Values of Latvian Ethnic Minorities and the relationship between the ethnic and economic factors in the formation of organisational culture, and the EU-funded Erasmus Higher Education project, "Enhancing Green Economy in 3 countries of Asia". BIA's self-assessment report emphasises the importance of integrating graduate students into academic research, building capacity, and contributing to the knowledge economy through education that enhances human capital and employability. Master's degree completions have averaged about 17 per year since 2019. This low figure should be a source of concern.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

The unit conforms in some ways with the objectives of state scientific and technology development, as well as educational and innovation development. Research at BIA goes some way towards contributing to the State's goals of improving international competitiveness, better integration in the European Research Area, national competitiveness, and the implementation of evidence-based research, technology development and innovation policy.

Firstly, the unit aims to attract new master's students, involve them in its research activities, and help prepare them for writing scientific papers.

Secondly, some of the unit's researchers have extensive relationships with government ministries and education institutions. Examples include advisory work for the Finance and Budget and National Economy Committees of the Latvian Saeima and membership in the commission of the Ministry of Justice on a unified state qualification replacement for lawyers.

Overall, however, the unit does not appear to have sufficient human resources for extensive collaboration with industry, and it has insufficient internationalisation.

Recommendations

The Expert Group has some suggestions that might help the unit to become a significant national player and to strengthen its position in the national and international scientific community as a more plausible partner in collaborative international research partnerships and networks:

- Targeted international collaboration**:** The unit could do more to develop opportunities for scientific cooperation, particularly with other Latvian and Baltic universities, research centres, and European universities, by building on existing networks and creating new

research partnerships. At present, this goal is aspirational and lacks a clear plan for how this will be achieved. The unit needs to develop a longer-term strategy for cultivating targeted national and international collaborations. This could include identifying a small number of priority partners aligned with the strongest research themes, setting clear objectives for collaboration (e.g., joint publications or coordinated grant applications), and allocating dedicated time to support the development and monitoring of these partnerships over time.

- Research publications and journals: The unit aims to get its two journals, 'Administrative and Criminal Justice' and 'Baltic Journal of Legal and Social Sciences', included in Scopus and ERIH+ databases. It does not, however, provide a plan for achieving this goal. The unit should develop a strategy for improving the quality of papers published in these journals. This would include inviting high-calibre external experts onto its editorial board and taking a more proactive stance towards soliciting submissions of quality articles.

- A focused and renewed research agenda**:** The current research agenda is very broad. The unit lists its core specialisms as Psychology; Law; Tourism, Management and European Studies, but these areas also include numerous sub-fields (Hotel and Restaurant Services, Recreation Organisation, Administration and Real Estate Management; Business Management and Administration; Social Management and Social Entrepreneurship; Small business development problems in Baltic States; and macro-level research on Financial and Banking Systems). Given the small number of research staff, it would be advisable to focus on a more targeted set of research topics. The unit might also consider developing some new, strategically important areas of research. For example, it could make more of its strengths as an institution with strong connections to, and a long history of engagement with, Latvia's Russian-speaking minority.

- Plan for future funding and doctoral programme: The unit states that from 2025 onwards it will prioritise efforts to obtain external funding from Latvian and European grants and give priority to opening doctoral programmes in social sciences. What is currently lacking is a plan to show how it will achieve these goals. Until 2024 the unit ran two doctoral programmes in Economics and Entrepreneurship and Law. The unit did not explain why these programmes were withdrawn and outsourced to other universities in Latvia, but the unit might consider options for restoring or replacing these doctoral programmes with new postgraduate offerings.

S_13 National Defence Academy of Latvia

2.2.15 The unit

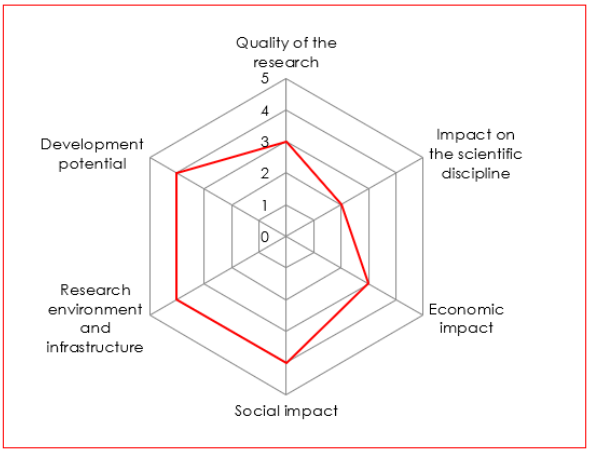
The National Defence Academy of Latvia (NDAL) is a higher education institution of applied sciences that offers professional bachelor's and master's programmes in military studies. The mission of NDAL is to support Latvia's defence priorities through practical, defence-related research initiatives. The programmes integrate academic education with military training to prepare skilled military leaders for the Latvian National Armed Forces. NDAL is fully funded by the Latvian government. The academy's research focuses on Latvia's military history, military medicine and psychology, security and defence of Latvia and the Baltic States, NATO and EU Roles in European Security, Russia's Strategy, Warfare, and Society, and Military Technologies and Defence Industry. NDAL emphasises applied research and military innovation, with a focus on technology transfer and defence product testing. The academy supports interdisciplinary projects, combining fields such as political science and sociology, and maintains collaborations with international partners.

2.2.16 Expert Group evaluation

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 8 National Defence Academy of Latvia – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	3
Impact on the scientific discipline	2
Economic impact	3
Social impact	4
Research environment and infrastructure	4
Development potential	4
OVERALL SCORE	**3**



Overall score
Score 3: good

The overall score for the National Defence Academy of Latvia (NDAL) is 3, indicating a good level of research. Strengths of the two research centres within NDAL include the social impact of its research, which was judged to be extensive, effective, and significant for stakeholders in Latvia and beyond. The Expert Group was also impressed by the general research environment and by the senior leadership's commitment to supporting researchers to enhance the overall quality of research. The development potential was also judged to be very good, though the current restructuring of research within NDAL introduces an element of uncertainty and contingency, as well as opportunities to strengthen the future of research. Areas for improvement include the quality and quantity of research outputs, increasing the number of peer-reviewed articles in international journals, as well as in strengthening regional and international research collaboration and projects.

Quality of Research

Score 3: good

The scientific quality of NDAL is assessed as good, and the institution is a strong national player with some international recognition. The research undertaken is important in terms of originality and significance, and of a quality suitable for publication in international peer-reviewed journals. According to the bibliometric data provided to the Expert Group, the seven researchers of the unit produced 42 outputs over the research period with 27 citations (1.7 average from 2019-23) and 26% of the outputs in Q1 journals. Most of the publications were articles but also included two books and a few book chapters.

This relatively modest formal record is, however, mitigated by the fact that some outputs are published in high-quality regional security and defence journals – such as the Journal of Baltic Security and PRISM – that are not indexed in Scopus or the Web of Science. In addition, some of the original and significant research undertaken is confidential and not published in open sources. There is also good quality research that is published through NDAL working papers.

There is also evidence of an upward trajectory in the scientific quality of the research outputs, with four articles published in internationally recognised journals in 2025. The new Routledge series on Baltic Security, of which NDAL is jointly responsible with Defence Academies in the other Baltic states, should also offer an outlet for high-quality monographs.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 2: adequate

The Expert Group judged NDAL to be a satisfactory national player in terms of its impact on the scientific community. NDAL differs from public and private universities in being fully funded by the Latvian Government, and it does not apply for external funding. This limits its potential to scale up its research and impact by securing large-scale European and international research grants. In addition, the lack of substantial internal resources for commissioning research limits the opportunity to lead on international research projects.

However, NDAL mitigates these restrictions by enabling researchers to collaborate on numerous research projects with NATO, other regional and international Defence Academies, and civilian universities. These include the Institute of Latvian History at the University of Latvia, Riga Stradins University, the Defence Academies in other Baltic States of Estonia and Lithuania and the Swedish Defence Research Agency. Its research contributions are interdisciplinary in nature and NDAL has extensive regional and international networks, including with the RAND Corporation (US) and Chatham House (UK). As long as the scientific quality and the geopolitical significance of unit's research becomes stronger and more significant, the demand for research collaboration with NDAL from other regional and international partners is likely to have an upward trajectory.

Economic impact

Score 3: good

The economic impact of NDAL was assessed to be good. This economic dimension of its research is primarily through DTIC, which is the centre that has focused on applied scientific research to support defence innovation. DTIC acts as a bridge between the National Armed Forces, the MOD, defence industries and academic institutions. As such, it has a significant economic role in relation to the national and international defence industry in coordinating military research and innovation projects with potential national defence applications.

The nature of DTIC research, which is applied and generally classified, makes its quality and impact difficult to measure or determine. However, the Expert Group was reassured of the quality of its impact by the evident verbal support provided at the on-site meeting with representatives of the Latvian Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the National Armed Forces (NAF). Particular emphasis was given to the impact of the project undertaken by DTIC with the two other Baltic states on Russia's nuclear messaging, which had been commissioned by NATO. Generally, the significance of this applied research has become more important through the increased level of national and regional insecurity since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. An example is the flagship initiative in regard to 5G network for military use project, launched by DTIC with LMT (Latvijas Mobilais telefons).

Social impact

Score 4: very good

The research undertaken by NDAL was judged to be important for Latvian society, and its impact on government and the wider public was very good. The Expert Group were impressed by the scale and scope of the unit's engagement with its stakeholders – national stakeholders from the NAF and MOD; diplomats and embassy staff; NATO institutions like NATO Science and Technology Organization (STO)and NATO Allied Command Transformation (ACT); as well as the wider public. As the only national institution with a primary focus on military sciences, NDAL plays an important social role in generating public understanding and support for national security policy. This includes understanding of the security challenges facing Latvia, the dangers of Russian disinformation and the potential threat of war, the nature of drone warfare and the potential risks of the use of AI in military affairs. Researchers in NDAL have also been influential in defence planning, notably in developing the national comprehensive security concept. Research on Latvia's military history is important not only for the education of military officers but also for the education and integration of wider society. Researchers at NDAL have a substantial media presence and participate in multiple public events. The Expert Group commended the annual Centre for Security and Strategic Research conference for bringing research on regional military and defence issues to a wider group of stakeholders.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 4: very good

The research environment and infrastructure were assessed to be very good, and NDAL provided a research environment comparable to other excellent regional and international Defence Academies. Clearly, the size of the academic research unit will never be large, given the small size of the national economy. But within this budgetary constraint, the Expert Group was impressed by the decision of the senior military leadership to shift from commissioning short-term contracts to a dedicated core of researchers with more assured long-term security. The commitment to sustainable research is also evident in improved salaries. The positive effect of this policy shift is that now the core group of researchers are increasingly productive in their outputs and impacts. In addition, this group of mid-career researchers provide a supportive developmental environment for early-career researchers.

The Expert Group were also impressed by the recently renovated library and by the wide-ranging collection of books on security and defence issues. Researchers within NDAL also have support for attending conferences, funding for opinion polls, and for inviting guest speakers and lecturers. However, there is a need to update researchers' offices and the lack of laboratories and workshops for applied research needs to be addressed.

Development potential

Score 4: very good

Research at NDAL has the potential to become an international player, if inevitably at a relatively small scale over the next 5-10 years. The core researchers are now at a productive stage of their academic careers, and their research outputs are expected to improve in quality. There are also external stimuli for development growth, with the increased salience of national defence demands requiring more academic research and with growing external interest in Baltic regional security and defence promoting internationalisation. As budgets for national defence and NDAL grow, it can be expected that support for research will increase accordingly.

The self-evaluation document includes a realistic strategy for future development. This includes key elements such as increasing high-quality outputs, enhancing academic research skills, involving students and cadets in research, expanding international research cooperation, and coordinating innovation in line with NAF needs.

