COUNTRY REPORT - LATVIA

Intellectual Output 4

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1. Preface

The context of the project "Development, assessment and validation of social competences in higher education – DASCHE" (2017-2020) was mostly created by the Bologna Process indicating that preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society is one of the main purposes of higher education (HE). Another European development requesting for social competences of HE graduates was implementation of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and subsequently development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) containing the pillar "competences: autonomy and responsibility".

Including social competences not only in curriculum, but also in teaching/learning process is difficult. They are multidimensional, grasp under one name a variety of learning outcomes concerning ethical, cultural, group and civic oriented attitudes of learners; often being meta-competences, which cannot be seen independently from knowledge and skills. Higher education institutions (HEIs) need assistance in designing, delivering and validating social competences of students. The DASCHE objectives answers these needs and the results are expected to offer model solution for the issue.

The main aim of DASCHE project is to support policy learning between Poland, Germany, Latvia, Czech Republic, United Kingdom and Netherlands and HEIs in curriculum development, assessment and validation of social competences.

The project focuses on two specific objectives:

1) To conduct detailed analysis of way how HEIs form social competences in different countries including: integrating social competences in HE qualifications, teaching/learning methods, responsibilities of HEIs and other institutions, standards and criteria of external and internal quality assurance, current debate on development of social competences.
2) Based on the analysis, to identify models and methodologies of introducing and assessing social competences in HE qualifications, to further develop the models and methodologies in order to elaborate the DASCHE recommendations.

Thus, the purpose of DASCHE is not only providing a better understanding of the concept of social competences, but also designing models for formulating and assessing social competences within HE programmes and provide sets of good practices serving as an inspiration or guidance for decision makers, HEIs and quality assurance agencies, designers of curriculum, teachers, students and other HE stakeholders.

In Latvia, social competences are part of study programmes and they are integral for all HE qualifications. Emphasizing social competences as one of the transversal skills is important because of the rapid changes in labour market requiring for employees to have advanced social competences.

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2. Abbreviations and acronyms

AIC	Academic Information Centre
AIKA	Augstākās izglītības kvalitātes aģentūra (Higher Education Quality Agency)
BA	School of Business and Finance
DASCHE	Development, assessment and validation of social competences in higher education
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
LQF	Latvian Qualifications Framework
LU	University of Latvia
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	quality assurance
RSU	Riga Stradiņš University
RTU	Riga Technical University
TSI	Transport and Telecommunication Institute

3. Methods applied

The aim of the research is to explore the understanding of the content of the concept of social competences and how they are integrated into study process (achievement of learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, quality assurance).

The following research questions were defined:

- How is the concept of social competences understood in HEI?
- How is the development of social competences in study process ensured by HEIs?

In order to achieve the stated aim, the succeeding tasks were formulated:

1. To explore students' opinion on the development of social competences in study process.
2. To explore teachers' opinion on the development of social competences in study process.
3. To explore the opinion of administrative staff on the development of social competences in study process.

The research method is case study combining both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Data collection methods are: document analysis, focus group discussions, structured interviews and surveys.

In order to ensure validity of data, a pilot study was conducted in one HEI (RSU) from May to June 2018. The pilot study included document analysis, focus group discussions (with students), and structured interviews. Regarding the collected data and initial conclusions, in addition to aforesaid data collection methods, surveys for teachers and students were designed to gain more thorough views on developing, assessing and validating social competences. The pilot study base was 10 teachers, 3 administrative staff, and 12 students (in total 25 respondents).

The research was carried out (collecting data) from January to February 2019.

The research base including pilot study consists of 279 respondents from five selected HEIs. The five HEIs selected for the research implement study programmes on all levels. HEI selection criteria are as follows: the desire of HEIs to engage in the research, the number of provided study programmes, including various types of HEIs, which offer less programmes and a variety of sectoral representations that would minimize the specific tendency of selected areas.

The HEIs offer study programmes from the following study fields: architecture and construction; life sciences; economics; energy, electrical engineering and electrotechnology; physics, material science, mathematics and statistics; geography and earth sciences; internal security and civil protection; information technology, computer hardware, electronics, telecommunications, computer control and computer science; information and communication sciences; education, pedagogy and sports; chemistry, chemical technology and biotechnology; arts; mechanics and metalworking, thermal energy, heat engineering and mechanical engineering; psychology; production and processing; religion and theology; social welfare; sociology, politics and anthropology; law; transportation services; translation; management, administration and real estate management; language and cultural studies, native language studies and language programmes; health care; history and philosophy; environment protection.

In spite of the fact that the research reveals a broad view expressed by education field professionals, the sample size does not allow to generalise the resulting trends by extending the data to all the HEIs of Latvia and HE system.

The division of respondents by data collection methods is:

- 230 respondents of online questionnaires (10 administrative staff, 84 teachers and 136 students),
- 28 respondents in focus group discussions (8 administrative staff and/or teachers and 20 students),
- 21 structured interviews with administrative staff and/or teachers.

Data collection via online survey was carried out in four HEIs. The data was summarized via online platform, processed and analysed. See questionnaires in Annex 2 and 3.

To have more broader view on research issues, focus group discussions were arranged for the representatives of four HEIs together: 1) administrative staff and/or teachers (8 participants) and 2) student focus group (8 participants). Both groups involved two representatives of administrative staff and/or teachers and two students from each HEI. The focus groups were organised at the premises of AIC, and moderated by AIC representative. In addition, in pilot study 12 students engaged in the focus group discussion. Structured interviews (8 in total) with two academic staff representatives from each HEI were conducted. Furthermore, 13 interviews were arranged during the pilot study. The discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed; thereafter, data was analysed using content analysis method. See interview and discussion questions in Annex 1.

The data in the research were both collected and analysed according to the following thematic sections:

- the goal of HE and the role of HEIs in society;
- conceptual understanding of "social competences" and their role in higher education, professional activity;
- the reflection of HEIs on their responsibility for promoting the development of social competences of a student and the division of responsibilities between stakeholders;
- current situation in developing social competences in study courses and examples of practice – factors influencing development of social competences and ideal initiatives to improve learning in study courses;
- challenges and consequences of developing social competences in higher education and professional perspective;
- reflection of social competences in international, national, institutional documents;
- suggestions for local and international initiatives to improve social competences.

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4. Higher education sector in Latvia

Description of higher education system

The HE system in Latvia is arranged according to three cycles of Bologna qualifications framework, the first cycle including short-cycle studies.

Figure 1. Higher education system in Latvia (2018)
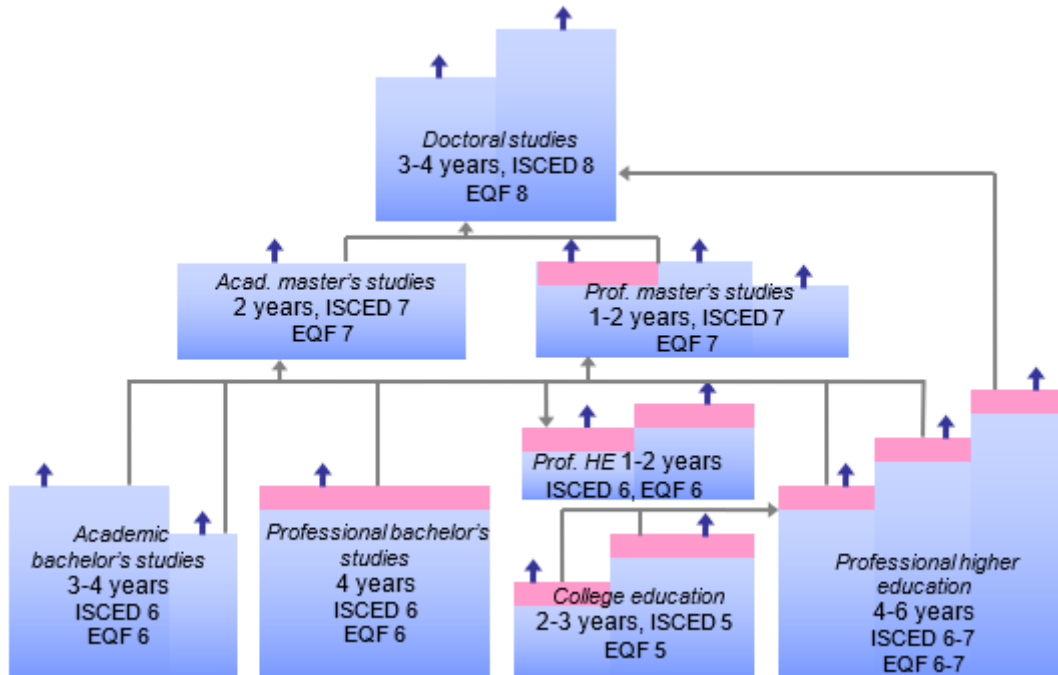
The HE system comprises academic higher education *(akadēmiskā augstākā izglītība)* and professional higher education *(profesionālā augstākā izglītība)*. See overview of HE qualifications in Annex 4.

The aim of **academic higher education** is to prepare for independent research activities and provide theoretical basis for professional activities. The academic study programmes are designed by HEIs in compliance with the state academic education standard[1].

The objective of **professional higher education** is to ensure the development of in-depth knowledge in a concrete field, ensuring the graduates' ability to develop or improve systems, products and technologies and prepare the graduates for creative, research and pedagogical work in this field. The professional study programmes are designed by HEIs in compliance with the relevant occupational standard[2] and corresponding state standard of

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[1] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 240 "Regulations on the state academic education standard" (in force since 16.05.2014), https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=266187.

[2] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 633 "Development procedure on occupational standard or qualification requirements (if occupation does not have a standard) and sectoral qualifications framework descriptions" (in force since 30.09.2016), https://likumi.lv/ta/id/285032-profesijas-standarta-profesionalas-kvalifikacijas-prasibu-ja-profesijai-neapstiprina-profesijas-standartu-un-nozares-kvalifikaciju.

first[3] or second level professional higher education[4], or the state standard of professional higher education for Doctor's degree in arts[5].

All three cycles (except short cycle programmes) have both academic and professional route, because since 2019, new professional Doctoral programmes in arts are implemented.

The graduates who have acquired any type of Bachelor's degree – either academic or professional – may enrol master studies, but those who have acquired a Master's degree – doctoral studies. The holders of degrees acquired in the professional studies of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy (5-6 years) may continue studies in doctoral programmes.

Academic higher education (LQF levels 6-8)

The volume of an **academic bachelor study programme** is 180-240 ECTS credit points, i.e. 3-4 years of full-time studies, and it leads to Bachelor's diploma (*bakalaura diploms,* LQF level 6). Distribution of credit points is as follows:

- Mandatory part is >75 ECTS credit points;
- Mandatory electives are >30 ECTS credit points;
- Bachelor thesis is >15 ECTS credit points.

The volume of an **academic master study programme** is 60-120 ECTS credit points, i.e. 1-2 years of full-time studies, and it leads to Master's diploma (*maģistra diploms*, LQF level 7). Distribution of credit points is as follows:

- Master thesis is >30 ECTS credit points;
- Mandatory part is >18 ECTS credit points.

The volume of a **doctoral study programme** is 180-240 ECTS credits, i.e. 3-4 years of full-time studies. Doctoral thesis may be elaborated within the framework of doctoral studies in a HEI or after carrying out an appropriate amount of independent research. Doctor's diploma (*doktora diploms*, LQF level 8) is awarded to a person, who has successfully passed the examinations in the chosen field of research and who has elaborated under the guidance of an experienced research advisor and publicly defended a doctoral thesis, which contain the results of original research and new insights in the respective branch of science. The doctoral thesis can be a dissertation, a set of anonymously reviewed thematically united publications or a monograph. The doctoral degree is awarded by the Doctoral Council. A Doctor's degree is awarded according to the procedure stipulated by Law on Scientific Activity (14.04.2005, last amendments 1.01.2011). The awarding of a Doctor's degree is supervised by the National Commission for Scientific Qualification established by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Professional higher education (LQF levels 5-8)

The volume of a **professional bachelor study programme** is at least 240 ECTS credit points, i.e. 4 years of full-time studies, and it leads to Professional Bachelor's diploma and higher professional qualification diploma (*Profesionālā bakalaura diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*, LQF level 6). Distribution of credit points is as follows:

- General study courses are >30 ECTS credit points;
- Theoretical foundations of the field are >54 ECTS credit points;

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[3] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 141 "Regulations on the state standard of first level professional higher education" (in force since 5.04.2001): https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=6397.

[4] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 512 "Regulations on the state standard of second level professional higher education" (in force 12.09.2014), https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=268761.