The Expert Group were informed that the reform of NDAL and the organisation and structure of research have yet to be completed, so this provides a degree of uncertainty in assessing future development potential. However, it was reassuring to hear that the expectation is for an integrated research and science department within NDAL to support greater research collaboration and integration.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

There is no doctoral studies programme at NDAL and no plan to have one. NDAL has supported early career researchers to complete their PhDs, such as Gita Leitlande who was hired while completing her dissertation. Some individual researchers supervise dissertations at other civilian academic institutions - including at Turiba University and the University of Latvia.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

Some of the applied work of DTIC aligns with RIS3 priority areas, particularly its research in information and communication technologies and smart materials and engineering systems. A flagship initiative in this regard is the 5G network for military use, with other significant projects focusing on secure communication systems and improving military rations (MRE) for Latvian soldiers. More generally, the research undertaken at NDAL is focused on security and defence, which is a precondition for national development and is the necessary foundation for the pursuit of smart specialisation.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

The work of DTIC is directly aligned with Latvia's defence sector priorities and ensures that research projects address real defence needs and are consistent with the long-term development plans of the NAF and the support strategy for the defence industry and innovation (2025-2036). More generally, NDAL's research aligns with national goals for academic excellence, international cooperation and innovation capacity, with a particular focus on Latvia's defence industry and the NAF.

Recommendations

The Expert Group recognised that the self-evaluation report included a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and threats facing the unit in terms of its future development. The recommendations here aim to support this vision for enhancing research quality over the next six years. These include the need:

- To use the opportunity of the institutional restructuring of research in NDAL to articulate a realistic but ambitious research strategy for the next six years that draws best practice

from military academies of a similar size in the region, such as the other Baltics States and in Scandinavia. The Expert Group recognised that it is currently difficult to devise such a strategy while the organisation and future research structures remain in flux. But such restructuring also potentially offers innovative and original ways of rethinking and implementing a longer-term research strategy.

- To increase the quality of research outputs through targeting more publications in peer-reviewed national and international journals, as well as other high-quality publications. This requires improving the research skills of existing staff, supporting those who have yet to obtain a PhD and generally having a dedicated programme for training in research methods. In addition, there is a need to attract high-quality researchers to the unit by providing conditions for research that match those of the best regional universities and providing institutional support, including financial, for upgrading the quality of research outputs.
- To enhance the economic and social impact of the research undertaken to meet the challenges of the worsening geopolitical situation, the growing threat posed by Russia, and the advances in military technology that have developed through the war in Ukraine. NDAL has a considerable economic and social responsibility to meet these challenges and to provide both economic and broader societal actors with the necessary information and research to understand and act upon the current security and defence situation in Latvia within the broader regional and international context.
- To take a more proactive role in expanding international research cooperation, identifying the key research areas where the institution offers the greatest competitive advantage, such as in Latvian and Baltic defence and security, to attract cooperation from external partners. Enhanced cooperation with other Latvian universities, building a stronger national capacity for defence and security studies, is also desirable, as well as enhancing connections with the national and international defence industry.
- To seek to fill gaps in research knowledge and expertise, such as in military science, military sociology, and drone warfare, where opportunities for growth become available. These gaps can also potentially be filled by offering more structured opportunities for acting/retired officers to engage in research, drawing from their professional experience and expertise. In addition, greater co-creation of research among NDAL researchers, students, and cadets is recommended.
- Although there is no ambition to develop a doctoral programme, NDAL should consider more concrete ways to support early career researchers (ECRs), such as through scholarships for topics critical to Latvia's security and defence and to give ECRs the opportunity to spend time researching at NDAL. More formal joint supervision programmes with civilian universities could also be considered.

S_16 Turiba University

2.2.17 *The unit*

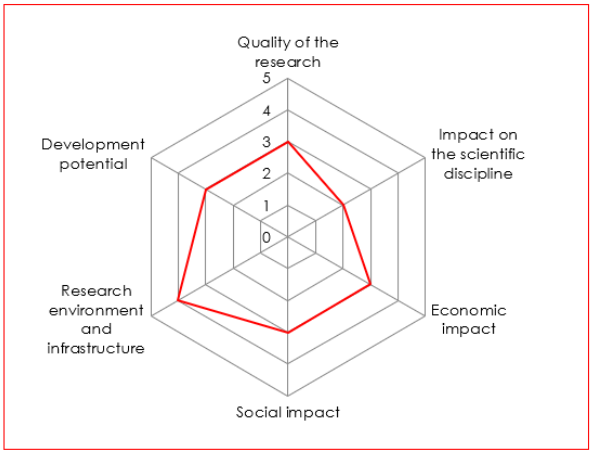
Turiba University is a multidisciplinary scientific institution, focusing on social sciences, particularly in economics and entrepreneurship, law, and media and communications. Its mission is to promote sustainable and responsible business practices and teach them to others, strengthening the idea of socially responsible entrepreneurship and increasing public awareness of sustainability, environmental responsibility, and their socioeconomic impact. Turiba University aims to provide competitive, high-quality, research-based professional and academic education, supporting Latvia's knowledge-based economic development. The university's social scientific activities are conducted within the Faculty of Business Administration, the Faculty of International Tourism, and the Faculty of Law. Main research directions include entrepreneurship and circular economy, society and security, human capital in the labour market, and the application of IT solutions in business.

2.2.18 *Expert Group evaluation*

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 9 Turiba University – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	3
Impact on the scientific discipline	2
Economic impact	3
Social impact	3
Research environment and infrastructure	4
Development potential	3
OVERALL SCORE	**3**



Overall score
Score 3: good

The Expert Group finds that Turiba University (TU) is a strong national player with growing international ambitions. The unit conducts applied research that is relevant to Latvia's economic and social needs, particularly in tourism, entrepreneurship, communication, and law. The quality of research is assessed as good; there is a reasonable volume of publications, including some in higher-ranked journals, and a clear upward trend in output and citation counts. At the same time, disciplinary visibility in international leading journals remains limited, and research is spread across a very broad range of topics, which constrains coherence and depth. The university maintains active engagement with the international academic community through its doctoral programmes, which attract a substantial number of international students, as well as through joint publications, seminars, conferences, and research projects. The unit's impact on the scientific discipline is assessed as adequate. TU participates in international projects, conferences, and networks, but has a modest presence in high-impact journals and limited leadership roles in international research collaborations.

The Expert Group evaluates TU's economic and social impact as good. This is achieved through the dissemination and practical application of research findings by both researchers and master's students, science communication, and active collaboration with industrial and governmental organisations. External partners highlight the university's professionalism and effective cooperation. Turiba University (TU) provides a very good research environment, characterised by strong leadership, effective researcher support, and well-equipped infrastructure. TU has developed an active and forward-looking research policy aimed at attracting young scholars and an increasing number of international doctoral students, while opening new research directions closely aligned with contemporary societal needs. Development potential is good: the unit has clear strategic ambitions and some momentum in internationalisation, but its capacity to realise these ambitions is constrained by limited research time for many staff and reliance on private funding, as it has had limited success in attracting industry or commercial funding. Taken together, these considerations justify an overall score of 3.

Quality of Research

Score 3: good

The Expert Group evaluates Turiba University's (TU) research as good. During the assessment period, TU produced 134 scientific publications, of which 18% were published in Q1 journals (total academic and research personnel were 41.4 FTE in 2024). Although the proportion of high-quality publications is not particularly high, the figures show a positive upward trend over the years: from 18 in 2019 to 31 in 2024 (yearly papers full) and from 12 to 20 (yearly papers fractional). Citation counts are modest. The self-assessment report documents examples of research that are visible in the Latvian context and, in some areas, in the wider region such as a study on Lithuanian, Latvian, and Swedish tourism organisations and a study on brain-computer interface technology. The research conducted is well aligned with the university's research strategy. Key research topics include tourism, organisational communication, sustainability, biodiversity, new technologies, design thinking in pedagogy, and mediation in Latvia. This breadth demonstrates responsiveness to societal needs and the professional orientation of the university. The Expert Group notes that several studies employ appropriate empirical methods, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis, and are well grounded in their applied contexts. In law and security, as well as in tourism and communication, there are examples of case studies and policy-relevant analyses that make a useful contribution to practice-oriented debates in Latvia.

However, the research agenda is very broad and includes topics at the periphery of the social sciences, for example, studies on the role of landscape connectivity in maintaining pollinator biodiversity, and how nature-based solution design can be informed by landscape ecology principles. This disperses effort, making it difficult to build a clear disciplinary profile or a sustained research trajectory in any one area. The proportion of publications in high-impact journals remains relatively low, and theoretical contributions to international debates are limited.

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that TU demonstrates solid research and is a strong national player.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 2: adequate

The Expert Group assesses TU's impact on its scientific disciplines as adequate. TU researchers participate in international conferences and networks, and the university organises an annual international scientific conference with peer-reviewed proceedings indexed in EBSCO. The theoretical and disciplinary impact on the international scientific community, as reflected in publications in top-tier journals (18%) and citation counts (327 in total, averaging 3.2 per

publication), remains limited but is showing signs of growth. TU staff co-operate with partners in Europe and beyond, and some joint publications have resulted from these collaborations with researchers in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Sweden and the UK. These activities demonstrate that TU is connected to the broader academic community.

The university offers four doctoral programmes covering all major research areas of its faculties. These programmes are highly valued by the students interviewed by the Expert Group during the site visit due to the excellent and vigilant supervision and the swift admission procedures. They attract a substantial number of international students and include seminars where international researchers share their expertise. Foreign lecturers are regularly invited; for example, in the 2023/2024 academic year, 13 visiting lecturers contributed. The Expert Group considers TU's doctoral provision to be well structured, internationally oriented, and supportive of high-quality research training.

At the same time, the disciplinary visibility of TU's research remains modest. Publications in high-impact international journals are relatively rare, citation rates are low compared with international benchmarks (FWCI is well below 1 and is 0.62), and TU has limited leadership roles in major international research consortia. The institutional journal Acta Prosperitatis is not yet indexed in major databases such as Scopus or Web of Science, limiting its contribution to international disciplinary debates. Overall, TU is recognised within some regional and professional networks, but it is not yet a reference point in the wider international scientific community.

The score of 2 reflects this situation: TU is an active national player with some international connections, but its overall impact on the scientific discipline remains limited.

Economic impact

Score 3: good

The Expert Group finds Turiba University's economic impact to be good. Each year, more than 500 TU graduates and two doctoral graduates enter Latvian companies, contributing significantly to the national and regional economy.

Collaboration with industry is actively promoted through partnerships with entrepreneurs. To foster innovative business ideas, TU operates a grant programme that invests up to €15,000 in start-ups and joint ventures. While systematic data on spin-off and start-up creation are not available, the Expert Group observed active and ongoing student and graduate entrepreneurial activity supported through the grant scheme and incubation infrastructure. TU further supports entrepreneurship through its Business Incubator, Mentor Association, Career Centre, and related initiatives. TU professors contribute to various national and international bodies, including the European Central Bank and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Researchers and students contribute to consultancy projects, training activities, and continuing professional development programmes that help transfer knowledge into practice. The Business Incubator supports entrepreneurship and innovation by connecting students and staff with local enterprises. These engagements show that TU's research and expertise are valued by external stakeholders and contribute to the national economy.

Practitioners interviewed by the Expert Group during the site visit praised their collaboration with TU, which included joint studies (also involving students) and consultancy activities. They described the university as a highly appreciated "think tank".

Turiba University has many activities that make an economic impact, especially through the Business Incubator Mentorship programme, by developing an entrepreneurial culture in Latvia. However, the attraction of projects and funding from the industry has been low. There is an

opportunity for it to capitalise on its specialisation in tourism to provide high-value consultancy projects and analytic solutions that would enhance its economic impact.

Social impact

Score 3: good

The Expert Group assesses TU's social impact as good. TU staff are active in public debates, serve as experts in media discussions, and provide input to professional and policy processes in areas such as mediation, tourism, and security. The self-assessment report lists numerous examples of contributions to working groups, advisory boards, and regulatory development.

Social impact is achieved through the dissemination and practical application of knowledge generated by both researchers and master's students. Research in areas such as constitutional law, tourism and hospitality, social inclusion, cultural diversity, the social dimension of sustainability, mass media, intercultural communication, and corporate social responsibility provides valuable insights with strong societal relevance.

TU shares its research outcomes through partnerships with governmental organisations and municipalities. The unit uses various communication channels, including the university's website, social media, public lectures, and participation in events such as Shadow Days and the European Researchers' Night, as well as seminars organised by professional associations and government ministries. The university also collaborates with media organisations to produce content for science and research programmes, for example, through TV24's *Press Club* and *Rita Panorama*.

However, the evidence of large-scale, long-term impact on national policy or social outcomes remains limited. The existing activities for the dissemination of knowledge could be extended to the Baltic region, as at present, most activities are focused on the national or local level. There is an opportunity for Turiba University to leverage on its expertise in areas such as tourism and mediation to influence national policy in Latvia. For these reasons, the Expert Group considers the social impact to be good rather than very good.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 4: very good

The research environment at TU is assessed as very good. The university has a clear governance structure, with defined responsibilities for research leadership at the institutional and faculty levels. Strategic documents outline research priorities and performance indicators, and there is evidence that leadership actively encourages research engagement and international collaboration.

TU's library, software, and laboratory facilities effectively serve the unit's needs. As new study fields develop, additional laboratories are being established, such as the Security Technology Laboratory and the IT Laboratory.

Researchers have access to consultation services for methodological issues and data analysis, as well as guidance on selecting suitable conferences and publication outlets. Regular research meetings are held, and staff members have extensive opportunities to participate in international conferences. The Research Development Fund provides financial support for publications in high-quality journals and conference proceedings, and available data indicate that this policy has been effective.

TU also maintains cooperation agreements with several leading foreign universities of (applied) sciences, such as FH Aachen (Germany) and the University of Applied Sciences and the

University of Hradec Králové (Czech Republic). It actively promotes Open Access publishing and adheres to the FAIR principles. The university further contributes to scholarly communication by publishing the annual academic journal *Acta Prosperitatis*.

The university has developed a research personnel development strategy focused on attracting, selecting, training, and motivating staff. At the same time, many academic staff hold relatively small research appointments and heavy teaching and administrative loads, resulting in unevenly distributed research time.

With sustained strategic focus, TU can offer an internationally comparable and excellent research environment to leading scientists in its core disciplines. Overall, the Expert Group concludes that TU has a research environment and infrastructure of very good quality. Reliance on tuition fees and private sources constrains the resources available for research.

Development potential

Score 3: good

TU offers high-quality master's and doctoral programmes that attract international students from around the world. 70% of the doctoral candidates at the time of the evaluation were international. The university's research is solid, and TU holds a firm position in both national and international networks. Its management is well organised, committed, and forward-looking, with clear strategic policies in place for future development.

TU has articulated strategic ambitions to increase the volume and quality of research, to expand international collaboration, and to attract more international students and staff. There is a growing number of externally funded projects, and some recent initiatives such as the Erasmus+ projects: INTUX in collaboration with six partners to develop learning models for people with disabilities; and on digital education tools for security risk management demonstrate that TU can be a credible partner in European consortia. Future plans include recruiting foreign researchers (15 by 2031) and supporting early-career scientists. The staff members the Expert Group met during the site visit were very positive about the management and the research environment at TU.

At the same time, there are structural constraints that may limit how far and how fast TU can develop. These include funding, limited success so far in securing competitive international research funding, modest disciplinary visibility, a broad and fragmented research agenda, and the high teaching loads carried by many staff members. The age and career structure of the academic workforce suggest that succession planning for key research leaders will be important. Although TU aims to become more active in securing EU research funding and in attracting additional international students, increasing global competition in academia, financial constraints among funding agencies, and demographic developments may pose challenges to achieving these goals.

The university also intends to develop new research directions, including green technologies, artificial intelligence, and healthcare, that are highly relevant to current societal needs. It will be essential for the management to assess whether TU possesses, or can attract, the necessary expertise and resources to realise these ambitions.

Overall, the Expert Group considers that TU has realistic opportunities to strengthen its position as a nationally important applied university with some international visibility, but that it is unlikely to become a leading international research institution in the near term.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

TU has a solid foundation for providing doctoral education. Within the Social Sciences group, the university offers four doctoral programmes covering all major research areas of its faculties.

Three programmes are offered in the field of Economics and Business: Business Administration, Management Science (implemented in cooperation with Daugavpils University), and Communication Management. In the field of Law, TU offers one programme: Law Science.

The university currently enrols around 30 doctoral candidates in the social sciences, with two to three graduates each year. Nearly 70% of doctoral candidates are international, and approximately 30% of graduates pursue careers in academia.

The TU Doctoral School provides a comprehensive range of seminars and workshops on transferable skills for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers. Doctoral programmes also include seminars where international researchers share their expertise, and foreign lecturers are regularly invited to contribute. For example, in the 2023/2024 academic year, 13 visiting lecturers participated in the programmes. The doctoral students interviewed by the Expert Group expressed very positive views on the quality of the programmes, the support provided, and the supervision they received.

The Expert Group finds that the existing doctoral provision is well structured and appropriate to TU's profile. At the same time, the number of staff with substantial research time and strong international publication records is limited, and the volume of doctoral completions is modest. These factors constrain the potential to significantly expand doctoral activity without further strengthening research capacity. The Expert Group therefore considers that TU has a solid base for doctoral training within its current scope, but that future development should focus on consolidating quality and supervisory capacity in its strongest research areas.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

The Expert Group finds that TU's activities are broadly aligned with Latvia's Smart Specialisation (RIS3) objectives. These include the Digitalisation Initiatives Project (RIS3 objective: enhancing study quality), the Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership (RIS3 objective: strengthening human capital), and a range of media literacy projects (RIS3 objective: promoting a knowledge-based economy). Other initiatives contribute to RIS3 priorities such as strengthening regional competitiveness and fostering university–industry collaboration to stimulate economic growth. Examples include the *Development and Implementation of a User Experience Design Course in Higher Education* and projects focusing on media literacy and regional development.

The Business Incubator and applied research projects undertaken with enterprises further support innovation and knowledge transfer in the Latvian economy. Nevertheless, the Expert Group sees scope for a more focused articulation of TU's contribution to specific RIS3 domains and for developing a smaller number of flagship research themes that can position the university more clearly within the national innovation system.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

The Expert Group considers that TU demonstrates a strong commitment to advancing national innovation goals and to strengthening the link between research, education, and regional economic development.

Collaboration with industry is well developed in some areas, particularly tourism, logistics, and mediation, but less systematic in others. To support innovative business ideas, TU operates a grant programme that provides support for start-ups and joint ventures. Entrepreneurship is further strengthened through the Business Incubator, Mentor Association, Career Centre, and related initiatives. Each year, more than five new cooperation agreements are concluded with industry partners, business entities, associations, and other stakeholders.

Internationalisation is progressing through joint projects and mobility, but there is still limited evidence of TU leading large-scale international research initiatives. The university maintains active engagement with the global academic community through seminars, conferences, and collaborative projects.

In relation to systemic challenges, TU is making efforts to attract international students and to recruit younger academics with specific targets set for the coming five years, although the number of research-intensive positions remains limited. It has developed a plan to support their career development through mentoring by experienced researchers.

Recommendations

The Expert Group considers that the university already has an excellent overall strategy, strong management, and solid research performance. The Expert Group is impressed by what has been achieved and recognises the significant value and potential of TU. Its recommendations are as follows:

- *Consolidate and continue the current strategic direction.* The first recommendation is to maintain and consolidate the current policy direction while implementing the strategic initiatives developed for the next five years.

- *Towards an internationally recognised centre of excellence.* The second set of recommendations outlines a pathway toward establishing an internationally recognised centre of excellence with strong disciplinary impact. Given current constraints in terms of time, funding, and staffing, implementing this approach across the full breadth of Turiba's fields may not be feasible at present. Turiba could therefore consider:
  - consider starting on a smaller scale, focusing on a strategically chosen sub-programme in fundamental research within one or more of its key disciplines (Business and Economics, Media and Communications, and Law).
  - Develop a focused, fundamental, disciplinary research programme that is not defined solely by Latvian or Baltic topics.
  - Establish collaborations for this programme with a limited number of top international partners from leading institutions in the relevant discipline(s)
  - Aim for increased international disciplinary visibility through recognised roles in leading international disciplinary conferences and/or through editorial positions in top-tier international journals in the discipline(s)
  - Invest resources in attracting international funding, especially from the EU
  - Emphasise quality over quantity in the publication strategy

- *Research structure and staffing.* Evidence from the SER and the site visit suggests that many TU professors and senior researchers are active at several universities in Latvia and generally hold small research appointments at TU. The Expert Group recommends aiming for a smaller, more concentrated group of researchers with substantial research time, which may provide better conditions for developing a strong and cohesive research community. This will involve increasing protected research time for staff with strong research potential, and using new appointments to build critical mass in key areas. Develop a clear plan for succession in leadership positions and for mentoring early-career researchers.

- *Research partnerships.* TU should consider developing more strategic industry and public-sector partnerships and move from ad hoc consultancy and short-term projects towards longer-term research collaborations with enterprises and public bodies, with clear research questions and potential for innovation and impact. These partnerships should be built around clearly defined research questions in TU's strongest areas (e.g.

tourism, entrepreneurship, mediation), with the aim of generating sustained socio-economic impact and policy-relevant outputs.

- *Consolidate and strengthen doctoral training.* With a growing doctoral programme, TU may wish to ensure that doctoral supervision is concentrated among staff with sufficient research time and international publication activity. TU should also consider developing joint supervision schemes with universities that have complementary strengths and international networks.

- *Clarify TU's role in RIS3 and national innovation policy*. TU should articulate more precisely how its core research themes contribute to specific RIS3 priorities and national policy objectives, and use this to guide decisions on project development and partnership building.

These measures would help TU to improve the quality and impact of its research, strengthen its position in the Latvian research and innovation system, and make more effective use of its existing strengths over the next evaluation period.

S_18 Baltic Studies Centre

2.2.19 The unit

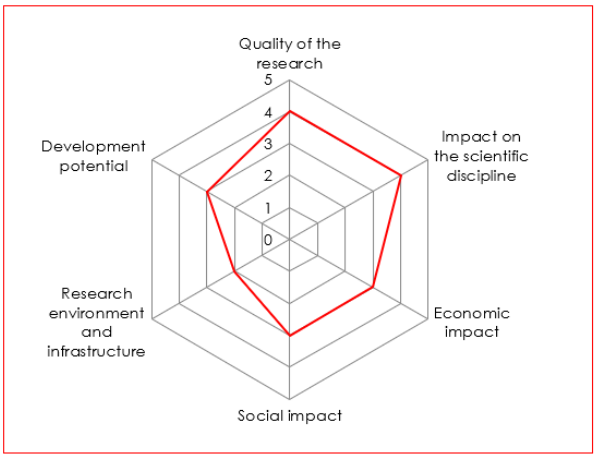
The Baltic Studies Centre (BSC) is a private non-profit research institute. BSC's mission is to produce and disseminate new knowledge through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research that addresses societal challenges, promotes innovation, and supports informed decision-making. The institute specialises in knowledge and innovation systems of agriculture and food, just urban, rural, and regional development, food system transformation, sustainable land use, and circular (bio)economy. The institute is based in Riga and aims to become a significant research centre in Northern Europe, fostering collaboration among researchers of various career stages and advancing both methodological and theoretical approaches in its fields of specialisation. BSC main specialisation areas are agricultural and food knowledge and innovation systems, just urban, rural, and regional development, food system transformation, sustainable land use, and circular (bio)economy.