[5] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 617 "Regulations on the state professional higher education standard for obtaining Doctor's degree and the procedure for awarding a professional Doctor's degree in arts" (in force since 5.10.2018), https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301992-noteikumi-par-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitibas-valsts-standartu-doktora-grada-iegusanai-un-kartibu-kada-pieskir-profesionalo.

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- Professional specialisation are >90 ECTS credit points;
- Elective courses are >9 ECTS credit points;
- Practice training are >30 ECTS credit points;
- State examination, including the graduation thesis are >18 ECTS credit points.

The volume of a **professional master study programme** is at least 60 ECTS credit points, i.e. 1-2 years of full-time studies, and it leads to Professional Master's diploma and higher professional qualification diploma (*Profesionālā maģistra diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*, LQF level 7). Distribution of credit points is as follows:

- Study courses on recent achievements in the field, theory and practice are >7.5 ECTS credit points;
- Practice training are >9 ECTS credit points;
- State examination, including the graduation thesis, are >30 ECTS credit points;
- Study courses of research work, creative work, design work and management studies are >4.5 ECTS credit points.

The volume of a **professional doctoral study programme** is at least 198 ECTS credit points, i.e. 3 years of full-time studies, and it leads to Professional Doctor's diploma in arts (*profesionālā doktora diploms mākslās*, LQF level 8). Distribution of credit points is as follows:

- Study courses of recent achievements in sector's theory and practice are >18 ECTS credit points;
- Study courses of artistic, creative and design work are >30 ECTS credit points;
- Study Courses of research work are >22.5 ECTS credit points;
- Artistic practice is >30 ECTS credit points;
- State exam (including final thesis) is >60 ECTS credit points.

The professional Doctor's degree in arts was introduced on 1st April 2018, when amendments to Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995) came into force. Admission to professional doctoral programme in arts requires a Master's degree. A professional Doctor's degree in arts is awarded to a person after acquiring an accredited professional doctoral programme in arts (at least 198 ECTS credit points) and after the development and defence of a doctoral theoretical research and artistically creative work. A professional Doctor's degree in arts is awarded by the State Examination Commission. The implementation of study programmes will be started 2019/2020 study year.

First and second level professional higher education programmes

There are also other types of programmes in professional higher education alongside bachelor and master programmes:

- **First level professional higher education (college) study programmes** leading to the LQF level 5. The volume of the programmes is 120-180 ECTS credit points, and they are basically intended for the acquisition of a profession, but the graduates may continue studies in second level professional higher education programmes. The college programmes may be implemented both by colleges and universities. The first level programmes are designed by HEIs in compliance with the relevant occupational standard and the state standard for first level professional higher education[6].
- **Second level professional higher education programmes** ensure the acquisition of qualification of LQF level 6-7. These programmes are in the volume of at least 60 ECTS credit points after the acquisition of a Bachelor's degree or at least 240 ECTS credit points after the acquisition of secondary education. In both cases, the programme should comprise practice training in the amount of at least 39 ECTS credit points and

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[6] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 141 "Regulations on the state standard of first level professional higher education" (in force since 5.04.2001): https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=6397.

a state examination (including the graduation thesis) in the amount of at least 15 ECTS credit points. If study programme of 360 ECTS credit points comprises the mandatory part of a bachelor's programme, the graduates acquire the right to enrol a master programme. The second level programmes are designed by HEIs in compliance with the relevant occupational standard and the state standard for second level professional higher education[7].

Credit point system

Since 2004, Latvia has a well-established national credit point system. One Latvian credit point corresponds to the workload of one week full-time studies (40 points for academic year). Recalculating in ECTS credits, the amount of Latvian credit points has to be multiplied by 1.5. Part of HEIs already uses the ECTS credits, as the law does not forbid it.

Types of higher education institutions

In Latvia, the higher education study programmes are implemented by colleges (*koledža*) and university and non-university type higher education institutions (*augstskola*).

A college (*koledža*) is an education institution that provides the first level professional higher education programmes (LQF level 5). Colleges have been developed as independent education institutions or as structural units (or just as a group of first level study programmes) within higher education institutions. In spite of the different names of education institutions, the legal status of college education is the same, because the requirements for developing and providing education programmes are unified.

A higher education institution (*augstskola*) is an institution of tertiary level education that provides second level professional higher education programmes and academic higher education programmes, where scientific, research and creative activity takes place.

HEIs are divided into university and non-university higher education institutions. At HEIs with the term "*augstskola*" in their name at least 40% of academic staff in elected positions must hold a Doctor's degree and institutions with the term "*akadēmija*" in their name must fill 50% of academic positions with Doctor's degree holders, unless otherwise determined by the Cabinet of Ministers, based on the specific sphere of activity represented by the HEI (e.g. art, architecture, theology, security, maritime affairs or national defence).

University type HEIs are those providing Bachelor's (LQF level 6), Master's (LQF level 7) and Doctor's (LQF level 8) degree programmes, where at least 65% of the tenured staff hold a Doctor's degree, which publish scientific articles covering areas of teaching and research implemented by the HEI and which have divisions or research institutes performing scientific research.

Admission requirements to higher education

Admission requirements to HEIs are based on Cabinet of Ministers Regulations[8], which state that candidates must have:

- A filled-out form of application to the HEI.

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[7] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 512 "Regulations on the state standard of second level professional higher education" (in force 12.09.2014), https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=268761.

[8] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 846 "Regulations on the requirements, criteria and procedures for admission to study programmes", https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/146637-regulations-regarding-the-requirements-criteria-and-procedures-for-admission-to-study-programmes.

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- For enrolling LQF level 5 and LQF level 6 programmes:
    - A proof of a completed secondary education: a certificate of general secondary education or a diploma of secondary vocational education.
    - Certificates of general secondary education outlining the achieved results of centralised state examinations in general study subjects.
- For enrolling LQF level 7 programmes: a proof of a completed LQF level 6 education: Bachelor's diploma, Professional Bachelor's diploma or Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (studies minimum 4 years).
- For enrolling LQF level 8 programmes: a proof of a completed LQF level 7 education: Master's diploma, Professional Master's diploma, or Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (studies minimum 5 years).
- Statement of Academic Information Centre (Latvian ENIC/NARIC) indicating the level and corresponding Latvian qualification (for foreign students).

HEIs may have additional requirements, for example, entrance exams or language certificate.

Latvian Qualifications Framework

The Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) is a state level referencing system where all qualifications awarded in the Latvian education system are arranged in eight levels. The LQF covers basic, secondary and higher education stage and all types of education (general, vocational (professional), and academic education), as well as professional qualifications acquired outside of formal education. LQF was established in 2010 with the amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations "Regulations on the classification of Latvian education"[9]. The Education Law (from 1998, with amendments of 18 June 2015, which came into force 16 July 2015) states the general regulation of the LQF.

The structure and functions of LQF were developed on the basis of EQF and taking into account the context and traditions in Latvian education, as well as stakeholders' interests.

The LQF level descriptors are based on learning outcomes that are expressed in three dimensions:

- Knowledge (knowledge and comprehension);
- Skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication, general skills);
- Competences (analysis, synthesis and assessment).

In HE, level descriptors were developed in accordance with Bologna cycle descriptors and EQF. See LQF level descriptors in Chapter 5.

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[9] In 2018, LQF is regulated by the updated version of previous Cabinet of Ministers Regulations: Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 322 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian Education" (in force since 16.06.2017), https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=291524.

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5. National contexts of social competences

Higher education significantly influences not only the professional development of an individual, but also the personal growth and that of the society altogether. More and more HEIs in cooperation with representatives from sector, ministries and social partners discuss the necessary prerequisites that would promote the creation of intellectually and psychologically supportive environment for the young professionals. Various sources – employers, researchers, graduates, education policy makers – are used to gather data on the current professional requirements in order to integrate the development of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes in study process. In higher education teaching theory and practice, the development of social competences highly resonates as one of the professional development pillars.

In Latvia, no separate regulation of higher education system has been set to define social competences and to describe procedures for the development, assessment and validation of social competences in HEIs; however, they cannot be considered as non-existent and developing social competences still form part of learning process. In the documents regulating the implementation of higher education in Latvia and the internal documents of HEIs, the concept of social competences appears rather fragmented.

Learning outcomes in higher education

In Latvia, higher education legally and in academic practice is implemented in accordance to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995) and Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 322 "Regulations on the classification of Latvian education" (in force since 16.06.2017) that include the reference of the existing formal education programmes to the levels of European and Latvian Qualifications Frameworks.

Since 2004, learning outcomes have been in the agenda of discussions in HE sector, when elaboration of level descriptors for HE qualifications framework was initiated. Since 2011, learning outcomes are compulsory part of the HE study programmes.

According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995), both study programme and study course descriptions should contain information on learning outcomes – a set of knowledge, skills and competences to be achieved after completion of study programme, study module or study course.

HE study programme descriptions include the following information: aim, content and expected learning outcomes of study programmes, including study courses, modules and their expected learning outcomes; requirements regarding previous education; study field corresponding to the study programme; volume of study programme parts; criteria for attaining and assessing learning outcomes, as well as forms and procedures for tests. HEIs review the implemented study programmes in order to introduce learning outcomes and to pass the accreditation procedure.

In Latvia, learning outcomes are described in two levels: LQF level descriptors (Cabinet of Ministers Regulations[10]) and learning outcomes of study programmes (developed by HEIs). Therefore, the LQF level descriptors act as more general descriptions, but learning outcomes are specifically developed for each study programme, according to the relevant LQF level descriptor by the HEI providing particular study programme.

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[10] Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 322 "Regulations on the classification of Latvian education" (in force since 16.06.2017), https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=291524.

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LQF level descriptors

The learning outcomes of study programmes, modules and courses are formulated in accordance to the LQF level descriptors that are expressed in three dimensions – knowledge, skills and competences. While social competences are not separately indicated in the LQF level descriptors, notions and elements of them can be found throughout all three dimensions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Notions of social competences in LQF level descriptors (2018)

Knowledge	Skills	Competences	LQF levels
Able to demonstrate comprehensive and specialised knowledge and **understanding of** facts, theories, **causalities** and technologies of the relevant professional field	Able, on the basis of analytical approach, to perform practical tasks in the relevant profession, to demonstrate skills that allow to find creative solutions to professional problems, **to discuss and provide arguments to practical issues and solutions in the relevant profession with colleagues, clients and management**, able to, with an appropriate degree of independence, to engage in further learning with some autonomy, by improving one's competences Able to **assess and improve one's own actions and that of other individuals, to work in cooperation with others**, to **plan and organize work** to perform specific tasks in the relevant profession, to perform or **supervise** work activities in contexts with unpredictable changes	Able to define, describe and analyse practical problems in their profession, select the necessary information and use it for solving clearly defined problems, participate in the development of the relevant professional field, **demonstrate understanding of the role of the relevant profession in a broader social context**	5
Able to demonstrate basic and specialised knowledge in the specific field of science or profession and **critical understanding of this knowledge**, furthermore, a part of this knowledge complies with the highest level of	Able, by using the mastered theoretical foundations and skills, to perform professional, artistic, innovative or research activity, define and describe analytically information, problems and solutions in the relevant field of science or profession, **explain them and provide arguments in discussions with both professionals and non-professionals** Is able to structure independently one's own learning, **guide** one's own and **subordinates' further learning**	Able to obtain, select and analyse information independently, and use it, **take decisions** and solve problems in the specific field of science or profession, **demonstrate understanding of professional ethics**, assess **the impact of one's professional activities on** the **environment and society**, and participate in the development of	6