2.2.20 Expert Group evaluation

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 10 Baltic Studies Centre – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	4
Impact on the scientific discipline	4
Economic impact	3
Social impact	3
Research environment and infrastructure	2
Development potential	3
OVERALL SCORE	**4**



Overall score
Score 4: very good

The Baltic Studies Centre is a small unit doing applied social science research. It is highly successful in securing competitive project funding through national and international calls. The quality of research is of a very good standard of quality in terms of originality and importance. The unit favours a strict quality over quantity approach in publishing, which generates good publication impact. Since most research projects are carried out in large consortia, BSC is embedded in the European research network and has proven itself to be a reliable partner in international collaborations. Through its focus on research questions derived from practical challenges and collaboration with the private and public sectors, BSC research has both economic and social impact that is important for the Latvian economy and society. However, due to the nature of BSC operations, its impact tends to be by project goals rather than through long-term commitment that would establish BSC in an advisory role. The research environment of BSC itself provides the necessary collegial and functional support to maintain successful participation in externally funded research projects. To compensate for its small size, BSC uses

agreements, cooperation, and collaboration with Riga Stradins University, University of Latvia, BA School of Business and Finance, and Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technology to provide connections to a richer local academic infrastructure. BSC has the research ambitions, ideas, collaborators, and organisation and management structure to develop further. However, there is currently no realistic business model in place to develop a diversified income stream that would be necessary to scale BSC.

Quality of Research

Score 4: very good

The Baltic Studies Centre is a small social science unit of 8,5 FTE, divided over 11 researchers and 3 support staff. The areas of research specialisation align with current national and European priorities, and over an extended period, the unit has been highly successful in securing competitive project funding to maintain its operations. Between 2019 and 2024, BSC was involved in 19 international and 5 national research projects attracting more than 3.6 million EUR in competitive funding, of which around 2 million were EU funding, and 0.6 million were Latvian state funding. For this evaluation exercise, the unit has submitted five well-cited, full-text research papers published in three different international high-quality (Q1) journals: Global Food Security, Journal of Rural Studies, and Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension. The papers all relate to food systems and farming and draw on Science and Technology Studies (STS), and presumably, they do not fully reflect the breadth of topics and methodological approaches that the unit applies. Academically, these publications lean more towards applied than fundamental research, although that said, the Expert Group finds that the theoretical framing of these papers builds heavily on a social science tradition. On aggregate, the unit has adopted a strict quality approach in publishing, still with 8,5 FTE producing 9-10 publications per annum. In effect, this boils down to about one paper per FTE per year, which might not seem much. However, these publications are consistently published in well-respected journals of high relevance to the research topics; beyond the three Q1 journals mentioned above, research papers are published in other Q1 journals, such as Ambio, Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, and Sociologica Ruralis. The unit is a strong collaborator in international research projects. To conclude, the Baltic Studies Centre is a strong international player, and its research is of very high quality, with strong originality and importance.

Impact on the scientific discipline

Score 4: very good

The success of The Baltic Studies Centre depends on its capacity to present itself as a productive and reliable partner in international research consortia. The unit is embedded in a diverse European network, where it clearly has a solid reputation. Senior researchers serve on several international review and expert committees; however, the unit is represented on only one editorial board of a scientific journal, the Social Science Bulletin (Sociālo Zinātņu Vēstnesis) published by Daugavpils University. The international embeddedness of research is confirmed by the international collaborators' rate of publications (ICR), suggesting that almost 80% of papers are written in international teams.

The unit has adopted a quality over quantity approach to publishing, and the unit stands out in the bibliometric analysis for 2019-2023, with an average citation of 14.9 and a field-weighted citation index of 1.54. Moreover, over 80% of publications are in Q1 journals, and close to one quarter of the research papers belong to the 10% most cited papers in the subfield and year. The institution is a strong international player. The Baltic Studies Centre is internationally recognised in its field of research and is highly regarded as a partner in international research projects and networks, for instance in the ROBUST and DATA4FOOD2030 projects coordinated by Wageningen University (NL), the BONUS TOOLS2SEA project coordinated by Aarhus University (DK), and the IN-HABIT project coordinated by Cordoba University (ES).

Economic impact

Score 3: good

The research projects at The Baltic Studies Centre contribute to solving important challenges for sustaining societal and economic development. The focus on applied research means that the unit derives research questions from practical challenges and that collaboration with the private and public sectors is part of the research design. This provides an opportunity to grasp real-world fundamental problems that also might have a high scientific impact if addressed well. At a rudimentary level, the unit contributes to attracting competitive EU and other international research funds to Latvia; over the period 2019 to 2024 over 2 million EUR from the EU Framework Programme and close to 800,000 EUR from other international funders. Substantially, the research of this unit is important, and interaction with the private sector is at a level that is expected of recognised academic institutions. Many research results speak directly to the Latvian agricultural industry (e.g., through collaboration with Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre (LRATC), Latvian Farmers'Federation and Farmers Parliament), as exemplified by the regional food system maps and small farms typologies that have been used by farmer organisations to formulate their position on agricultural policies (Salsa), and recommendations on implementing sustainable farming practices in horticultural production (Greenhort). On one hand, BSC produced a number of innovations, e.g., "digital marketing and traceability tools (apps) developed for Latvian beef producers", and "four visionary and integrated infrastructure solutions (community kitchen, improvement of outdoor marketplace, elevator, waste reduction site) worth EUR 400k accomplished at Āgenskalns market in Riga". On the other hand, the unit's competence is not utilised through membership in committees and scientific advisory boards of business and/or public companies, and thus does not reflect strong recognition among businesses.

Social impact

Score 3: good

Many research projects are carried out in collaboration with local stakeholders. The renovation of the Āgenskalns Market in Riga, the Municipal cultural strategy developed for Tukums Municipality, and scale-up and replication suggestions for local market development in greater Riga region are good examples of positive transformation of a neighbourhood and region with demonstrable social impact. As expected from a unit of this quality, researchers have answered calls to present research results and perspectives to a wide range of national non-academic organisations. Because The Baltic Studies Centre relies solely on time-limited projects with external funding, collaborations are diverse and extensive. However, they are also in effect project-based, which means that the longer-term collaboration with external partners to build sustainable social impact are hard to achieve. This is also the reason why the expert group does not grade social impact a 4.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 2: adequate

The limitations of the research environment and infrastructure are defined by the unit's small size. Because the Baltic Studies Centre is solely oriented towards scientific research, the organisation is focused and cohesive. Within the limitations, the unit does a good job in maintaining a clear and rather democratic management process. There is a clear goal orientation and explicit expectations for the individual researchers, as well as a clear reward structure. The research team at The Baltic Studies Centre meet regularly for research seminars, there is an internal peer-review process in place, and senior researchers are expected to make themselves available to support and mentor junior researchers.

Notably, the unit has an open recruitment policy for all positions and has attracted international postdocs. BSC collaborates with Latvian universities and Doctoral programmes to provide place of internships for doctoral students as well as provide training for them. This is a smart strategy to attract research talent. Open-source software and access to the national library resource cover researchers' basic infrastructural needs. Since many of the research projects are in large consortia, the research environment has a strong international orientation. The unit is nationally embedded through national agreements and cooperation with Riga Stradins University, the University of Latvia, the BA School of Business and Finance, and the Latvian University of Biosciences and Technology. The unit maintains a small office located in central Riga. The total dependence on external grants means that the capacity for long-term resource planning is weak, despite collaboration with Doctoral programmes at other universities. The Expert Group is of the opinion that, although the unit is clearly a professional and goal-oriented research environment, it is not quite comparable to globally recognised academic institutions in its discipline.

Development potential

Score 3: good

Having increased its scientific impact, its size from 6 to 8,5 research FTE's, and its annual income from approx. 450,000 to 850,000 Euros over the past five-year period, the unit demonstrates clear signs of developing in the right direction. A substantial part of the budget increase is now spent on administrative support to researchers, thus fortifying the unit's organisational capacity, allowing researchers to focus more on research. About 85 % of the research income is sourced internationally and has increasingly diversified across sources, making the unit less dependent on EU funding only. The Baltic Studies Centre aims to develop into a leading Northern European Centre within the field. The unit is in possession of the necessary research ambitions, ideas, collaborators, as well as the organisation and management structure to take this step. However, to scale, BSC should diversify income streams, rethinking opportunities to generate more stable income through commercial education programmes and life-long learning courses, including programmes delivered across Europe with international partners. The unit's management suggests that to reach the goal, the ideal size of the unit would be 20-25 people, including administrative support. However, the unit currently lacks a realistic business model for how to achieve this ambitious goal, which is the reason why the score is kept at a 3.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

Since the unit is not embedded in a university, it has neither the will nor the capacity to offer doctoral studies. However, while the Baltic Studies Centre does not offer teaching, the unit still contributes to the quality and internationalisation of PhD training in the social sciences, especially as the unit has good-quality PhD supervisors with good publishing records and international networks. The unit already contributes to PhD training and to seminars and teaching modules in Latvian universities, such as Riga Stradins University and the University of Latvia. It is not uncommon that Latvian and international PhD students participate in the research projects, and the unit occasionally offers Latvian PhD students positions as research assistants. In this way, the Expert Group considers the Baltic Studies Centre to be a national resource for PhD training in its field.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

The Baltic Studies Centre's activities demonstrate clear alignment with Latvia's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3), particularly with Priority 6 ("Advanced knowledge base and human capital in areas of Latvia's comparative advantage") and Priority 7 ("Studying territorial

resources and proposing prospective development directions"). BSC contributes directly to the RIS3 "Knowledge-intensive bioeconomy" specialisation area through interdisciplinary research on agricultural and food innovation systems, food system transformation, the circular (bio)economy, and sustainable land use. Its projects strengthen human capital, advance scientific excellence, and foster multi-actor cooperation, while territorial analyses and co-creation with local stakeholders' support evidence-based regional development. In line with international trends, BSC could further refine its specialisation by strengthening digital and data-driven bioeconomy research, deepening alignment with climate-neutral and circular economy missions and expanding comparative work on just territorial transitions. The research of the Baltic Studies Centre is aligned with the main priority area "Knowledge-intensive bioeconomy" of RIS3, contributing knowledge on practical solutions and policy that support economic transformation through innovation and resource efficiency, and develop innovation ecosystems in sectors tied to Latvia's competitive advantages.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

Baltic Studies Centre's activities are well aligned with Latvia's key policy objectives in science, technology, education, and innovation, particularly those outlined in the Science, Technology Development and Innovation Guidelines 2021–2027 and the National Development Plan 2021–2027. Its research on sustainable agri-food systems, circular (bio)economy, and territorial development contributes directly to national goals to strengthen research excellence, support a knowledge-intensive (bio)economy, and promote green, regionally balanced growth. BSC addresses major challenges of Latvia's research system by attracting and training early-career researchers, engaging in applied and innovation-oriented projects with industry and practice partners (including through EIT Food), and maintaining broad international collaborations through EU framework projects. Overall, the institution's work clearly supports national priorities to develop human capital, enhance international competitiveness, and improve knowledge transfer to the economy. The Baltic Studies Centre operations are clearly in line with the objectives of state scientific and technological development, as is evident by its strategy to attract competence in open international calls, to offer competitive and family friendly contracts to staff, fostering strong international research collaborations, and national collaboration with private and public sector actors. By nature of its funding strategy, it is also well-embedded in the European policy and research funding landscape. In summary, the unit does everything right in relation to state expectations.

Overall, the Expert Group considers that BSC's research aligns with the two objectives "develop research excellence and international competitiveness" and "strengthen human capital and knowledge transfer to the economy" of Latvia's Science, Technology Development and Innovation Guidelines 2021–2027, as well as with the NDP2027 priorities for building a knowledge society and a green, innovation-driven economy.

Recommendations

The Baltic Studies Centre has set an ambitious goal to become a Northern European research leader in its field. To quote the director, over the past years, BSC has transformed its operations "from doable to sustainable" by significantly improving its organisation and governance structure and is now set up as a contemporary, international research unit. These recommendations are related to sustaining the current level, but also sustainably advancing to the next quality level, which is inevitably related to further growth.