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achievement of the relevant field of science or profession Able to demonstrate **understanding of the most important concepts and causalities** of the specific field of science or profession	**and professional improvement**, demonstrate scientific approach to problem solving, **assume responsibility and take initiative** when performing individual work, when **working in a team or managing the work of others**, take decisions and find creative solutions in changing or unclear contexts	the relevant professional field	
Able to demonstrate advanced or extensive knowledge and understanding, a part of which conforms to the most recent findings in the relevant field of science or profession and which provides the basis for creative thinking or research, *inter alia*, working in the interface between different fields	Able to independently use theory, methods and **problem-solving skills** required to perform research or artistic activities or highly qualified professional functions Able to **provide arguments when explaining and discussing complex or systemic aspects of the relevant field of science or profession** both with professionals and non-professionals Able to **manage independently the improvement of one's own competences** and specialisation, **assume responsibility for the results of staff and group work and analyse them**, perform business activities, innovations in the specific field of science or profession, perform work, research or further learning under complex and unpredictable conditions and, if necessary, change them using new approaches	Able to define independently and critically analyse complex scientific and professional problems, **substantiate decisions** and, if necessary, carry out additional analysis Able to integrate knowledge of various fields, contribute to the creation of new knowledge, the development of research or professional working methods, **demonstrate understanding and ethical responsibility for the possible impact of the scientific results or professional activity on environment and society**	7
Able to demonstrate that has knowledge of and understands most topical scientific theories and insights, has mastered research methodology and contemporary	Able to independently assess and select appropriate methods required for scientific research or artistic innovation, has contributed to the expansion of the limits of knowledge or provided new understanding of existing knowledge and its use in practice, by carrying out work of artistic innovation in the field of artistic innovation or an original	Able, by performing independent critical analysis, synthesis and assessment, to carry out significant research, innovation or artistic innovation tasks in the field of artistic innovation, set independently research idea, plan, structure and	8

research methods in the specific field of science or profession and in the interface of various fields	large-scale research, a part of which is at the level of internationally cited publications **Able to communicate both orally and in writing about one's own field of scientific activity (one's own branch) with wider research community and public in general**. Able to implement artistic innovation projects of international level Able to **independently improve one's scientific qualification**, implement scientific projects, by attaining achievements meeting international criteria of the relevant field of science, manage research or development tasks in companies, institutions, and organisations that require extensive research knowledge and skills Able to independently improve the skills of performing artistically highly valuable works and develop practical skills required for implementing unique ideas of international level and artistic innovation work	manage large-scale scientific or artistic innovation projects, including international projects	

Social competences in HEIs internal documents

Each HEI has their own internal documents that regulate their activity (depending on the HEI – constitution, strategic plan, development strategy, code of academic integrity, quality policy, documents regulating study and research process, self-assessment reports, etc.). These internal documents may contain some elements with regards to developing and assessing social competences in the respective HEI. However, as the findings of the document analysis (conducted as part of the research within DASCHE project) reveal, social competences are not defined separately by HEIs and, even though they are taken into consideration, they are secondary in the list of common goals and tasks (see Chapter 7 – Social competences in higher education institutions).

ESF project "The development of education quality monitoring system"

The Ministry of Education and Science as a coordinator implements European Social Fund project "The development of education quality monitoring system" (2018-2022), and as part of this project, a systemic approach to data collection is developed, indicators identifying the quality of education at all levels of HE are determined and methodology for storing and

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publishing them is developed. In order to provide in-depth data acquisition and analysis, within the project eight national-level studies are expected to be conducted in education. One of the studies planned is the longitudinal study in HE: "Competence evaluation of higher education students and dynamics of their development in the study period". The aim of this study will be to clarify the main factors affecting the development of students' competences and the performance of students in the achievement of the objectives of the Latvian Smart Specialisation Strategy, to evaluate the quality of the education supply of HEIs of Latvia, research, innovation, entrepreneurial capacity, digital and global, as well as students' civil competence. In the course of the project a methodology for assessing the dynamics of competences and their development (EQF levels 6, 7, 8) is planned to be developed, to carry out two evaluations and improve the indicator system within the thematic group – learning outcomes. The developed methodology – the structure of the competence card matrix – will be applicable for describing the content of other competences and learning outcomes in HE.

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6. Evaluation of social competences in internal and external QA systems

Quality assurance in higher education

Quality assurance (QA) in HE is carried out internally and externally. Internal QA is done by HEIs themselves, including the preparation of self-assessment reports, which should comprise all study programmes provided by the relevant HEI and their respective learning outcomes.

Quality assurance in HE is stipulated by the following laws and regulations:

- Law on Higher Education Institutions (in force 1.12.1995, with the latest amendments in force since 1.01.2019);
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 795 "Regulations for the licensing of study programmes" (with the latest amendments in force since 1.01.2019);
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 794 "Regulations regarding accreditation of higher education institutions and colleges" (with the latest amendments in force since 1.01.2019).

Accreditation is done by fields of studies, not by separate study programmes. Depending on the results of evaluation, the accreditation is given either for 6 or 2 years (2 years when avoidable deficiencies have been detected).

The external higher education quality assurance **is the responsibility of the following institutions**:

Academic Information Centre – Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA)[11] ensures licensing of study programmes, accreditation of HEIs and study fields, quality monitoring and improvement. AIC is a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – INQAAHE (since October 2015), the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA (since May 2016), European Consortium for Accreditation – ECA (since June 2017), CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the United States) International Quality Group – CIQG (since January 2018) and ENQA (since 21.06.2018). As a result of ENQA evaluation, by the end of 2018, AIC has been included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR.

Higher Education Quality Assurance Council ensures strategic management and planning of the organisation of licensing of study programmes, accreditation of HEIs and study fields by AIC. The chairperson of the Council is elected by the Council for the term of five years. The composition of the Council includes State Secretary of MoES, Director of AIC, chairperson of the Council of Higher Education, Chairperson of Latvian Rectors' Council, Chairperson of Association of Latvian Colleges, Director General of Employers' Confederation of Latvia, President of Student Union of Latvia, Chairperson of Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees, a representative of Association of Art HEIs of Latvia, Chairperson of Latvian Council of Science, Chairperson of Management Board of Latvian Agriculture Organisation Cooperation Council, a representative of Council of National Economy, Chairperson of Council of Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, President of Latvian Medical Association, and a representative of a foreign accreditation agency registered in EQAR. The secretarial tasks of the Council are undertaken by AIC.

Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)[12] during the licensing of study programmes or the accreditation of study fields, at the request by AIC, provides information on HEIs,

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[11] Website of the AIKA. See: http://www.aika.lv.

[12] Website of MoES. See: http://izm.gov.lv.

which are included in the State and MoES registers. Following the receipt of a copy of the decision made by the study accreditation or licensing commission, it provides AIC with a license or, as the case may be, a certificate of study field accreditation, as signed by the minister of education and science.

Council of Higher Education (CHE)[13] examines the application of a HEI on its accreditation, makes the decision on the accreditation of HEI or its refusal, and forwards the decision to MoES for the approval, as well as approves the methodology for the assessment of HEIs, as developed by AIC, and publishes the methodology on its website. CHE is also entitled "to examine the materials regarding the assessment and accreditation of a study field implemented by any higher education institution" and "to request extraordinary accreditation of any higher education institution or study field"[14]. CHE is an independent organisation, the 12 members of which are approved by the Parliament (*Saeima*) for the term of four years. The composition of CHE includes the minister of education and science (ex-officio) and one delegated representative from Latvian Academy of Sciences, Association of Art HEIs of Latvia, Association of Education Managers of Latvia, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Association of Latvian Colleges, Latvian Rectors' Council, Association of Professors of Latvian Higher Education Institutions, Employers' Confederation of Latvia, Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees, Student Union of Latvia, as well as local governments and other HEIs founded by other legal and natural entities.

Latvian Council of Science, at the request of AIC, submits a report on doctoral study programmes submitted for licensing, as provided for in Section 16, Paragraph 7 of the Law on Scientific Activity[15] (2005).

Mapping of the study programmes

The mapping of the study programmes helps in monitoring the compliance of learning outcomes of study courses with aim of study programme. Matching of learning outcomes has also been incorporated as an external quality assessment requirement in the accreditation process of study fields.

Mapping allows monitoring:

- how each study course fits into the study programme and ensures achievement of the results of the study programme;
- how all the courses included in the study programme ensure the achievement of the results of the whole study programme;
- that the most important results of the study programme are achieved in the programme's compulsory courses;
- that the achievement of the results of the study programme takes place in a logical and sequential manner.

Grading system

The degree of achievement of learning outcomes including social competences is evaluated on the 10-point scale or with a grade "passed/not passed". The degree of achievement of

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[13] Website of the CHE. See: http://www.aip.lv.

[14] Section 71, Paragraph 1 and 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (in force since 1.12.1995; the recent amendments came into force on 1.04.2018). See: http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=37967.

[15] Law on Scientific Activity (in force since 19.05.2005; the recent amendments came into force on 1.11.2017). See: https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=107337.

the learning outcomes during the final examination of the study course may be evaluated with an assessment of "passed/not passed" if the amount of the course of study is not more than two credits. "Passed/not passed" can also be used when assessing degree of achievement of learning outcomes in the course of tests specified in the study course, which are not final examinations of the study course.

The grades of achieved learning outcomes including social competences in the 10-point scale are as follows:

- outstanding (10) – knowledge, skills and competences go beyond the requirements of study programmes and study courses, as well as demonstrate the capacity to implement independent, artistic research-based projects and understanding of deep problems;
- excellent (9) – knowledge, skills and competences fully comply with the requirements of the study programme and the acquisition of the study course, acquired the skills to use gained knowledge independently;
- very good (8) – full compliance with the requirements of the study programme and the acquisition of the course, but there is not enough understanding on certain issues to use knowledge independently to address more complex problems;
- good (7) – in general, the requirements of study programmes and study courses are met, but sometimes there is a lack of ability to use the acquired knowledge independently;
- almost good (6) – the requirements of study programmes and learning courses are met, but at the same time there is a lack of understanding of the problem and a lack of skills to use acquired knowledge;
- average (5) – a study programme and study course have been completed in general, but there is a lack of awareness of some problems and a lack of skills to use acquired knowledge;
- almost average (4) – the study programme and the study course have been completed in general, but there is insufficient understanding of some basic concepts, there are considerable difficulties in the practical use of the acquired knowledge;
- poor (3) – knowledge is superficial and incomplete, the student is unable to use it in specific situations;
- very poor (2) – there is superficial knowledge only about individual problems, most study programmes, study modules or study courses have not been learned;
- very, very poor (1) – there is no understanding of the basic problem of the subject, there is hardly any knowledge of the course, study module or study programme.

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7. Social competences in higher education institutions

7.1. Case study for Riga Stradiņš University (RSU)

7.1.1. Short description of RSU

Riga Stradiņš University (RSU) is a public university located in the city of Riga, Latvia. It was established in 1950. RSU has approximately 9100 students and it offers 69 study programmes.

RSU is the only university in Latvia that has traditionally been closely integrated within the health care system, providing work force for the medical institutions of Latvia. Currently nine faculties at the RSU offer Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's degrees, professional and continuing education programmes. RSU has increasing proportion of foreign students.

7.1.2. Methodology of the case study

The aim of the pilot study was to explore what was the understanding of the concept of social competences and how their development was integrated into study process of RSU (learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, quality assessment system).

The following research questions were defined:

- How is the concept of social competences understood at RSU?
- How does RSU implement the development of social competences in study process?

In order to achieve the set goal, the succeeding tasks were formulated:

1) To study literature and sources on understanding of the concept of social competences and implementation of their acquisition in HE.
2) To explore the internal and external regulatory acts that conceptually mention the need for development of social competences.
3) To explore the views of students regarding the development of social competences in study process.
4) To explore the views of teachers regarding the development of social competences in study process.
5) To explore the views of administrative staff regarding the development of social competences in study process.

The research methods used:

- focus group discussion with students;
- structured interviews teachers and/or administrative staff. See interview and discussion questions in Annex 1.

The reasearch base: RSU teachers (10), administrative staff (3), and students (12).

The pilot study carried out by RSU has displayed views of representatives from both social sciences and health care programmes. All the courses of study implemented by RSU were considered: Living nature science; Internal security and civil protection; Information and communication sciences; Education, pedagogy and sports; Psychology; Social welfare; Sociology, political science and anthropology; Law science; Management, administration and real estate management; Health care.

7.1.3. Reasons for selecting RSU for research

RSU has good quality indicators in licencing and accreditation processes, as well as experience in designing learning outcomes based study programmes and mapping learning

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outcomes. This is one of the largest HEIs with wide variety of study programmes, of which some are unique in Latvia.

7.1.4. Findings of the interviews, discussions and documents analysis

According to the results of pilot study, development of social competences in study process mostly was considered as self-evident, positive side effect, which means that credit points are not allocated and a legitimate basis for shaping social competences has not been created. However, social competences may not be considered less important, because no extra attention is paid to the development of social competences in the study content and process.

While development of social competences is not a direct goal of study process, they are deeply integrated into curriculum and form an integral part of study process. For an instance, the development of critical thinking, reasoning, analytical skills, argumentation of opinion, self-presentation, listening and conversational skills are highly emphasized in study process, and these are also important components for developing social competences.

Various activities are purposefully organised and implemented to promote social competences (without emphasising that these are social competences). The examples of these activities are as follows:

- Health Express (educating the public about health issues);
- Student Radio;
- Academy of Researchers[16];
- Intelligence Academy[17];
- academic seminars organised by the RSU self-government of the students;
- work placements at companies/sectoral institutions;
- group work;
- delivering presentations individually and in group;
- conducting social qualitative and quantitative research;
- representatives of various health-care sectors in a simulation-based approach practice manipulating and communicating with the patient and their family, as well as collaborating with colleagues in an interdisciplinary team at the Centre for Medical Education Technology.

Analysis of HEI's documents indicated that shaping specific professional competences and general competences is equally important, in order to promote the development a person in a comprehensive manner, regardless of the sector.

Not only in teaching literature, but also in the discourse of local and international HE policies, legitimate importance has been attributed to social competences and a large niche of content is devoted for it. In order to successfully integrate social competences in study process, understanding of not only for the content of the concept but also its interpretation and reflection in HE policy documents in needed.

"Civic skills" are based on knowledge of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and citizens' rights, including how they are expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in international declarations and how they are applied at different institutions at local, regional, national, European and international levels. "Civic skills" include knowledge of contemporary events, as well as main events and trends in the history

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[16] The aim of the Academy of Researchers is to present basic principles for the development of scientific works to students before they are provided within the framework of study programmes, the various developments in the scientific sector, and to provide an opportunity to acquire the practical skills that will be necessary for the development of scientific works.

[17] Intelligence Academy – a project implemented for RSU students and graduates, which was realized six academic years in a row with the aim of providing participants with a core of knowledge and skills that is not provided by academic education but are vital to personal growth and can be a key to success in career development (for example, knowledge of art, culture, music, etiquette, behavioural culture, dance skills, etc.).

of state, Europe and world. In addition, an understanding should be developed for social and political movement goals, values and policies. Knowledge of European integration and the structure, main goals and values of the EU, as well as understanding of diversity and cultural identities in Europe are also essential.

7.1.5. Conclusions

As the result of the pilot study of theoretical and practical concept of social competences at RSU, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The idea of social competences in HE was widely conceptualized by the respondents of pilot study. Document analysis on social competences in HE highlights acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes for a current student, future graduate which would allow them to achieve individual goals effectively, the implementation of which would not create a social collision but adequately fit into the current social context.
- An analysis of the theoretical literature, secondary research, normative documents and empirical data obtained in the pilot study has led to a conclusion that explanation of the term of social competences in the context of HE has specific accents, which are characteristic to the education framework. Social competences within the context of HE can be defined as the ability of an individual to evaluate and understand the capacity and boundaries of their individual knowledge, skills and attitudes in the cognitive, attitude and behaviour-activity dimension to other individuals, groups and societies. Individuals need to prove themselves in a competent work, reflecting on the process and result. They also need to identify the necessary growth that is appropriate to the current situation and context and through effective self-learning achieve newly emerging growth and goals that are in harmony with the social environment.
- Research of local and international documents related to HE consistently state the need to promote aspects of social competences, both in the content of education and in the process. Guidelines and accents of different level documents, which are categorized into life skills of 21st century – "ability to learn" and "social and civic skills" which covers the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for effective operation. The operational aspect of developing social competences in policy documents is not prescribed in detail, but delegated to HEIs within the framework of academic freedom.

Figure 2. The concept of the social competences
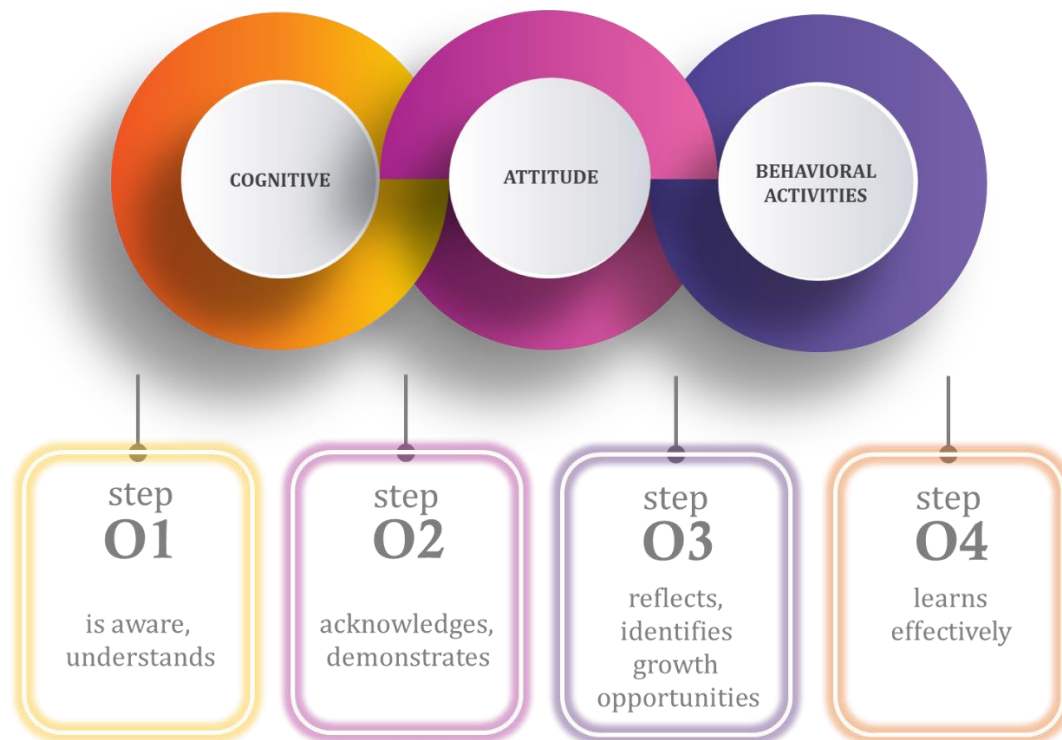
Source: Dr. paed. Nora Jansone-Ratinika – RSU pilot study

- Students, teachers and administrative staff of RSU regarding the development of social competences in study process concluded:
  - Cognitive, social and instrumental aspects of the social competences in all respondents' groups are mentioned as similar, which indicates a generally uniform understanding of the concept at all RSU management levels, as well as its undisputed topicality in the context of HE and labour market. However, the accentuated aspects of representatives of different sectors indicate that the interpretation of the concept vary by professional disciplines which, on the one hand, confirms the importance of social competences in any branch of science, but, on the other hand, strengthens the need to define and implement social competences in a sector-specific way.
  - All the respondents agreed that effective development of social competences in study process is a question of participation for all parties involved – students, teachers, support and administrative staff, which allows to conclude that in this process the majority of responsibility is not to be delegated to individual target groups, but to be implemented throughout RSU community in a collegial manner of both raising the awareness of the content of the concept, its importance in HE and the implementation of its learning in study process.
  - However, opinions of the respondents about implementation of social competences in study process reveals divisive and systematically fragmented practices in all study programmes, which demonstrates that teaching approaches and allocation of greater role of social competences in study process are essential and necessary.

7.1.6. Recommendations

At institutional level

- A comprehensive recommendation was expressed among all respondent groups, which states that concept of social competences should be explained in different levels

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(students, teachers, supporting staff, management, and cooperation partners), its meaning should be promoted and a common understanding should be consolidated in organizational culture. Separate informative activities could also be organised among industry representatives – by identifying the specific skills and contexts of the sector.

- To analyse the content of RSU study programmes from a perspective of social competences and identify the practice of other local and international HEIs in developing social competences.
- The heads of academic departments, directors of study fields and study programmes, deans of faculties should emphasize the role of social competences in study courses.
- Teachers in their study courses could didactically improve study process with more emphasis on teamwork, communication, expressing opinions, allowing the social competences to develop in spontaneity and improvisation. Social competences should not be divided in a separate block but integrated with study subject and professional skills. To provide the opportunity for students in guidance of teachers to explore themselves in the study courses, because study process is mainly focused on the study of the target group of a particular profession.
- For teacher-student communication to be more personalised and effective, student-teacher ratio should be reduced in order to implement a more individual approach.
- To modernize study process and enrich it with digital tools and proportionally implement real contact between students and teachers.
- To strengthen collegiality and cooperation among students, teachers, support staff, management and cooperation partners in various thematic corporate activities (conversation evenings, trips, hiking, etc.).
- To create a positive atmosphere and conditions for teachers at the management level, rather than to define the rules how to standardise the exercise of developing social competences. With reduced use of top-down approach allowing teachers to understand, at the real level of learning, how to implement social competences most effectively. To keep in mind their development as an absolute necessity, to define accents, to prioritize but not to moderate it with indicators.
- Methodological support for positioning and implementing both institutional policies and teaching approaches should be provided in order to ensure targeted development of social competences in study process.
- In-depth analysis of HE content and process should be conducted, as well as an agreement on the gradual implementation of institutional and sectoral joint objectives in terms of developing social competences should be reached for the systematic succession of social competences in study process.

At national level

- An agreement should be made in HE sector in Latvia on a single understanding of the concept HEIs.
- More attention should be paid in the subject of social competences when organising continuing education activities of teachers by promoting the improvement of teaching competence of teachers in its definition, implementation and evaluation.
- Other HEIs should also form departments similar to Centre for Educational Growth in RSU, which is responsible for improving the competence of teachers and implements various activities for the development of study quality.
- Increase the proportion of practice in study process opposite to theory to enrich students' practical experience.
- To activate the involvement of student self-government in the development of social competences.

At European level

- To review the courses of study programmes by allocating part of structured study process to social competences which are directly expressed in credit points. Informal

extra-curricular activities or additional study activities could be turned into formal part of the study programme including allocation of credit points for participation.

- To strengthen intercultural competences by building more international teams, as the intercultural environment will be the model of the professional environment in which the graduates will have to compete.
- The quality of professionally oriented social competences in study process would increase if potential graduates had a clearer idea of HE and consider it as a high-quality privilege with adequate prestige and added value to professional growth.

7.2. Case study of School of Business and Finance (BA)

7.2.1. Short description of BA

The BA School of Business and Finance (BA) is one of the leading, self-financing business HEIs in Latvia, located in the city of Riga, Latvia. It was founded in 1992 as a Banking College under the Bank of Latvia. BA has approximately 1490 students and it offers 14 study programmes.

BA provides study programmes of all three Bologna cycles including short cycle. Its main focus is on finance and business studies. All study programmes have incorporated company traineeship as a compulsory requirement. Study process has gained international dimension. Every year BA receives international full-time and exchange students, which ensures a diverse student community.

7.2.2. Methodology of the case study

The methodology of the research carried out at BA is consistent with the common methodological setting. The data collection was carried out in parallel:

1) Document analysis of HEI was conducted by the HEI representative according to a list of questions. See Annex 1. Thereafter, collected data were processed and analysed.
2) One online questionnaire for HEIs' administrative staff and teachers, and one online questionnaire for students was developed. See questionnaires in Annex 2 and 3. Electronic data collection at HEI was organised by an internal coordinator. Respondents participated in the research on an individual basis.
3) Two representatives – one from administrative staff and one teacher – participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.
4) Two students participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.
5) Structured interviews with two HEI recommended teachers were conducted. Each interview was at least one hour long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See interview questions in Annex 1.

Anonymity of data was ensured at all stages of data acquisition.

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7.2.3. Reasons for selecting BA for research

BA has good quality indicators in licencing and accreditation processes. The HEI has a thorough experience in developing learning outcomes based study programmes, and participating international projects. BA offers study programmes of a specific economic sector. This is a small HEI with partial state funding.

7.2.4. Findings of the documents analysis and survey, discussions, interviews

Findings of the case study are divided in two main parts: document analysis and results of survey, discussions, and interviews in a summarized way. Although not clearly indicated the latter section relates to document analysis, too. More detailed information about the results of survey are outlined in Annex 5. The results of focus group discussions are reflected in Annex 6 (teachers) and Annex 7 (students).

Findings of the document analysis

The following regulatory enactments of BA were analysed with regards to social competences:

- Strategy of BA School of Business and Finance 2018-2023;
- Action plan for the development of academic staff of BA School of Business and Finance;
- Code of Ethics of BA School of Business and Finance;
- Internal Rules of Procedure of BA School of Business and Finance;
- Regulations regarding Identification and Prevention of Plagiarism BA School of Business and Finance;
- Guidelines for the development and defence of independent and research studies;
- Teacher's manual.

The document analysis focused on the internal regulatory enactments that regulate the activity of BA and the responsibility and business norms of its students and teachers, thus stating the importance of social competences (such as respect, loyalty, cooperation, academic integrity etc.). The compliance with these regulations is regulated by the same documents stating the procedure for actions of not following the regulations.