International experience shows that small research centres become sustainable by integrating education, increasing researcher mobility, and combining frontier research with high-impact applied activities. To grow sustainably from its current base, BSC should consolidate its governance improvements and transition from a project-dependent unit into a structurally resilient research organisation. This includes:

- expanding research capacity through competitive, structured PhD training aligned with European standards and by attracting international doctoral candidates via joint or fully international PhD programmes (e.g., in cooperation with Latvian universities and ERA mobility schemes)
- expanding human resources through opening visiting scholars and post-docs positions; becoming co-supervisors of the other international universities' PhD students;
- introducing selective master's and continued professional education programmes for researchers and practitioners, particularly international ones, to create stable income streams and a long-term human-capital pipeline
- balancing applied research with a stronger fundamental research component to build long-term expertise while continuing to deliver high local value to municipalities and SME
- strengthening strategic partnerships with universities for teaching rights, shared supervision and infrastructure;
- diversifying funding through EU Framework participation, mission-oriented programmes, multi-year collaboration contracts, and lobbying to change the policy for national base research funding.

S_21 RISEBA University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Business

2.2.21 The unit

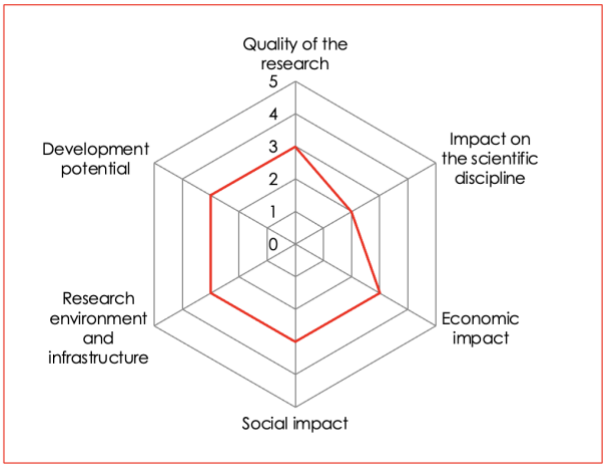
RISEBA University of Applied Sciences is a privately funded institution in Latvia, focusing on business, media, and architecture. The university's vision is to be a leading regional entrepreneurial university with a strong interdisciplinary focus and active knowledge transfer. RISEBA aims to achieve international competitiveness, research excellence, digital age leadership, and sustainable growth and societal relevance. The Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) is a significant part of the university, conducting research in social sciences and collaborating with other faculties on interdisciplinary subjects. The primary research directions include strategic management, people and knowledge in organisations, economics, finance, and business environment, and marketing, and communication, digital technologies, innovation. The university emphasises applied research, international collaboration, and business relevance. The university publishes journals and organises conferences to support research dissemination and engagement with society and industry.

2.2.22 Expert Group evaluation

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 11 RISEBA University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Business – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	3
Impact on the scientific discipline	2
Economic impact	3
Social impact	3
Research environment and infrastructure	3
Development potential	3
OVERALL SCORE	3



Overall score
Score 3: good

RISEBA has a strong national standing among Latvian applied science universities. Its research output is original and societally significant in applied domains, and increasingly internationalised, though not yet achieving widespread international academic distinction. RISEBA demonstrates clear ambition, selective originality, and increasing international engagement, but its influence on the evolution of its scientific disciplines remains limited. It is recognised within international applied-research ecosystems and professional networks, yet it has not established itself as a source of widely cited theoretical advancement or as a consistent contributor to top-tier disciplinary scholarship.

RISEBA produces meaningful economic impact through applied, industry-embedded research, strong professional networks, and selective technological innovations. Yet its commercialisation footprint and capacity to catalyse new economic sectors remain in an early

developmental stage. Also, its research has a clear, measurable and multifaceted social impact, driven by strong public-sector collaboration (e.g., with numerous ministries and NGO organisations), contributions to digital inclusion (e.g., Motival image-based value research), engagement with vulnerable groups (e.g., the Invisibles project), and sustained public communication (e.g., cross-sectoral events, engagement with strategic partners and broad society).

Overall, RISEBA offers a well-organised and strategically framed research environment with clear strengths in planning, support for applied research, and emerging open-science practices. However, restricted administrative capacity, uneven staff qualification levels and high teaching loads remain the key factors constraining further development.

Looking forward, RISEBA's specialisation could be sharpened in light of emerging international trends. Its strengths suggest potential to position itself more distinctly within AI-enabled behavioural analytics, digital skills and workforce transformation, and applied strategic management for resilience and sustainability, all of which are increasingly important in European research and innovation agendas. By deepening research in these areas and increasing participation in Horizon Europe and other competitive programmes, the institution could expand its international visibility and make a stronger contribution to Latvia's innovation ecosystem.

Quality of Research

Score 3: good

The research output of the RISEBA demonstrates an adequate level of quality. The unit shows clear thematic focus, growing international engagement and a clearly defined applied research profile. However, the performance remains uneven across fields and lacks a consistent presence in top-tier journals.

The bibliometric data for 2019–2024 indicate 175 full-count publications (107.5 fractional), a modest output for a medium-sized applied-science institution. These metrics align with the self-reported strategic emphasis on applied, industry-relevant, and collaborative research.

In terms of originality, the strongest contributions emerge in marketing, communication, and digital innovation. The development of AI-driven psychography (Motival) and its demonstrable international deployment constitute novel methodological work. The unit also contributes original perspectives on strategic management, dynamic capabilities, and HRM, particularly through participation in international business and educational research networks such as GLOBE, EDAMBA, CEEMAN, and EHRM. Originality is less pronounced in economics and finance, where research is more conventional and tied to national policy problems.

In terms of significance, RISEBA's research is relevant for business practice, public administration, and societal development. The research directions in digital transformation, consumer behaviour, and organisational psychology have generated tangible influence in both the Latvian public sector and industry, particularly through large-scale applied projects (e.g., digital skills capacity building for 30,000–40,000 citizens). However, significance at the international academic level is more limited: a relatively small share of outputs (31%) appears in Q1 outlets, and high-impact publications remain sporadic rather than systematic.

Performance varies across sub-units. The Marketing, Communication, Digital Technologies and Innovation group is clearly the strongest, producing the most internationally visible outputs and leading interdisciplinary collaborations. Strategic Management and People/Knowledge in Organisations also shows solid performance through participation in European consortia. By contrast, Economics/Finance produces important applied work, but with weaker international visibility and modest bibliometric impact.

Interdisciplinarity is a notable strength of the unit. The integration of psychology, AI, data science, marketing, and communication within several flagship projects demonstrates effective cross-disciplinary collaboration, aligned with national RIS3 priorities and open-science

practices. Work with the Faculties of Architecture and Media further broadens the interdisciplinary profile.

Impact on scientific discipline
Score 2: adequate

RISEBA's impact on its scientific disciplines is emerging but remains limited when benchmarked internationally. The unit demonstrates increasing activity in applied research areas—particularly marketing, communication, digital innovation, and aspects of organisational psychology—yet its influence on shaping theoretical or methodological developments in the broader international academic community is still modest. The unit's strongest contributions arise from practice-oriented innovations rather than conventional academic leadership. The development of AI-driven psychography and value-based behavioural analysis represents a distinctive niche for an applied-science institution. However, these contributions have not yet translated into sustained visibility in high-impact journals or a recognised position within global scholarly debates.

International collaboration is present and growing, but it is uneven across fields. Once again, in strategic management, HRM, and cross-cultural leadership, RISEBA researchers participate in recognised international networks such as GLOBE, EHRM, CEEMAN, and EDAMBA. These collaborations provide channels for knowledge exchange and co-authorship, but RISEBA's role is generally that of a participant rather than a disciplinary driver. The marketing and digital innovation group has a wider geographic reach, collaborating with partners across Europe and occasionally beyond, yet these partnerships tend to be tied to project-based applied research rather than long-term scholarly agendas. The economics and finance domain demonstrates collaboration mainly with regional partners, but this work rarely produces internationally visible research outputs that influence disciplinary development.

International recognition through publications remains limited. Although the overall bibliometric profile indicates competent engagement with global publishing standards, the institution's presence in Q1 journals remains sparse. This constrains the unit's ability to shape theoretical conversations or be cited as a reference point within its disciplines. The citation impact metrics are consistent with low-impact scholarly contributions (e.g., only 4.8% of output falls in the category of highly cited publications).

The nature of RISEBA's international connections reinforces this pattern. Many collaborations emerge through mobility programmes, conference participation, or project partnerships, often producing co-authored publications with moderate reach. These relationships broaden exposure and enable staff development, but do not yet result in consistent contributions widely acknowledged as advancing disciplinary knowledge.

Economic impact
Score 3: good

RISEBA's economic impact is tangible and clearly grounded in its applied orientation, yet its influence remains primarily national and sector-specific rather than transformative at a broader international scale. The unit's research is closely aligned with the needs of economic actors, particularly within Latvia's business environment, and its strongest contributions stem from practical collaborations, industry-driven projects, and the development of tools and knowledge with direct commercial relevance. This orientation gives RISEBA a meaningful presence among industry partners, although the depth of economic impact varies across research areas and does not yet reflect large-scale commercialisation or the systematic creation of new economic sectors.

RISEBA maintains active engagement with a wide range of industry partners. The marketing, communication, and digital innovation research direction shows the most substantial economic relevance. The Motival project exemplifies how research has been transformed into commercially deployable technology. The unit also collaborates extensively with professional

associations representing key economic sectors, including the Latvian Chamber of Commerce, the Latvian Business Angels Network, the Latvian Private Equity and Venture Capital Association, marketing, HR, and project management associations, and multiple chambers of commerce from partner countries. These relationships bridge academic expertise and business practice.

RISEBA's contributions to public-sector economic policy also carry economic significance. Applied research undertaken with ministries and governmental agencies, including the Public Administration School and the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development on improving the Latvian population's digital skills, has informed national strategies for human capital development, digital skills acquisition and workplace readiness. These initiatives have the potential to strengthen labour market performance and indirectly support private-sector competitiveness. The extensive digital-skills training for tens of thousands of citizens further demonstrates systemic economic relevance, enhancing Latvia's capacity for digital transformation and supporting the development of the national ICT ecosystem.

Despite these strengths, commercialisation remains centred around a limited number of flagship projects, and there is little evidence of spin-off companies beyond the Motival Development partnership. Engagement in emerging economic sectors such as AI-enabled business analytics and creative industries is promising, but the unit's role remains that of a contributor rather than a driver of sectoral growth. Economic impact in the finance and economics research direction is weaker; although the research is relevant to regulators and financial-sector actors, it has yet to generate notable commercial applications or high-visibility industry tools.

Social impact

Score 3: good

RISEBA demonstrates a solid and growing social impact, with research that is clearly relevant to societal development and increasingly visible in national discussions on public welfare, digital inclusion, social cohesion, and policy design. The applied orientation and close integration with public-sector stakeholders ensure that its research outputs are used to address concrete societal problems. While the influence is predominantly national, the breadth of engagement across ministries, municipalities, NGOs, and public-service providers reflects a sustained contribution to Latvia's social and cultural development, consistent with an assessment at a good level.

RISEBA's most substantial social impact arises from long-term collaborations with public administration and ministries. RISEBA played a significant role in developing Latvia's Public Sector Engagement Survey (2019–2024), which directly shaped improvements in personnel policy, HR analytics and organisational culture across the state administration. Similarly, targeted research on project-management competencies in the public sector led to the creation of a national competency framework and specialised training programmes for public-sector project managers, strengthening administrative capacity and contributing to national governance quality.

RISEBA's work in digital inclusion and human capital development demonstrates significant societal relevance. Through the Motival research programme and its subsequent applications within the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development, the unit has helped design a nationwide digital skills monitoring framework, motivation and skills assessment tools for digital mentors and leaders, and large-scale educational content for improving digital literacy. The impact is substantial not only in scale but also in terms of its contribution to reducing digital inequality and increasing access to e-services, key priorities for social inclusion and economic participation.

Social welfare and security impacts also extend to more targeted populations. Research conducted through doctoral work, such as the development of a support model for military families, demonstrates relevance for national security structures and community integration.

RISEBA has also contributed to public understanding of hidden or vulnerable groups through the internationally oriented "Invisibles" project. Its dissemination across the Baltics and Mexico raised awareness of social inequality patterns and informed debates on social policy and inclusion.

RISEBA's engagement with society is reinforced by extensive media presence and participation in public dialogue. Over 120 media appearances by researchers have brought academic insights into public discussions on taxation, retail development, demographic change and social behaviour, enhancing public understanding of the role of research in addressing societal challenges. In education, the unit strengthens higher-education development by integrating research into teaching, promoting applied thesis work that directly addresses organisational and societal issues, and contributing to the professionalisation of public-service roles through training and advisory work.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 3: good

RISEBA offers a good research environment that supports a good level of performance, though several structural and capacity constraints limit its ability to reach a higher level of excellence. The unit has established a clear and well-defined organisational framework for managing research. The Science Department, Heads of Scientific Directions and an expanding set of internal regulations provide a structured system for monitoring research activity, guiding publication strategies and supporting project acquisition. This framework is goal-oriented and aligned with the institution's long-term strategy.

Strategic and financial planning is solid, with research embedded in institutional priorities and linked to external accreditation goals (AACSB, EFMD). RISEBA has introduced performance-based incentives, financial support for conference participation and publication costs, and targeted investment in interdisciplinary areas such as AI, digital innovation and human-capital research. These mechanisms encourage goal-oriented research, but long-term planning is challenged by the limited state funding available to private higher-education institutions and the scarcity of national scholarships for PhD and post-doctoral training. Human-resource development is strengthened by discount schemes for academic staff pursuing PhD studies, yet the low proportion of staff holding PhDs and the uneven motivation to pursue PhD qualifications remain significant weaknesses.

The research environment benefits from reasonably strong support services and access to relevant research infrastructure. RISEBA has access to Euromonitor and Statista, but these are more suitable for writing commercial reports than academic research. Recent integration into the national Open Science infrastructure (DataverseLV, VPC) and the planned introduction of Elsevier Pure represent meaningful steps toward modernising research-information management and ensuring open access to research outputs. However, the technical and administrative staffing in the Science Department remains limited relative to the volume of regulatory requirements and project activity, resulting in bottlenecks in research support and coordination. Teaching workloads are typical for an applied-science institution but continue to constrain the time available for high-quality research, particularly for early-career staff.

RISEBA's support for knowledge dissemination enables good compliance with open-access principles. The environment for student involvement in research is strong at MSc level, where theses frequently involve applied studies with external partners, although opportunities for undergraduate research and systematic involvement in formal research groups appear more limited.

Development potential

Score 3: good

RISEBA demonstrates a credible development potential over the next 5 to 10 years, with realistic ambitions and a strategic framework that, if fully implemented, could strengthen its position in international competition and consolidate its role as a nationally relevant applied research institution. The unit's future vision is clearly articulated, centred on internationalisation, digital innovation, interdisciplinary integration and progression towards AACSB accreditation. RISEBA's SWOT analysis recognises its strengths in motivation systems, international networks and PhD-programme growth, while acknowledging weaknesses such as limited high-quality publications, constrained administrative capacity and uneven staff qualifications. This realistic appraisal underpins a plausible plan for navigating future opportunities and threats.

RISEBA's potential to participate more effectively in international competition is bolstered by its expanding collaborations within networks such as CEEMAN, EDAMBA, EHRM and GLOBE. These partnerships expose researchers and PhD students to international standards and create avenues for joint projects, although current involvement remains more participatory than leadership-driven. The growing emphasis on project-based collaboration, the establishment of an AI Lab and the strong alignment with digital transformation trends position RISEBA to join future EU-funded initiatives, particularly in areas such as digital skills, behavioural analytics and applied management research. Securing competitive international funding will require further strengthening of research groups, improving staff publication profiles and building more experienced project-management capacity.

The capability of the scientific environment to support chosen research areas is developing positively. The institution's thematic focus—digital innovation, strategic management and human capital—aligns with global trends and Latvia's RIS3 priorities, suggesting that research directions are well chosen and forward-looking. However, the age and career progression profile indicates that while several senior researchers are active and internationally connected, the pipeline of early-career staff and PhD-qualified academics remains thin. The joint doctoral programme provides a promising mechanism to address this gap, especially given increased interest from international candidates, but sustained investment and mentoring structures will be essential to ensure progression from doctoral training to research careers within the institution.

RISEBA's ability to increase its academic, economic and societal impact is moderate but improving. It already demonstrates meaningful influence through applied projects, national policy collaborations and technology-backed behavioural research. If publication quality improves and interdisciplinary strengths are leveraged more systematically, the unit could achieve greater international recognition. Its capacity to initiate new research directions is supported by internal flexibility, interdisciplinary culture and openness to experimentation. Continued development will depend on attracting external funding, increasing staff research time and strengthening administrative support for research.

Overall, RISEBA has a solid and credible development trajectory, with a realistic strategy, growing its PhD capacity, clear thematic positioning and increasing integration into international research networks. To realise its potential fully, RISEBA should deepen staff research qualifications, enhance support structures and sustain efforts to raise international publication quality and competitive-funding success.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

RISEBA has a large PhD programme (currently 68 students from 17 countries). Having several years of work experience is one of the prerequisites, and consistent with an applied (rather than academic) scope of PhD training. The PhD students are treated like "junior faculty" and closely coached by the staff. They also benefit from the PhD programme being integrated into doctoral networks such as EDAMBA and from participation in European conferences. Yet, PhD-level research from RISEBA has low visibility on an international stage and has not yet achieved significant disciplinary visibility.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

RISEBA's research activity is aligned with Latvia's RIS3. This is particularly demonstrated in the priority areas of ICT, digital transformation and human capital development, as well as in aspects of smart public administration and socio-economic resilience. The research aligns with RIS3 priority area "Information and Communication Technologies" through the development of AI-enabled tools such as the Motival platform, which integrates machine learning, psychography and digital-skills analytics. These outputs support Latvia's goals for improving digital literacy, fostering data-driven innovation and expanding the ICT service ecosystem, as also noted in RISEBA's self-assessment.

RISEBA also contributes to the human capital and education modernisation objective of RIS3 by generating research used in national training programmes, digital-skills curricula and public-sector competency frameworks. These strengthen labour-market adaptability and workforce upskilling.

RISEBA's research also reflects alignment with the "knowledge-intensive business services" and "smart public governance". Large-scale collaborations with ministries, public agencies and municipalities are good examples of how RISEBA supports evidence-based policymaking and improved administrative performance. The interdisciplinary integration of management, psychology, digital technologies and communication further reinforces the unit's contribution to RIS3's cross-cutting goal of fostering innovation capacity across sectors.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

RISEBA demonstrates a high level of conformity with Latvia's national science, technology, and innovation development priorities by aligning its research, partnerships, and knowledge-transfer activities with strategic frameworks such as the NSTIDP, RIS3, NDP2027, and the Latvian Open Science Strategy 2021-2027. It's applied, interdisciplinary research directly targets nationally important domains - ICT development, human capital advancement, digital transformation, and sustainable socio-economic growth—while collaborations with ministries, public institutions, and industry (e.g., MSARD, Public Administration School, Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Finance) ensure that research outputs support evidence-based policymaking and capacity building. RISEBA's development of AI-driven tools (e.g., Motival), involvement in national digital-skills programmes for 30,000–40,000 citizens, and participation in international networks (EHRM, CEEMAN, EDAMBA, GLOBE) further reinforce its contribution to strengthening Latvia's innovation ecosystem and global competitiveness.

Recommendations

RISEBA is a dynamic and growing institution. Its staff are enthusiastic and motivated to contribute to the unit's further development of teaching capacity and research provision. Yet, for this to happen RISEBA should prioritise strengthening the depth, visibility and sustainability of its research capacity.

The Expert Panel recommends that RISEBA:

- creates a strategy on how to raise the international quality of publications. RISEBA should implement a structured publication-development programme, including mentoring for early-career researchers, targeted research skills development workshops, and internal peer-review of manuscripts. Establishing small, focused research groups with clear publication targets would help build critical mass in priority areas such as digital innovation, behavioural analytics and strategic management
- should also expand its pool of PhD-qualified researchers through an active staff-development plan. This includes offering guaranteed teaching-load reductions for PhD candidates, co-funding for international supervision, and clearer career pathways from doctoral studies to academic positions. Recruitment of internationally experienced researchers, even part-time or on visiting contracts, would help raise standards and strengthen supervision capacity
- should significantly strengthen research-support infrastructure. Increasing the staffing and expertise of the Science Department is essential to support competitive funding applications, open-science compliance, Horizon Europe participation and the management of interdisciplinary projects. Introducing the Elsevier Pure research information system should be paired with training to ensure full adoption
- should aim to reshape its research profile around emerging European priorities, concentrating resources on a limited number of high-potential themes: AI-enabled behavioural research, digital transformation of organisations, sustainable strategic management and human-capital development. These areas offer clear competitive niches and alignment with EU missions and RIS3 priorities
- should step up participation in international competitive funding, beginning with coordinated Horizon Europe consortia participation and Nordic–Baltic cooperation programmes. To support this, RISEBA should create an internal seed fund to prepare proposals and enable staff to build partnerships
- should formalise a comprehensive open-science strategy, including systematic deposition of datasets, open-access publication plans and training for staff and students.

These measures would substantially enhance RISEBA's research quality, competitiveness and long-term societal and economic impact.

S_22 Stockholm School of Economics in Riga

2.2.23 *The unit*

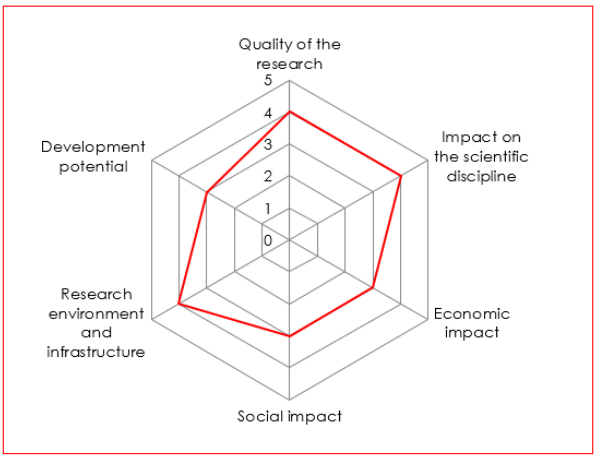
The Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (SSE Riga) is a higher education institution of applied sciences, operating under a license agreement with the Stockholm School of Economics in Sweden. SSE Riga is owned by the SSE Riga Foundation and offers a B.Sc. in economics and business, an Executive MBA, and executive education programmes. The institution does not receive public funding, relying instead on tuition fees, executive education fees, donations, and research grants. The mission of SSE Riga is to contribute to the economic, social, and democratic development of Latvia and the region through education and research. The unit's main research fields are economics, finance, business, and management. These are broadly defined and include, for instance, research in demography, health economics and political science/economy. The institution fosters an environment where education and research are interconnected, ensuring that academic programmes are grounded in up-to-date scholarship. SSE Riga aims to foster an environment where academic inquiry informs education, businesses, and policymakers by addressing real-world challenges.

2.2.24 *Expert Group evaluation*

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Group to the unit.

Figure 12 Stockholm School of Economics in Riga – Scores

Criteria	Scores
Quality of the research	4
Impact on the scientific discipline	4
Economic impact	3
Social impact	3
Research environment and infrastructure	4
Development potential	3
OVERALL SCORE	**4**



Overall score
Score 4: very good

SSE Riga has a strong research quality and international standing. It has produced outputs published in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals, but the quantity and the quality of those outputs seem to have declined in recent years. SSE Riga has an ambition to maintain high research standards, broaden its international collaborations and increase its significance in the domestic market.