The Strategy of BA School of Business and Finance 2018-2023 contains a chapter "Assurance of 21st century skills in study programmes" defining the main skills that will be of great demand in 2020, including social competences (e.g. cooperation with others, intercultural communication, interdisciplinary communication).

The Action plan for the development of academic staff of BA School of Business and Finance states the need to develop new skills and competences (e.g. ability to implement leadership effectively).

The document analysis revealed that there is no separate policy set for defining, developing and assessing social competences at the BA; they are rather incorporated within study process and the HEI policy.

The goal of higher education and the role of HEIs in society

According to the results of interviews, the goal of HE is positioned at two levels: the externally targeted and self-growth of the individual and society. HE provides the ability of students and graduates to implement and realize own self-education, which allows achieving higher goals in their career.

Conceptual understanding of social competences and their role in higher education and professional activity

HEI representatives compared acquisition of HE with social competences – the individual must be socially competent enough to be able to obtain a diploma. The development of social skills is important at all levels of education and is a rolling theme in any content that strengthens the ability to collaborate effectively through socialization. Social competences

are ability to cooperate. In the context of HE, a student in a similarly minded environment begins to learn to cooperate better, to learn from each other, to respect the needs of the others, to think together about their future career. In HE, social competences are part of entire study process. For example, in a group work where the division of responsibilities is formed.

The reflection of HEIs on their responsibility for promoting the development of social competences of a student and the division of responsibilities between stakeholders

Teachers believed that in the development of social competences HEIs play an important role and every employee of the institution with whom the student socializes is involved in this process. However, primarily the teacher is responsible for the student's personality and professional development; therefore, they promote the student's active learning. HEI has a responsibility to ensure development of social competences, as they will be necessary in work situations. HEI should take the responsibility and successfully implement promotion of social competences for teachers and HEI administrative staff. BA offers various activities, which help in developing social competences, i.e. unions, sports clubs, choir.

HEIs' representatives pointed out that the student undertakes to demonstrate their social competence by signing the contract, in compliance with HEIs' rules, and to begin their development with the first day of study. Directors of study programmes play a major role in strengthening students' social competences, when meeting with students and solving various issues.

Current situation in developing social competences in study courses and practice examples – factors influencing social competences development and ideal initiatives to improve learning in study courses

As an example of good practice, group work in study courses and content discussions were highlighted. The development of social competences mostly takes place indirectly and incidentally and are not specifically targeted in the study courses. In some study courses, students are encouraged to leave their comfort zone, which helps them to adapt to different situations, thus also improving their social competences.

Challenges and consequences of developing social competences in higher education and professional perspective

Representatives of HEIs pointed out that students lack basic social skills – respect discipline, respect others, plan times and meet deadlines, take responsibility, deliver promises, say truth, and adequately express feelings. Digitization was described as the greatest challenge for interpersonal communication. Due to digitalization, people have less eye-to-eye conversations and they are often communicating through text messages, which leads to loss necessary skills for communication, being unable to express their opinion clearly.

Reflection of social competences in international, national, institutional documents

Although the HEIs representatives pointed out that all legislative documents are known and clear, they did not recall specific documents, except that HEIs have internal frameworks, which define the rules of academic honesty, ethics, and internal rules.

7.2.5. Conclusions

- Although HEIs play an important role for students' development of social competences, BA focuses students' professional development; therefore, development of social competences is not a primary goal.
- BA develops social competences through various extra curriculum activities;
- Development of social competences mostly takes place indirectly as their development is not significant objective of study process.
- Digitalization is a major obstacle for development of social competences as people spend a lot of time communicating through digital means.

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7.2.6. Recommendations

At institutional level

- To develop competence-based study courses.
- To integrate more social contacts in the activities of study process, in which students should communicate with society and employers.
- To align study process proportion for face-to-face and virtual courses.
- To construct study process in project-based approach.
- To adapt international practice in developing social competences in HEI.
- To develop the application of innovative teaching and learning methods in study courses.
- To initiate an additional motivation system for teachers in creating teaching innovations.
- To integrate more social sciences study courses into study programmes.
- At the level of the study programme, to think about minimizing standardised tasks and more about modelling non-standard situations for students.
- To include more case solving into study courses, which also allows social competences to be reflected.
- More intensive involvement of students in developing the content of studies.
- To strengthen work management skills of own and others in the study courses, which will develop leadership skills.
- To strengthening corporate, culture for HEI to build on common values and settings.

At national level

- It is necessary to strengthen students' involvement in international projects, which promote the development of intercultural cooperation skills.
- To organise teaching practice experience exchange activities for teachers within HEI and inter-institutional level.
- To increase the use of Erasmus+ opportunities in study programmes.
- To more actively involve employers in the development of study programmes.
- To emphasize more at national and institutional level that strengthening social competences at the level of HE is essential.
- To emphasize the need to include social competences in the occupational standards more actively.

At European level

There were no recommendations given at European level.

7.3. Case study of University of Latvia (LU)

7.3.1. Short description of LU

University of Latvia (LU) is a public university established in 1919, located in the city of Riga, Latvia, and is the largest HEIs in Latvia. LU has approximately 17 000 students and it offers 151 study programmes.

LU has 13 faculties and over 20 research institutes and independent study centres, is one of the largest comprehensive and leading research universities in the Baltic countries. LU provides study programmes of all types and of all three Bologna cycles including short cycle.

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7.3.2. Methodology of the case study

The methodology of the research carried out at LU is consistent with the common methodological setting. The data collection was carried out in parallel:

1) Document analysis of HEI was conducted by the HEI representative according to a list of questions. See Annex 1. Thereafter, collected data were processed and analysed.

2) One online questionnaire for HEIs' administrative staff and teachers, and one online questionnaire for students was developed. See questionnaires in Annex 2 and 3. Electronic data collection at HEI was organised by an internal coordinator. Respondents participated in the research on an individual basis.

3) Two representatives – one from administrative staff and one teacher – participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.

4) Two students participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.

5) Structured interviews with two HEI recommended teachers were conducted. Each interview was at least one hour long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See interview questions in Annex 1.

Anonymity of data was ensured at all stages of data acquisition.

7.3.3. Reasons for selecting LU for research

LU has good quality indicators in licencing and accreditation processes. This is one of the largest HEIs with wide variety of study programmes with partial state funding. LU has a leading role in Latvia in providing study programmes in the field of education.

7.3.4. Findings of the documents analysis and survey, discussions, interviews

Findings of the case study are divided in two main parts: document analysis and results of survey, discussions, and interviews in a summarized way. Although not clearly indicated the latter section relates to document analysis, too. More detailed information about the results of survey are outlined in Annex 5. The results of focus group discussions are reflected in Annex 6 (teachers) and Annex 7 (students).

Findings of the document analysis

The following regulatory enactments of **LU** were analysed with regards to social competences:

- Development Strategy for the University of Latvia (LU) 2016-2020 (2016);
- By-law of the University of Latvia study programmes and further education programmes (2017)
- Procedures for the development and updating of courses at the University of Latvia (2018);
- Procedures for organising examinations of study courses at the University of Latvia (2015);
- Regulations regarding academic integrity at the University of Latvia (2013);
- Code of Academic Ethics of the University of Latvia (2008);
- Regulations for curators of students of the University of Latvia (2015/2017);

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- Procedures for ensuring the activities of senior students of the University of Latvia (2016).

The document analysis revealed that the definition of the term "social competences" does not appear in the regulatory enactments of LU; however, its ideological concept is incorporated and defined within the documents. For instance, "By-law of the University of Latvia study programmes and further education programmes" (2017) defines "general skills" that contains also social competences (interpersonal communication, digital, social and civic activities, etc.).

Several documents (Code of Academic Ethics, Regulations regarding academic integrity) indicate the principles and norms of individual's ethical activity that are important elements of social competences (e.g. free, respectful exchange of ideas).

The goal of higher education and the role of HEIs in society

Representatives of HEIs marked two directions regarding the aim of HE – academic growth and professional specialization. HE should promote both general personality development and focus on a specific sector, profession and competence. HEIs were described as the main forces of change in a society that both generate new knowledge and help adapting and transforming existing developments in the world.

Conceptual understanding of social competences and their role in higher education and professional activity

Social competences were interpreted as intelligence – a set of knowledge and skills that are necessary for everyday socialization in society, while performing specific tasks in a particular professional field. According to the results of interviews, students should use their social competences so they can study, finish their studies and later work successfully.

The reflection of HEIs on their responsibility for promoting the development of social competences of a student and the division of responsibilities between stakeholders

HEIs representatives believed that HEIs play a major role in strengthening intelligence, where one of the components are social competences. The content integrated into the study courses, the form of learning and the environment, in which students are located, gradually helps them to acquire cultural norms. Regarding the results of interviews, one of the HEI representatives mentioned percentage breakdown – if the level of social competences is not so high, the amount of responsibility of HEI for their development is up to 50%, while HEI involvement for students with higher level is about 20-30%. HEIs agree that socio-emotional personality development should take place in every study course. The interviewed HEI representative believed that lack of support for new students, including strengthening social and learning competences, is a major reason why many students drop out after the first study year.

Current situation in developing social competences in study courses and practice examples – factors influencing social competences development and ideal initiatives to improve learning in study courses

Teachers admitted that developing social competences in study courses is a creative initiative of teachers, i.e. others pay more attention to it, while others – less. One example of good practice is the student mentor project, where older students support the younger ones; thus, both sides strengthen and acquire new skills. The HEI representatives agreed that, for the most part, the evaluation process only takes into account the specific subject-specific knowledge and skills, as social competences are highly subjective and difficult to be objectively assessed. Teachers highlighted that study process should be organised in such a way that students must cooperate with each other as much as possible.

Challenges and consequences of developing social competences in higher education and professional perspective

Lack of teachers' competence was mentioned as one of the main challenges both during interviews and discussions. Teachers try to find the most effective learning solution in a

more creative way and simultaneously follow the requirements of state education standards. However, ensuring development of social competences is still a challenge in the study courses provided by teachers, who do not attach importance to social competences and consider them a secondary skill comparing to professionally specific skills, because the development of social competences takes place naturally. Still, study process is rarely integrated into environment, which does not allow meaningful implementation of the development of social competences. Thus, according to the results of interviews, often the development of social competences is in the hands of students themselves.

Reflection of social competences in international, national, institutional documents

The representatives of LU mentioned that there are certainly such documents, which between the lines highlight the importance of developing social competences, but could not name which documents in particular. Characteristically, European level documents are likely to contain similar issues as regards social competences, which would be reflected in national and HEI level documents. The only concrete initiative mentioned is the EU Fund Specific Support Objective projects coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science, whose guidelines may refer to a relevant topic.

7.3.5. Conclusions

- LU mostly focuses on development of professional skills; therefore, development of social competences is not separately emphasised in study process.
- While development of social competences is not primary goal of study process, teaching/learning process still strengthen students' intelligence, including social competences.
- Lack of support for new students is believed to be one of the reasons why students drop out after the first study year.
- Development of social competences mostly is a creative initiative of teachers; therefore, development level of students' competences may vary.
- Good practice example is the student mentor project, where older students provide necessary support for the younger ones.

7.3.6. Recommendations

At institutional level

- To change approach to teaching/learning process in which students are more active in their learning process.
- To increase proportion of general knowledge, skills and competences in the subject-oriented knowledge, skills and competences.
- To strengthen equivalent relationships between students and teachers based on mutual respect, support and exchange of experience.
- To promote communication at the level of inter-faculty, interdisciplinary programmes so that there is no conceptual collision and unequal attitude in the implementation of study process in entire HEI.
- When possible to substitute part of lectures with thematic discussions.
- At the level of the study programmes, to consider (when possible) reducing standardized tasks and modelling non-standard situations for students.
- More study courses should include case studies that also reflect social competences.
- To provide continuing education of academic staff in terms of developing students' and their own social competences.
- To further develop summer school practices and student engagement in research.
- To use more technological solutions in completion of assignments to strengthen students' co-responsibility for collaborative content creation and investment of equivalent work.
- To strengthen corporate culture in HEI to build on their shared values and settings.

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- To organise additional courses for students, for example, time management, financial literacy, etc.
- More attention should be given to the process of first year students' adaptation in studies to strengthen students' learning and socialization skills in the academic environment.

At national level

- Study programme directors should be more involved in bringing together the content of studies and in promoting interpersonal communication between teachers.
- To develop HEI cooperation in the implementation of study courses, which would allow sharing resources and combine expertise.
- To reduce the volume of groups in practical classes and lectures to facilitate the exchange of views and the interactivity of content acquisition.
- To organise teaching practice experience exchange activities for teachers within HEI and inter-institutional level.
- To more popularise use of Erasmus+ opportunities in study programmes.
- To incorporate the necessity of developing social competences into the normative regulation of Latvia in order to be able to state their legal place in the study programme and not to seek additional opportunities and resources for their implementation.