SSE Riga exhibits a strong, coherent model of research-to-economy engagement, resulting in a sustained engagement with industry and public economic actors. Its collaboration portfolio, applied research commissions, and regional innovation projects show that firms, policymakers, and sectoral organisations consistently use its research. While the unit's size limits the scale of traditional technology transfer, its impact within applied economics and management is significant.

SSE Riga demonstrates a very important societal impact through sustained collaboration with public authorities, contributions to national policies, support for public health and welfare, reinforcement of democratic and media institutions, and broad public engagement.

SSE Riga's societal engagement is important and credible, with strong examples in governance, economic transparency and media development. However, its scale, topic concentration and project-based engagement model somewhat constrain the overall societal footprint.

SSE Riga offers a competent and effective research environment, with strong academic autonomy, international networks and protected research time. However, the environment is held back by limited in-house research infrastructure and modest support services.

Overall, SSE Riga has a good and credible development trajectory, though scaling up its research ambitions will require targeted investment in support structures, infrastructure and international project engagement.

Quality of Research

Score 4: very good

The Expert Group assesses the quality of research at SSE Riga as very good, reflecting a highly focused and internationally credible body of work. The unit publishes in internationally recognised journals, including outlets of high standing such as the Journal of Financial Economics, Review of Finance, Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, and Review of World Economics, demonstrating the methodological rigour and relevance of its research portfolio. This demonstrates that a core group of researchers can publish internationally competitive work.

Research themes in competitiveness, governance, financial behaviour, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and public-sector performance are well aligned with international debates and highly relevant for Latvia and the Baltic region. Generous research time (50%), systematic support for conference participation, and expanding access to data and methodological tools enable researchers to pursue ambitious scholarly agendas.

However, research performance is uneven across staff. Only a small subset of researchers publish in recognised international journals, while overall publication volume and quality have declined in recent years (the Compounded Annual Growth Ratio (CAGR) is -3.3% for the 2019-2024 period). The research agenda is broad, limiting disciplinary coherence. Co-authorship with undergraduate students, while pedagogically beneficial, does not explain the downturn in output quality nor compensate for the need for sustained academic publishing.

Given its international visibility, publication achievements, and strategic direction, the Expert Group finds the quality of research to be very good. However, for the reasons given above, the Expert Group concludes that research quality is not strong enough to justify a higher score as the unit is not yet a global leader.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 4: very good

SSE Riga demonstrates a very good level of impact on its scientific disciplines, supported by strong international integration, high-quality publications, and a research profile that is widely recognised across economics, finance, management and political economy. The unit has a history of very good international connections. This is partly the legacy of being connected to the Swedish School of Economics, which is one of the best in Europe and has excellent research standing. The full credit should be given to the unit for taking advantage of this opportunity and engaging in research collaborations. The unit maintains active collaborations with globally

respected partners, including Harvard University, King's Business School, the University of Utah, the European Corporate Governance Institute, and leading European policy institutions such as the OECD, the European Central Bank and the European Commission. These collaborations result in co-authored publications, joint research initiatives and participation in high-level academic networks, signalling clear international visibility and peer recognition.

SSE Riga's researchers publish in reputable international journals, benefiting from a research culture that prioritises quality, open access and international dissemination. The Baltic Journal of Economics (Taylor & Francis) provides an additional platform for contributing to the wider scientific community. The unit's integration in the FREE Network further enhances its international outreach, connecting it with research institutes across Sweden, Poland, Georgia, Ukraine and other countries engaged in transition economics.

At the same time, SSE Riga's presence in high-impact international journals has been declining and leadership roles in major international research consortia are infrequent. The Expert Group considers SSE Riga to be a highly credible international actor with strong disciplinary engagement, meriting a score of 4 — very good.

Economic impact
Score 3: good

SSE Riga demonstrates research and expertise relevant to economic actors in Latvia and the wider Baltic region. The unit maintains interactions with private firms, industry associations, and public economic bodies, and it is a sought-after partner for industry and public economic actors, although its size and mission (as an applied higher-education institution) limit the scale of direct technology transfer compared with large research universities. The unit's impact model is based on applied economic and business research, commissioned studies, executive education, and ecosystem-building activities that support sectoral development and entrepreneurial capacity. This aligns the unit with the national expectations for research that is highly relevant to economic actors.

SSE Riga maintains a consistent portfolio of commissioned research for private-sector clients, demonstrating clear demand for its analytical capabilities (e.g., Amgen Baltics, health economics modelling of the impact of PCSK9 inhibitors; Novartis Baltics, assessment of the economic cost of migraine in Latvia and Lithuania). These projects illustrate that SSE Riga translates research and quantitative methods into commercially relevant insights that shape market strategies, payer negotiations, and investment decisions within the health-pharmaceutical sector.

The unit's Executive Education division is a major channel of industry engagement and knowledge transfer. It delivers tailored programmes to firms and public bodies, such as the Mini-MBA in Innovation Management for the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia. These programmes embed research into managerial practice across key sectors and create a sustained two-way exchange between faculty and industry professionals.

SSE Riga also plays a role in policy-economy interfaces. Faculty work regularly with actors such as Latvijas Banka, the European Commission, and the OECD, ensuring that academic insights feed directly into financial governance, productivity policies, and sectoral decision-making.

SSE Riga also contributes to the development of emerging and strategically important sectors through (i) health-economics research that supports the growth and sophistication of the Baltic pharmaceutical and biotech markets, (ii) deep-tech and entrepreneurship ecosystems, via EIT. UNIcorn, and UNITeD projects, which help build commercialisation capacity and connect students, researchers, investors, and start-ups, and (iii) the Baltic Family Firm Institute, which the school co-founded, supporting one of the most significant business segments in the region through governance training, advisory and applied research.

Open workshops, annual conferences (e.g., shadow-economy conference with LTRK & BICEPS), and partnerships with chambers and business associations create repeated, visible

interfaces where research is co-produced, disseminated and taken up. These activities generate networks that link researchers to firms, consultants and investors.

SSE Riga provides credible evidence of sustained engagement with industry and public economic actors. Its collaboration portfolio, applied research commissions, and regional innovation projects demonstrate that its research reaches firms, policymakers, and sectoral organisations. The Expert Group finds that the unit plays a valued role as a source of analytical expertise in Latvia. However, the Expert Group noted that the economic impact demonstrated by SSE Riga does not yet reach the level associated with the strongest international institutions, where research systematically shapes industry practices, contributes to sectoral transformation, and influences economic policy beyond national borders. The unit's economic engagement, while meaningful, remains project-based and limited in scale, and it does not yet demonstrate the depth, continuity and cross-sectoral influence typically seen in institutions whose research has a sustained international economic footprint.

Social impact

Score 3: good

SSE Riga demonstrates a meaningful contribution to Latvian and Baltic societal development, particularly in governance, public administration, sustainability, media integrity and public understanding of economics. The unit has developed a portfolio of collaborations with government bodies, public-service providers, NGOs, and the general public. While many activities are influential, the breadth and depth of societal impact remain somewhat constrained by SSE Riga's small size and applied focus, which limits its ability to sustain large-scale or long-term social-impact infrastructures. This aligns well with the definition of "Good", where research is important for society but not systematically embedded across all relevant sectors.

SSE Riga contributes evidence-based analysis to multiple public-sector stakeholders. For instance, through the State Competitiveness Council, chaired by Prof. Arnis Sauka, the unit provides inputs on national competitiveness, education and entrepreneurship policy for the Office of the President. The long-running Shadow Economy Index—produced annually since 2010—supports the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economics and the Estonian Tax and Customs Board in understanding tax evasion, informality and compliance. Collaboration with Latvijas Banka, OECD, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank includes co-authored studies feeding into macroeconomic and regulatory decisions. These partnerships demonstrate that SSE Riga's domains span the full breadth of social and cultural sectors.

SSE Riga's contributions to public health are growing but remain focused on specific applied projects, e.g., health economics studies with Amgen Baltics and Novartis that assess the societal and economic burden of cardiovascular events and migraine in Latvia and Lithuania. These analyses provide policymakers with evidence for healthcare prioritisation. While meaningful, such work is occasional rather than establishing a permanent health-policy research capacity.

SSE Riga offers valuable but selective contributions to social cohesion. For instance, research on Ukrainian refugees and migrants integrates demography, labour economics and anthropology to inform national responses to displacement and labour-market integration. The FICIL Sentiment Index, based on interviews with major foreign employers, supports policymaking on labour regulation and administrative burden. These activities show responsiveness to emerging social challenges, though the work is primarily episodic research rather than ongoing societal-engagement programmes.

SSE Riga plays a visible public-facing role, especially in strengthening media integrity. The Anne-Marie and Gustaf Ander Centre for Media Studies provides training in investigative journalism, media sustainability and networking. The Centre for Sustainable Business (CSB) organises open events and produces widely covered analyses such as the Shadow Economy Index and FICIL Sentiment Index, contributing to public debate on ethics, sustainability and competitiveness.

Faculty regularly participate in national media and events such as the LAMPA Democracy Festival, reinforcing public understanding of economics and policy. These contributions are significant but largely centred on economics and sustainability rather than spanning broader cultural and societal domains.

SSE Riga's executive-education programmes for ministries, public servants and state leaders support capacity-building in public administration. Open workshops, lectures and public seminars broaden access to research, though these remain modest in scale.

Overall, SSE Riga's societal engagement is important and credible, with strong examples in governance, economic transparency and media development. However, the unit's scale, topic concentration and project-based engagement model constrain the overall societal footprint. Its performance aligns with Score 3 — Good, indicating research that is meaningful for societal actors but not yet systematically broad or deeply institutionalised across all major social sectors.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 4: very good

SSE Riga provides a coherent and functional research environment that supports applied social-science research in economics, finance, business and political economy. The institutional scale is small, but the structures in place are generally appropriate for its mission. The research environment demonstrates several strengths—particularly academic freedom, integration of research and teaching, and strong external networks.

SSE Riga's financial model is based on tuition, donations, grants and commissioned research. This supports the unit's independence but imposes constraints. For instance, it may make long-term investment in research infrastructure more difficult.

In the past, it benefited from the close ties with the SSE in Stockholm. However, with the devolution of the connection, it is unclear how research activity development can be supported. Giving the faculty time to test new research ideas is very important, but given the applied nature of the research the unit focuses on, it may not be enough.

The Expert Group evaluates the research environment as very good. SSE Riga provides protected research time, maintains a supportive academic culture, and fosters strong external networks. The integration of research and teaching is effective and, at the institutional level, supports doctoral seminars for students in Latvia on transversal skills, even if the unit does not offer its own PhD programme. Governance structures are clear, and strategic documents identify key priorities.

Development potential

Score 3: good

The research environment of SSE Riga is well aligned with its mission and capable of further strengthening the unit's role within the international academic community. The institution has already established valuable international links, particularly through the FREE Network, collaborations with BICEPS, and partnerships with European policy bodies such as the OECD and the European Commission. These provide a stable foundation for continued participation on the international arena.

SSE Riga's development plans show a realistic understanding of its strengths and limitations. Key strengths include an internationally oriented faculty, protected research time, and a clear thematic focus on applied economics, governance and sustainability. At the same time, SSE Riga acknowledges constraints associated with its small scale, and limited in-house research infrastructure, which affect its ability to expand technical research capacity or host large research teams.

SSE Riga's vision involves deeper integration into European research programmes, strengthening collaboration with regional partners, and increasing participation in competitive funding schemes. These goals are credible, though their achievement will depend on strengthening internal support structures for grant application, data management and large-scale project coordination. The unit's involvement in initiatives such as EIT HEI and UNITeD provides promising avenues to develop new research directions related to innovation, entrepreneurship and digital transformation, though these initiatives are still evolving. The Unit should develop clear strategic and implementation plan in this regard.

The age structure of the faculty, combining experienced senior researchers with younger academics receiving substantial research time, supports steady career progression but requires ongoing attention to retention and succession planning. The unit's reputation and English-language programmes enhance its ability to attract international students and visiting scholars, although having no doctoral opportunities constrains long-term research capacity building.