At European level

There were no recommendations given at European level.

7.4. Case study of Riga Technical University (RTU)

7.4.1. Short description of RTU

Riga Technical University (RTU) is the oldest technical university in the Baltic countries established in 1862. It is a public university located in the city of Riga, Latvia. RTU has approximately 14 000 students and it offers 145 study programmes.

RTU has long lasting traditions, meanwhile advanced teaching/learning methods; new technologies and innovative approach provide the university with the opportunity to ensure excellence in research. RTU consists of 9 faculties. RTU collaborates with the enterprises of major industries in Latvia and abroad as well as with state and local government institutions. RTU provides study programmes of all types and of all three Bologna cycles including short cycle.

7.4.2. Methodology of the case study

The methodology of the research carried out at RTU is consistent with the common methodological setting. The data collection was carried out in parallel:

1) Document analysis of HEI was conducted by the HEI representative according to a list of questions. See Annex 1. Thereafter, collected data were processed and analysed.
2) One online questionnaire for HEIs' administrative staff and teachers, and one online questionnaire for students was developed. See questionnaires in Annex 2 and 3. Electronic data collection at HEI was organised by an internal coordinator. Respondents participated in the research on an individual basis.
3) Two representatives – one from administrative staff and one teacher – participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded,

transcripted and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.

4) Two students participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.

5) Structured interviews with two HEI recommended teachers were conducted. Each interview was at least one hour long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See interview questions in Annex 1.

Anonymity of data was ensured at all stages of data acquisition.

7.4.3. Reasons for selecting RTU for research

RTU has good quality indicators in licencing and accreditation processes, as well as evident experience of designing learning outcomes based study programmes. This is one of the largest HEIs in Latvia with wide variety of study programmes with partial state funding. RTU has a leading role in Latvia in providing STEM study programmes.

7.4.4. Findings of the documents analysis and survey, discussions, interviews

Findings of the case study are divided in two main parts: document analysis and results of survey, discussions, and interviews in a summarized way. Although not clearly indicated the latter section relates to document analysis, too. More detailed information about the results of survey are outlined in Annex 5. The results of focus group discussions are reflected in Annex 6 (teachers) and Annex 7 (students).

Findings of the document analysis

At RTU in total 52 documents and regulatory enactments were analysed with regards to social competences.

The document analysis reveals that the term "social competences" as a separate definition is not presented. However, the development and assessment of social competences is a part of descriptions of study programmes and study courses and have an important role in study process. For example, Bachelor or Master level study programmes should include study courses of humanities and social sciences that develop communicative and organizational skills in the amount of at least 7.5 ECTS credit points.

The goal of higher education and the role of HEIs in society

HEIs' representatives highlighted the strengthening of academic and professional knowledge as a goal of HE, emphasized the development of thinking skills and generalise the individual's handling of life situations as a task for HEIs. HE has the complex task to address the dilemma between ensuring specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that will be needed immediately by a professional on the first working day and developing competences that will be useful for them in the long-term and allowing adapting to all future challenges.

Conceptual understanding of social competences and their role in higher education and professional activity

HEIs representatives recognised that the concept of social competences is difficult to define and categorize skills involved. However, the understanding of the concept of social competences was explained as the ability to manage own activities and cooperate effectively with others in different situations of professional and social life. HEI representative characterised social competences into three groups: 1) skills for communication with other people, 2) ability to cooperate – distribution of works, 3) communication skills in terms of language skills, writing skills, ability to express, ability to present.

The reflection of HEIs on their responsibility for promoting the development of social competences of a student and the division of responsibilities between stakeholders

HEI representatives were convinced that the basic characteristics of the personality at the time the person starts studies have already been developed, while study process can evolve additional skills needed for professional activity in different aspects. Fundamental personality changes at HE level no longer occur. On the one hand, the teachers said that at the level of HE the development of social competences plays a secondary role, but on the other hand, they actualize students' problems to make a decision, communicate structured and logical information, collaborate, etc., which must be solved in study process and which in itself are essential components of social competences. HEI representative emphasized that most social competences cannot be developed in lectures, teachers can only teach the basics while rest of knowledge and skills students have to learn in working environment.

Teacher and student are mainly responsible for the development of social competences; however, the teachers would like to receive more support from the study programme directors and pedagogical methodological support from education specialists.

Current situation in developing social competences in study courses and practice examples – factors influencing social competences development and ideal initiatives to improve learning in study courses

The teachers emphasized the lack of motivation in the acquisition of study courses, while not applying communication skills as tools of cooperation and work accomplishment to social competences. According to the results of interviews, the concept of social competences appears to be very complex and incomprehensible, but when specific teaching situations are presented and specific skills are mentioned, the development of social competences in study courses is essentially described. The teachers said that the acquisition of specific general skills is interfered by lack of experience, inability to see interconnections, analyse own actions, communicate regularly with own colleagues and teachers' ability to discipline themselves and organise others. HEIs representatives highlighted the need for the development of professional and academically applied language in order to be able to create the logic of thought, choose correct terms, arrange them in successive grammatical sentences and communicate effectively. Teachers emphasized that students mostly lack the ability to learn individually and socially, structure their activities, plan time, and cope with stress. Teachers themselves lack knowledge in teaching and psychology to find effective approach to each group and student and, in turn, to teach students how to seek individual way when meeting people in their professional activity.

Challenges and consequences of developing social competences in higher education and professional perspective

For students and sometimes teachers themselves it is difficult to understand that there is no area where social competences would not be necessary, regardless how technical the chosen field of study would be. Sometimes those students who have chosen to study in a highly technical field are protesting against the development of social skills because they do not consider them necessary. HEI representative mentioned part-time teachers who are employed in the industry as a challenge. For them, developing students' social competences is of secondary importance because they are very focused on the presentation of industry-specific content.

The teaching competence of the teachers, which does not allow to freely vary and improvise in study courses according to the needs of the students, was also mentioned as a challenge. HEI representatives pointed out that one of the obstacles is that teacher has to combine scientific and teaching activities. A large number of teachers are engaged in teaching work only partly due to their workload requirements, while they mostly focus on scientific work.

Reflection of social competences in international, national, institutional documents

HEI representatives did not mentioned specific documents that might mention priority of developing social competences in HE, but referred to occupational standards and assume that projects could be announced at European level to strengthen the forming of social competences.

7.4.5. Conclusions

- Goal of HE is to strengthen academic and professional knowledge of students.
- Social competences are described as communication skills with other people, ability to cooperate and communication skills in terms of language skills, writing skills, ability to express and present.
- Basic social competences should already be developed before a person starts studies, and fundamental changes in their social competences no longer occur.
- There are no areas where social competences are not necessary, including highly technical study fields.
- A large number of teachers mostly focus on scientific work and engage in teaching due to their workload requirements, which in turn slows down the development of their teaching competence.

7.4.6. Recommendations

At institutional level

- To plan the time for study course expediently and use it meaningfully.
- To further develop feedback loops that would strengthen students' ability to express a reasoned opinion.
- To invest more in the development of teachers' competence.
- The content of psychology should be more integrated into the content of study programmes, which would allow developing interpersonal contacts more fully.
- To put emphasis on assessment skills of self and others in study courses.
- To develop innovative teaching/learning methods in study courses.
- To reduce the scope of groups in practical classes and in lectures to facilitate the exchange of views and the interactivity of content acquisition.
- To initiate a supplementary motivation system for teachers in the creation of teaching innovation.
- To integrate more social sciences study courses into study programmes.
- At the level of the study programme, to consider reducing standardised tasks and modelling non-standard situations for students.
- To further develop summer school practice and student engagement in research.
- To use more technological solutions in completion of study tasks to strengthen students' co-responsibility for collaborative content creation and investment of equivalent work.
- To strengthen corporate culture in HEIs to build on students and teachers' shared values and settings.
- To separate the pedagogical work from the academic work in order to allow for the higher qualified to focus on science, while colleagues in lower academic positions could focus more on the pedagogical work.

At national level

- To develop HEIs' cooperation in the implementation of study courses, which would allow sharing resources and combining know-how.
- To organise teaching practice exchange activities for teachers within HEI and at inter-institutional level.
- To more popularise use of Erasmus+ opportunities in study programmes.

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At European level

There were no recommendations given at European level.

7.5. Case study of Transport and Telecommunication Institute (TSI)

7.5.1. Short description of TSI

Transport and Telecommunication Institute (TSI) is the largest university-type accredited non-state technical higher education and scientific establishment located in Riga, Latvia. It was established in 1999, although it also incorporates the core of a technical and aviation school, which dates back to 1919. TSI has approximately 2750 students and it offers 20 study programmes.

Main directions of academic activities include electronics and telecommunications, information technology and computer science, economics, management and business administration, transport and logistics. TSI conducts diversified scientific work in research. TSI provides study programmes of all three Bologna cycles.

7.5.2. Methodology of the case study

The methodology of the research carried out at TSI is consistent with the common methodological setting. The data collection was carried out in parallel:

1) Document analysis of HEI was conducted by the HEI representative according to a list of questions. See Annex 1. Thereafter, collected data were processed and analysed.
2) One online questionnaire for HEIs' administrative staff and teachers, and one online questionnaire for students was developed. See questionnaires in Annex 2 and 3. Electronic data collection at HEI was organised by an internal coordinator. Respondents participated in the research on an individual basis.
3) Two representatives – one from administrative staff and one teacher – participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.
4) Two students participated in the focus group discussion and expressed their opinion on the development of social competences in HE. The number of participants was limited to eight in order to form a proportionate representation of HEIs, and everyone would have the opportunity to speak on each question. Focus group discussion was two hours long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See discussion questions in Annex 1.
5) Structured interviews with two HEI recommended teachers were conducted. Each interview was at least one hour long and audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using content analysis method. See interview questions in Annex 1.

Anonymity of data was ensured at all stages of data acquisition.

7.5.3. Reasons for selecting TSI for research

TSI was founded by a legal person and it has good quality indicators in licencing and accreditation processes. In terms of students, this is a small HEI, which operates without state funding. TSI has an important role in providing study programmes of transportation and logistics field.

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7.5.4. Findings of the discussions, interviews and documents analysis

Findings of the case study are divided in two main parts: document analysis and results of survey, discussions, interviews in a summarized way. Although not clearly indicated the latter section relates to document analysis, too. More detailed information about the results of survey are outlined in Annex 5. The results of focus group discussions are reflected in Annex 6 (teachers) and Annex 7 (students).

Findings of the document analysis

The following regulatory enactments of TSI were analysed with regards to social competences:

- Study regulations;
- Regulations for the management of study directions and programmes;
- Regulations for the management of study courses;
- Descriptions of study courses in the study course register;
- Descriptions of study programmes.

The regulatory enactments of TSI do not require indicating separately the types of competences to develop, nor to describe their assessment process. Social competences, in accordance with the knowledge, skills and competences of the relevant LQF level, are described in the learning outcomes of each study programme. The learning outcomes for each study course, as well as their assessment system are included in the description of the study course.

Not all study courses include development of social competences; however, there are separate courses where social skills and competences are highly important and are assessed accordingly. For instance, the study course Group Project the student ability to work and cooperate within group is assessed. The same refers to other courses, such as, Art of Presentation, Psychology of Relations, etc. Moreover, during the work placement in companies students' ability to assume individual and professional decisions in specific conditions and present their work results are assessed.

The goal of higher education and the role of HEIs in society

HEI representative emphasized that the goal was to prepare new professionals who will enter labour market and be part of society. The goal of HE was described in a concise manner and at the same time, very broadly – the renewal of society. This was explained as follows: to provide academic and scientific competences rather than social, and create a young professional.

Conceptual understanding of social competences and their role in higher education and professional activity

The concept of social competences was characterised as an ability to integrate into society and work place. According to the interviews, social competences involve how a person is able express themselves, present, communicate with colleagues and integrate into collective. Social competences can also be expressed as leadership, when a person wants to lead a collective and achieve their goals.

The reflection of HEIs on their responsibility for promoting the development of social competences of a student and the division of responsibilities between stakeholders

The task of developing social competences is more applied to family and school, less to HEIs. The task of HEI is to strengthen professional competences; however, the reflection of the HEIs' representatives concluded that much of the professionalism is also social. Regarding the results of interviews, depending on the level of qualifications, more attention should be paid to the development of social competences. In general, several HEI representatives considered that so much attention in HE needed to be paid to the development of social competences, because they have not been formed at previous levels of education.