The Expert Group assesses the development potential of SSE Riga as good, given its research orientation and strengths. SSE Riga continued hiring after the evaluation period, recruiting three full-time faculty members. While recent recruitment represents a positive development, the Expert Group noted that the longer-term approach to workforce planning is still evolving. SSE Riga has credible ambitions to strengthen its role in European research programmes, build partnerships within the FREE Network and enhance participation in competitive funding schemes. The unit demonstrates awareness of its strengths and constraints, including small scale, uneven research performance, limited infrastructure and dependence on external collaborations.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

SSE Riga does not offer a PhD programme and has no plans to develop one. The unit expressed concerns about the feasibility of establishing a high-quality doctoral programme in Latvia. However, SSE Riga contributes to doctoral training through workshops, seminars, conferences and invited lectures for PhD students enrolled at other institutions. Despite current limitations, SSE Riga's strong international networks and collaborations indicate that it could contribute meaningfully to doctoral training, especially through joint or co-supervised arrangements. The unit's experience in hosting research seminars, delivering transversal-skills training, and engaging with international partners provides a foundation that could be strengthened should the institution decide to pursue a structured doctoral role.

Alignment with the SMART Specialisation Strategy

SSE Riga's research activities demonstrate a good level of alignment with the objectives and development priorities of Latvia's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3), particularly in the domains of "Smartly Governed and Resilient Society" and "Knowledge-Intensive Bioeconomy and Wellbeing Economy." The unit's strong thematic focus on competitiveness, productivity, governance, human capital, sustainability, entrepreneurship and economic transparency reflects direct contributions to the development of a modern, high-value, knowledge-based society—core ambitions of the Latvian RIS3 framework.

The alignment with RIS3 Priority "Smartly Governed and Resilient Society" is especially clear. SSE Riga's long-running work on the Shadow Economy Index supports improved governance, transparency, regulatory quality and institutional performance. The unit's involvement with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economics, the State Competitiveness Council, and other high profile bodies further embeds the unit's research into the evidence base used for national reforms and policy modernisation. These collaborations directly support RIS3 objectives on strengthening state capacity, improving policy evidence, and enhancing societal resilience.

SSE Riga also aligns with RIS3 Priority "Knowledge-Intensive Bioeconomy and Wellbeing Economy", primarily through its contributions to public-health economics and human-capital development. Its commissioned study with Amgen Baltics provides insights into the societal and economic burden of chronic diseases, informing more efficient allocation of healthcare resources and contributing to wellbeing-oriented innovation. Moreover, the unit's research on Ukrainian refugees, labour-market integration, and demographic change supports national efforts to strengthen human capital, labour supply and social cohesion, which are essential long-term drivers of the wellbeing economy. This research is commissioned by Novartis Baltics.

SSE Riga's involvement in innovation- and entrepreneurship-focused European initiatives—including EIT HEI, UNIcorn and UNITeD further reinforces alignment with RIS3 cross-cutting objectives linked to the capacity for SMART innovation, digital transformation and deep-tech ecosystem development. These initiatives increase the institution's ability to support entrepreneurial talent, promote business creation and strengthen the innovation pipeline in Latvia.

The Expert Group thus finds that SSE Riga's research aligns with RIS3 priorities in "Smartly Governed and Resilient Society" and "Knowledge-Intensive Bioeconomy and Wellbeing Economy."

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

SSE Riga contributes to Latvia's STI policy through human capital development, applied research informing governance and public-sector performance, and collaboration with public authorities. Alignment with STI policy is, therefore, partial but credible.

Recommendations

SSE Riga is a research-active and ambitious institution. It is well nationally and internationally connected, and its current specialisation areas are well aligned with Latvia's RIS3. The Expert Group considers that the evolving institutional and governance context of SSE Riga, and its implications for international partnerships and future development, should be carefully considered. SSE Riga should have a clear medium- and long-term strategy that strengthens international networks and supports sustainable growth. The Expert Group has not been convinced that such an approach has been taken.

In particular, while thinking about building the future, the Expert Group thinks that there is room for deeper integration with emerging European and global research priorities. International trends indicate growing emphasis on green transition economics, sustainable finance, digital governance, AI and data-driven public-sector innovation, and resilience in small open economies. SSE Riga's existing expertise in sustainability (via the Centre for Sustainable Business), productivity, governance and labour markets could be expanded to more explicitly address these future-oriented thematic areas. Likewise, the unit may strengthen connections to RIS3 domains related to digital transformation by developing research capacity in digital business models, fintech, cybersecurity for SMEs, or data governance.

SSE Riga could provide an academic, research-oriented PhD sessions. The unit should have enough international contacts to create joint supervision. For instance, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions PhD Networks could provide seed funding for such a PhD programme. However, there seems to be no such strategic aspirations and plans.

Further suggestions would consolidate and expand SSE Riga existing strengths and special position in the social science education landscape in Latvia:

- Maintain support for publications in higher-impact journals through protected research time, internal peer review, mentoring and targeted writing support. For example, introducing an annual research planning cycle, where each researcher identifies

targeted journals, co-authors, and project milestones, would support a more strategic and predictable publication workflow across the unit.

- Identify 2–3 thematic priority areas where SSE Riga has clear comparative strengths and concentrate resources, grant-seeking, and recruitment efforts on these domains. Strategic focus will amplify impact and improve international standing.
- Develop a clear medium-term strategy that strengthens SSE Riga's international networks and supports sustainable development within its evolving institutional context.
- Enhance grant-support structures to improve success in European funding schemes
- Expand joint activities with regional partners and systematically pursue co-authored publications.
- Continue contributing to doctoral training through structured collaboration with universities offering PhD programmes.

3 Summary of findings across the set of unit evaluations

The general level of quality of research

Overall, the Expert Group concludes that the quality of reviewed social science research units is good. In many units, the implementation of previous recommendations has been ambitious, and there is positive evidence of development towards higher research performance in most of the units.

One third of the units stand out with very good level of research, and among these, UL stood out as the only unit that received very good scores across all criteria. The unit at LBTU rank slightly behind UL but was also considered to have very good development potential. Two smaller units, BSC and SSE Riga, were also assessed to have a very good level of research.

In five of the twelve units, the Expert Group gave a higher score for research quality than for impact of the scientific discipline. The Expert Group propose two related explanations for this; first, units are explicitly committed to align with and contribute to (non-academic) national priorities. All units are also highly committed to deliver on these expectations. Secondly, limited resources and sharp external expectations leave little room to develop and pursue the field specific research questions, methods and theory development that tend to characterize high impact international research contributions. University of Latvia unit and SSE Riga are the two positive exceptions, and the Expert Group consider these two units to have both very good quality of research and very good impact of the scientific discipline. Not considering the two special cases mentioned above (BIA and ECA), the economic and social impact of social science research units is good. Top impact performers are University of Latvia unit, LBTU and ViA that all have very good economic and social impact, and NDAL that have very good social impact.

Many of the units under review here are constrained by their size and capacity. Nevertheless, and despite this, the Expert Group found strong commitment and dynamism in most of the institutions it visited. Expert Group was left with a lasting impression that "these units punch above their weight".

Key strengths

Strong collaborations is a key strength across all units. Specifically, the Expert Group found that units i) sustain a close connection to industry and public actors, and an ambition to be a relevant partners in solving social, economic, and policy problems, ii) have an ambition and take steps to engage both in national and international research collaborations, and iii) foster an open attitude and productive approach toward cross- and multi-disciplinary research. These strengths are expressed in good economic and social impact at the local and national level, an active participation in institutional European Universities alliances, and a growing participation rate in EU framework programmes. High performance fields include research on technology-enhanced learning, communication, and digital and green transition, including bioeconomy, agriculture, tourism, and land use.

Main weaknesses

While there is a certain focus on specific research fields across the institutions (see above), the Expert Group found that at the unit level research tend to be diverse and uneven in performance. Oftentimes, the research agenda is so broad as to limit disciplinary coherence, and although interdisciplinarity is a strength, it also largely masks the absence of fundamental scientific research aimed at interdisciplinary concept and theory development. There is an absence of disciplinary research colloquia and seminars at all levels and intra-disciplinary state-of-the art appears not to be prioritized in doctoral training. As strong disciplinary excellence remains a key currency for both sustained international collaboration and the generation of

scientific impact, the Expert Group considers the relatively limited emphasis on disciplinary excellence to be a core weakness of Latvian social science.

Conclusions

The units under review are to be applauded for their attention to previous recommendations, their dynamism and strong commitment. Overall, the Expert Group found that units tend to be strong national players, and the assessment considered one third of the units to be strong international players, among them the University of Latvia unit and LBTU. But the Expert Group also believed that these units still have quite a distance to go to become global leaders. It would require strong incentives, substantial resources and explicit expectations for the unit at UL to continue its positive development and establish itself among the global leaders.

Engagement and collaboration with industrial and public actors, regionally and nationally, is a strength. However, given current resources and policy priorities, this strength also contributes to weak disciplinary excellence. The Expert Group believes it would be reasonable to focus resources on one research university and accept universities of applied sciences and other institutions for what they are: institutions that, alongside education, conduct some (contract) research for the region to identify practical issues and contribute to solutions.

Recommendations

All units should start research seminars following a model that is standard in international research units in all disciplines: Internal seminars promote greater cohesiveness in the research environment and serve to get feedback on progress towards major publications and preparation for international conferences. External seminars invite leading researchers in relevant areas to present current research to develop links with other institutions, leading researchers, potential collaborators and referees. To preserve costs and increase visibility and attendance, units can collaborate on shared organisational responsibility for external seminars.

Consider establishing a small number of national disciplinary research schools to which different units contribute. They can serve as nodes for inviting international guests and to retain and upgrade the research skills of senior researchers. Such schools can offer methodology and advanced courses on research topics at the third-cycle level. This complements the training provided by supervisors and is standard in international doctoral programmes in most disciplines.

Consider reorienting publishing strategy, assessment, and reward towards a quality over quantity approach. This requires abandoning the mechanistic fixation on Q1 (or Q2) publications in favour of targeting discipline-specific high-impact journals and field visibility (citations).

Consider implementing national support mechanisms for encouraging participation in EU framework programmes (to boost participation in ERC and MSCA, and increase capacity to take coordinator roles in Pillar II) by implementing a national seed funding program for grant preparation, grant-writing support, mock interviews, etc.

Appendix A Feedback on Expert Group assessment

Feedback from the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga

SIA "STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS IN RIGA"
comments on the consolidated report

With these comments, SIA "STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS IN RIGA" (hereinafter – SSE Riga) intends to draw attention to concerns regarding the conclusions made in consolidated report and wishes to highlight the following:

The expert panel introduced an additional bibliometric indicator - *publications per year* - which is not included in the approved methodology developed by Technopolis, and drew misleading conclusions based on this metric. This was done without providing any justification, either regarding the choice of the metric itself or the time period selected for analysis. According to the detailed methodology for bibliometric evaluation, the total number of publications over the five-year assessment period must have been analyzed. No alternative time periods or additional metrics were mentioned.

The approach taken by the expert panel, and endorsed by Technopolis, not only leads to misleading metrics and conclusions, but also violates Cabinet Regulation No. 619, specifically paragraph 4, which requires adherence to the Methodology approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. It further contradicts paragraph 9.4, which states that the specific nature and operational context of each scientific institution must be taken into account. In the case of SSE Riga, this requirement is particularly important: as a small institution working with only a few research grants, publication output naturally follows a cyclical pattern, with academic publications typically appearing towards the end of or after the completion of research projects.

Moreover, allowing expert panels to freely introduce additional, non-standard metrics and to base their assessments on these largely arbitrary indicators, results in institutions being evaluated according to inconsistent standards, undermining the comparability and fairness of the evaluation process.

When these concerns were raised, Technopolis declined to address them, arguing that the expert panels are free to introduce their own metrics even if these are not part of the official Methodology, and to base their conclusions on such metrics.

Produced by Lars Anders Gustav Paalzow,
Professor and Chairman of the Management Board