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Current situation in developing social competences in study courses and practice examples – factors influencing social competences acquisition and ideal initiatives to improve learning in study courses

Since TSI has not specifically identified the need to develop social skills in study courses, this was a matter of individual choice for each teacher. Interviewees could not state about HEI in general and in study programmes whether and how social competences were developed.

The case studies at group level allow improving social skills such as decision making, risk assessment and prevention, achievement of goals, process management. HEI representative highlighted that presentation skills were part of some lectures, but they were not acquired in a separate study course. The assessment also mostly takes into account the final product itself, rather than the level of acquisition and demonstration of social competences. However, HEI's representatives were convinced that social competences should be more developed in social sciences study courses.

Challenges and consequences of developing social competences in higher education and professional perspective

According to the results of interviews, the greatest challenge was the rapid change in the world which comes with development of technologies and digitalisation. Technical skills prevail over social skills, which makes communication and cooperation difficult. In addition, teachers are not competent enough to change their operational approaches and find an effective way to work with different generations and help compensate for missing skills. As one of the obstacles was also mentioned the lack of time for discussions in study process. Representatives noted that employers highly valued socially competent employees, but HEIs lack the resources necessary to fully meet their demand.

Reflection of social competences in international, national, institutional documents

HEI representatives were not able to mention specific documents, as well as expressed view that theoretical settings are not primary in education practice.

7.5.5. Conclusions

- The goal of HE is to provide academic and scientific competences rather than social competences.
- Development of social competences is mostly attributed to schools and family, while HEIs can only supplement them.
- To what extent social competences are developed in study courses mostly depends on each teacher.
- Most significant development of social competences should take place in social sciences study courses.
- Development of technologies and digitalisation is one of the major obstacles for developing social competences as they make communication and cooperation more difficult.

7.5.6. Recommendations

At institutional level

- To organise joint group work by integrating several study courses.
- To integrate gamification more into study process, which would enable the development of thinking and acquiring necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- To integrate more modelling of situations in study courses.
- To integrate more debates as a learning method in study courses, as it develops judgement, the ability to formulate own opinion, to oppose respectfully and reasonably.
- To substitute some lectures with thematic discussions.
- To develop the application of innovative teaching/learning methods in study courses.

- To initiate an additional motivation system for teachers in creating teaching innovations.
- To integrate more social sciences study courses into study programmes.
- To include more case studies into study courses which would also reflect social competences.
- To further develop summer school practice and student engagement in research.
- More intensive student involvement in the development of study content.
- To strengthen management skills of own and others in study courses, which would develop leadership skills.
- To strengthen corporate culture in HEI to build on its shared values and settings.
- To implement educational activities on a community scale for the development of social competences.
- To initiate joint large-scale projects in sectors where students and teachers can participate.

At national level

- To organise teaching practice exchange activities for teachers within HEI and at interinstitutional level.
- To more popularise use of Erasmus+ opportunities in study programmes.

At European level

There were no recommendations given at European level.

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8. Findings and results

Overall findings and results concluded from all HEI case studies

More detailed information about the results of survey are outlined in Annex 5. The results of focus group discussions are reflected in Annex 6 (teachers) and Annex 7 (students).

The goal of higher education and the role of HEIs in society

Both students and teachers divide the goal of HEIs into three pillars: teaching, learning, research, which are equally important for personal development, as well as, was stated as the goal of HE. According to the results of survey with students, the main aims of HE are to provide human resources for labour market (72.8% of respondents), educate society (71.3% of respondents), develop personality of students (52.9% of respondents) and be the driving force in science (42.6% of respondents). Meanwhile, administrative staff and teachers emphasized educating society (72.3% of respondents), providing human resources for labour market (69.1% of respondents), developing personality of students (65.9% of respondents) and being the driving force in science (64.9% of respondents).

When describing the goal of HE – improvement of the competence of new professional, teachers and students when discussing the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes of the 21st century, distinguish between three dimensions which cannot be separated from each other, but which are mutually complementary:

1) cognitive – skills to supplement existing knowledge, to think meaningfully, critically, logically, universally, reflect, solve complex logical operations, to integrate creativity into the specific content of the industry;
2) social – readiness to accept and meet new challenges, ability to adapt to new global conditions, to build contacts and collaborate, express one's opinion, to be open, to represent and protect values, to be emotionally intelligent in communication and adequately understand one self's emotionality, assimilate and represent identity of an educated person;
3) instrumental – skilfully and operationally implement professional activity by combining equal proportion of theory and practice and by attesting one's comprehensive education, by increasing one's competitiveness, by the use of theoretically acquired tools for enriching experience and intelligence.

In the opinion of the teacher's role of HEI in public is to be its educator – spread existing and create new knowledge, to be the driving force in science, regional development, to be agent of change, to be the centre of intelligence, creativity, new competitiveness, the emergence of the new developments and social relations.

Conceptual understanding of social competences and their role in higher education and professional activity

Between the groups of students and teachers, there were extensive discussions about the content of the concept. The teachers in focus group pointed out that in Latvian using the term in plural is incorrect, as an individual can be socially competent which includes wide set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which in turn are learning outcomes of HEIs – what the students acquires in study process. When defining the concept of social competences students jointly emphasize the responsibility of the individual for their influence, behaviour that is morally ethical (to live up to the great values of the European Union – equality, tolerance, justice, freedom), its consequences, influence on society, cooperation with others, qualitative use and transfer of skills to others. In students' point of view that can be characterized as skills to understand their individual approach in different sociocultural

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situations by being open not categorical, hearing, interdisciplinary assessing, adjusting, making responsible decisions for themselves and people around them.

Teachers' opinions varied from a certain belief in the content of the concept of social competences, which dates back 50 years, to the answer that they have not thought about it, so no unequivocal belief was observed that the concept is understood as homogeneous. Students and teachers tended to call social competences soft, general skills and account for a set of content-intensive skills, knowledge and attitudes: presentation skills, tolerance, communication elements, understanding of different behavioural patterns, computer skills, leadership, perception of what kind of activities are/are not acceptable in a particular society, ethical and etiquette standards, ability to organise themselves, interact with others, manage their emotions in a balanced way, be psychologically resilient, explore their strengths, test their behavioural habits, reorganise and replenish previously acquired knowledge, skills and experience, skills to be effective. Both students and teachers highlighted the fact that the individual's social competences are shown by the ability to think critically and reflect on themselves and others. Social competences include synonyms such as emotional competence, behavioural competence, social intelligence, which includes the ability to integrate into society and professional field, the ability to adapt, improvise, perceive a huge amount of informative noise and understand what the student has learned at a HEI and professional growth of a given moment.

The students in the survey explained social competences as ability to cooperate, communicate, work in a group (44.1% of respondents), ability to fit in society and collective (13.2% of respondents), ability to learn, analyse, think (11.0% of respondents), characteristics that build a personality (10.3% of respondents), as well as social norms, behaviour (7.4% of respondents). Administrative staff and teachers in the survey explained social competences as communication and cooperation skills (36.2% of respondents), ability to fit in society and collective (21.3% of respondents), ability to learn, analyse and think (6.4% of respondents), characteristics that build a personality (6.4% of respondents), and social norms and behaviour (6.4% of respondents).

The reflection of HEIs on their responsibility for promoting the development of social competences of a student and the division of responsibilities between stakeholders

The respondents also emphasized the relevance of the development stages in terms of social competences, ranging from parenting to development of top-level social experience, which is related to person's ability to fully function in society, including their professional development.

Results of the research revealed that the greatest responsibility for the development of social competences were attributed to family and to the previous education levels, then to teachers, students themselves. According to the results of survey with administrative staff and teachers the main responsibility lies with family (marked by 91 respondents), prior education institutions (marked by 87 respondents), students (marked by 81 respondents), and teachers (marked by 81 respondents). However, all groups of respondents shared the view that there should be flexibility at any level of education and also in the professional sector. In general, teachers focus on the ideal scenario where skills have been acquired sequentially, but the process of improving personality in life is influenced by a number of factors, and therefore, especially at HE level, teachers, without lowering the quality bar, have to adapt the content and form to each student. Respondents in all groups agreed that social competences acquired and improved at HE level are very important.

The respondents in the survey prioritized the following social competences to be strengthened in HE: to collaborate, take responsibility, seek knowledge, constructively communicate in different circumstances, be purposeful, creative, self-confident, tolerant, empathic, control emotions, trust. The views expressed on the social competences that are given high and inadequate attention in HE also coincided with those reflected in interviews and focus groups. Particular attention was paid to the skills of cooperation, ability to take

responsibility, the pursuit of knowledge, creativity, sociality, communication. In turn, teachers, students and representatives of administrative staff pointed out that emotional control, empathy, trust, tolerance, co-responsibility, self-reflection in study process had to be strengthened much more.

Particular emphasis was placed on social competences of teachers themselves, which allows them to diversify ways of effectively supporting students in the development of their social competences. All respondents agreed that neither family nor any level of education could have full delegation of responsibility for acquiring the individual's social competences. Each of them is important and to some extent decisive, so successive cooperation is offered as a panacea for strengthening the overall social competences of society.

Current situation in developing social competences in study courses and practice examples – factors influencing social competences acquisition and ideal initiatives to improve learning in study courses

In all groups of respondents, the opinion was that social competences have a great impact and role, but generally, they have a rather small focus in study process and are left to the individual understanding and capacity of each teacher. During study courses, social competences are taken into consideration but they are secondary in the list of common goals and tasks. The primary factor is how teacher understands social competences and how their significance is considered. Students noted that cultural tradition in the Latvian society prevails, in which asking questions is considered as incompetence; as a result, the exchange of opinions is reduced in the context of the assessment. The same applies to reasoned criticism in both directions (teacher – student; student – teacher) which is often perceived as a condemnation, not as a valuable material for conclusions and growth. Students, like the teachers themselves, also pointed out the perceptions of social competences of different teachers as an obstacle. In their opinion, initially the initiative should come from academic staff, starting with a personal attitude and looking at the student as a colleague.

Results of the survey with students indicate that social competences in study courses were mainly developed through presentations, group work (42.6% of respondents), communication with teachers and others students (16.2% of respondents), as well as modules for development of social competences and indirectly as part of study courses (14.7% of respondents).

As the main problem teachers considered the lack of time and the fact that organisation of study process is episodic which prevents working with student repeatedly within study course even in later stages; thus, making it harder to keep up with their growth. However, the timing and diversity of study courses and teachers' time frame was also reflected as an advantage for students, with the possibility of gaining a great variety in a relatively short time.

The teachers emphasized the high capacity in different professional roles, which does not allow devoting a lot of time to consider ideas on how to more effectively implement the development of social competences in study courses. The lack of teachers' competence in this issue was also considered as an obstacle by all groups of respondents. Teachers' representatives pointed out that often faculty still seemed to think they needed to do work for the students, but the teacher must be masterful in order to transfer the workload to the students themselves. The teachers should not give a signal that they have intentionally planned to develop social competences of students in a certain part of the course, but through the assignment, teachers should get feedback that the student has understood why the teacher organised the activity in a particular way and their development has taken place. The teachers emphasized that the importance and use of technology has also affected direct social contacts which development is becoming increasingly more difficult – eye to eye contact, formulate full sentences, explain. For example, obtaining full information from patient/client is complicated if conversation skills are weak.

As positive examples, teachers and students mentioned the written and verbal expression of opinion, comments about life subjects, also describing attitudes, comparisons – so that they are interesting not only from a subject point of view but also express a certain view of life, the involvement of social media, the involvement of student co-operation outside the HEI, participation in research, analytical activities, interaction with the employer and other situations the student can experience in their thematic field throughout their life. This makes the study environment not only more active and saturated, but also allows the student to create a certain compass, in the cases and environment in which they go through. All target groups mentioned similar activities, which, at the same time, contribute to the development of social competences, are already practised in study process and need to be extended more widely. Respondents mentioned following examples: tasks aimed at analysis and finding interconnections, development of presentations and public presentations, work in teams and pairs, joint creation of innovation products, project work involving students of different levels (bachelor, master, doctoral level), tasks in study courses tailored to learning the knowledge and skills needed for professional activity, student representations, extracurricular activities, solving conflicts which are staged by the teachers for the purpose of teaching, tasks in which students have to communicate with each other intensively, sharing of ideas and opinions between teachers and students which leads to conflicts of opinion, excursions, exchange of experience trips to institutions outside HEIs, separate study courses for improvement of communication competence which teaches theoretical bases, involvement outside the organisation of study activities, group course senior commitment, student organizations.

Challenges and consequences of developing social competences in higher education and professional perspective

All groups of respondents admitted that HE still had greater emphasis on theory and science. Therefore, modernization of HE initiated today is increasingly focused on the synergies between HEIs and industry representatives, with the aim of making the graduates of HEIs more effective in acquiring the competence of young professionals by purposefully increasing their preparedness for labour market.

One of the challenges is also that there is not always enough proof of the students' level of competence. Social competences are mostly integrated into the content of all study courses and are not deciphered as a separate block. Their acquisition is not strictly structured, so they are implemented both in defined learning outcomes and indirectly, intuitively. On the one hand, this is to be welcomed; on the other hand, responsibility for providing social competences is blurred. Teachers believed that not all aspects could be included in measurable indicators so that they do not restrict self-expression, creative improvisation and not create a threat of bias. Students emphasized that in each study programme an essential holistic view of the content and process could be observed that from the beginning encourages thinking in categories "I and public", "my industry and society". Students recognized that theoretical knowledge base was essential, though nothing sharpens skills as well as real activity and communication.

If a single, definition of social competences was adopted and the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be learned were identified, they could be strengthened in each study course, also by identifying the overall proportion to be acquired in the study programme. Teachers are still rather confined to their study course without knowing the content that students learn in other courses. This creates both, a risk of overlapping and a risk of shortage. Study programme directors also have the challenge of clarifying what social skills can be acquired in each study programme, in which courses they are more highlighted and how their acquisition can be recorded.

The surveyed students noted that major obstacles for developing social competences in study process are lack of time in study process (58.1% of respondents), no feedback loops (44.9% of respondents), no understanding about concept of social competences (44.1% of

respondents), reluctance to develop social competences (34.6% of respondents), digitalisation (33.1% of respondents), and other priorities in HE (31.6% of respondents). Meanwhile, the administrative staff and teachers in the survey as main challenges for developing social competences in study process marked lack of understanding about concept of social competences (59.6% of respondents), underdeveloped feedback loops (51.1% of respondents), lack of time in study process (47.9% of respondents), reluctance to develop social competences (29.8% of respondents), other priorities in HE (28.7% of respondents), digitalization (25.5% of respondents), and lack of financial resources (25.5% of respondents).

In general, the lack of a common understanding of the notion of social competences and the lack of consistency in the implementation of its acquisition by all respondent groups was identified as the main obstacle. Lack of time was mentioned as the second most common challenge, as full-time acquisition of subject-oriented content lacks resources in terms of credit points and contact hours.

Reflection of social competences in international, national, institutional documents

The respondents' answers were categorised in two parts – in terms of existing practice and desirability. The representatives of all HEIs acknowledged that the institution's internal regulatory framework did not specifically address the development of social competences, but this is reflected in the study programme's descriptions of goals and tasks. The most of the respondent groups rarely mentioned specific document names, but more conceptualized their type, level. The representatives of all groups mentioned that there are a number of European Commission documents related to the development of the Bologna process, lifelong learning, quality monitoring, which emphasize the importance of social competences in HE and labour market. Examples of the documents mentioned in all datasets are: New Skills Agenda for Europe; Higher Education Guidelines 2014-2020; European Commission Memorandum; European Qualifications Framework (EQF); Regulations on the education classification of Latvia; knowledge, skills and competences descriptors appropriate to Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) level; study programme descriptions; Working Together for Growth and Jobs: A New Start for the Lisbon Strategy. Brussels: European Commission; Law on Higher Education Institutions; Cabinet of Ministers Regulations; School 2030 methodological materials; OECD National Skills Strategies; ET2020 Working Group on Modernisation of Higher Education; strategy of HEI; European Commission recommendations on key competences (2018); the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; occupational standards.

Some respondents mentioned that they also based their activities on specific documentation relevant to their field, which highlight the pillars of current education and professional practice and future development. In general, students and teachers were more oriented towards operationally practical content documents, while administration representatives were more focused on conceptual approaches that delegate landmarks and provide information on international analysis of HE. The question was also answered in the sense of desirable or hypothetical effective practice. The representatives of all groups acknowledged that there should be documents on the European, national and institutional level that included development orientations and a conceptual view of things that could be reflected and implemented at different levels according to its capabilities and institutions, best known for its environment and resources.

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9. Conclusions

The conclusions outlined below mostly refer to the development of social competences in higher education. Findings of the research did not reveal particular aspects of assessment and validation of social competences. The only exception was a statement: "for the most part, the evaluation process only takes into account the specific subject-specific knowledge and skills, as social competences are highly subjective and difficult to be objectively assessed" (see case study of LU). Although some further conclusions impart notions of assessing and validating social competences, they are not highlighted or separated.

9.1.   At institutional level

- On the one hand, it is not meaningful and also fully possible to define regulations for developing social competences in a certain volume, level, thematic area; however, a unified setting on the need for learning and understanding of content would enable them to be fully strengthened in study programmes and study courses.
- The targeted development of social competences in study process requires both the methodological support of institutional policy-making and the positioning and implementation of pedagogical approaches.
- HEIs often need contributing to compensate for the skills that have not been fully acquired at previous levels of education, which reduces the time and volume of resources for the achievement of the basic tasks of HE, which would be useful in professional activity.
- The wave of digitalisation, both in education and in professional work, is particularly important for strengthening the social competences of both teachers and students.
- Teachers need up-to-date knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to effectively promote the development of social competences of students from different generations and from previous levels of education in study programmes.

9.2.   At national level

- There is a lack of common understanding about:
    - concept of social competences themselves;
    - general social competences necessary for 21st century professional;
    - levels of acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes in HE;
    - settings for the development of social competences in study programme and study courses;
    - succession of development of social competence in study courses;
    - division of responsibilities between fields and teachers in study programme;
    - the necessary evidence of the development of social competences in the assessment, which would allow conclusions to be drawn on the necessary development at the level of the study programme and study courses.
- Along with the implementation of the project "Competence approach in learning content" (School 2030) implemented by the National Centre for Education in general education programmes, succession of content acquisition is expected to improve. The aim of the project is to develop, approbate, successively introduce such general education content and approach to teaching in ages from pre-school to secondary school in Latvia, which would result in learners gaining the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for life and would be more willing to learn meaningfully at HE levels.
- Intensive changes must take place in both the learning and teaching dimensions, which requires growth for secondary education learners, students and teachers. In HE, the Ministry of Education and Science has also initiated a number of EU funded development projects, which aim to: reduce fragmentation of study programmes, strengthen resource

sharing; strengthen academic staff of HEIs in areas of strategic specialisation; ensure better management in HEIs and modernise study programmes. The acquisition of high-quality social competences in the education system requires the development of all its levels, including teacher education, which provides for the promotion of the competences of teachers and academic staff.

9.3. At European level

- There is a lack of experience exchange at international level and definition of the content of the concept of social competences at European level and the list of knowledge, skills and attitudes contained therein.
- There is a lack of common setting for the priority of emphasizing social competences in the objectives of the Bologna process.
- There are no international guidelines to help strengthening Europe's common practice in the development of social competences in different levels of study programmes.

10.   Recommendations

10.1. Local and international recommendations to improve the development of social competences

At institutional level

- The development of social competences in study programmes would be facilitated by the development of teaching guidelines for study programme directors, and content and the different types of social competences for teachers.
- Teachers need teaching methodological support in order to effectively integrate social competences into sectoral study courses; therefore, at institutional level, a separate body should be established to promote the philosophical settings for the teaching and learning of HEIs and to help implement them in teaching practice in all study programmes.
- To organise study process in a simulation-based approach that allows testing professional tasks in a safe environment by gradually and repeatedly training skills.
- Study process should be more closely connected with the professional practice of the field in order to strengthen the social competences that are especially needed in labour market. This can be achieved through the organisation of meaningful study practices, traineeships for teachers, involvement of industry professionals in the implementation of study courses, joint research projects leading to innovation for practice.
- To actualise the importance of developing social competences in study courses for heads of academic structural units, study field directors, study programme directors and deans.
- To create a structure in HEIs institutionally that is responsible for improving the competence of teachers and implements various activities for the improvement of study quality and provides conceptual and methodological support for the development and consolidation of the common teaching and learning approach.
- To reduce student-teacher ratios in order to implement a more individual approach and, thus, teacher-student communication would be more personalised and effective.
- To modernize study process and enrich it with digital tools and also proportionally implementing real contact between students and teachers.
- To review the courses of study programmes by allocating part of the structured study process to social competences which are directly expressed in credit points. In addition, informal extracurricular activities or additional study activities could be turned into formal part of the study programme and allocating credit points for participation.
- To increase the proportion of practice in study process opposite to theory in order to enrich students' practical experience.
- To create a positive atmosphere and conditions for teachers at the management level, rather than to define the rules how to standardise the exercise of developing social competences. With reduced use of top-down approach allowing teachers to understand, at the real level of learning, how to develop social competences most effectively. To keep in mind their acquisition as an absolute necessity, to define accents, to prioritize but not to moderate their development with indicators.

At national level

- HE sector of Latvia should agree on a common understanding of the concept of social competences and its interpretation in HEIs. Systematic succession of social competences in study process requires an in-depth analysis of content and process, agreement on the gradual implementation of common goals in the institutional and sectoral fields.

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- In the formulation of learning outcomes at the national level, attitudes should be emphasized and innovative teaching solutions should be supported in study process.
- More attention should be paid to the topic of social competences in the continuing education activities for teachers, by facilitating the improvement of teacher's pedagogical competence in its definition, implementation and evaluation.
- To review the regulatory framework for study programmes by providing more flexibility in the implementation of the content of studies, thereby providing an opportunity to adapt to the needs of students.
- To invest additional targeted resources so that the development of social competences can be updated at another level.

At European level

- The content of the concept of social competences and their knowledge, skills and attitudes should be defined and their acquisition should be mapped in existing study programmes, study courses and learning outcomes at European level.
- Strengthening the priority of developing social competences in the objectives of the Bologna process should be emphasized.
- A comprehensive recommendation at international level involves clarifying the concept of social competences themselves at different levels (students, teachers, support staff, management, cooperation partners, education policy makers, and employers), promoting their importance and strengthening common understanding in Europe, countries and cultures of organisations. There should be a single conceptual setting and practical targeted education activities, which would identify the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and contexts of a particular industry.

10.2. Local and international recommendations to improve the assessment of social competences

There were no recommendations.

10.3. Local and international recommendations to improve the validation of social competences

There were no recommendations.

11. Executive summary

The main conclusions of the research were that there is a lack of common understanding about the concept of social competences. The respondents listed skills that are part of social competences, e.g. ability to cooperate, communicate and integrate in a society.

As regards assessment, the necessary evidence of developed social competences cannot be observed, which creates a challenge both when designing study programmes and implementing study process. Thus, development of social competences cannot be evaluated directly and no credit points may be allocated.

Overall results of the case studies indicated that during study courses social competences were taken into consideration, but they are secondary in the list of common goals and tasks comparing to professional development and science.

As the main problems teachers considered lack of time and the fact that organisation of study process is fragmented by study courses which prevents working with student repeatedly within study process even in later stages; thus, making it harder to keep up with the students' growth. An important factor is how teachers understand social competences and how their significance is considered. Hence, teachers' ability to foster development of students' social competences often depends on their own social competences. Therefore, teachers' further education in terms of developing students' social competences should be provided, as well as teachers should be ensured with methodological support.

Although social competences are integral part of study process, HEIs put greater emphasis on professional study subjects. The modernization of HE initiated today is increasingly focused on the synergies between HEIs and industry representatives, with the aim of making the graduates of HEIs more efficient in acquiring the competences of young professionals by purposefully increasing their preparedness for labour market.

As regards to conclusions of each case study, several core recommendations were drawn:

- At institutional level, the development of social competences in study programmes should be facilitated by the development of pedagogical guidelines for study programme directors, and content and the different types of social competences for teachers.
- At national level, HE sector of Latvia should agree on a common understanding of the concept of social competences and its interpretation in HEIs, as well as more attention should be paid to the topic of social competences in the continuing education activities for teachers, by facilitating the improvement of teaching competence in its definition, implementation and evaluation.
- At European level, strengthening the priority of developing social competences in the objectives of the Bologna process is integral. The content of the concept of social competences and their knowledge, skills and attitudes should be defined and their development should be mapped in existing study programmes, study courses and learning outcomes.

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12. Annexes

Annex 1. Interview and focus group discussion questions

Annex 2. Questionnaire for teachers and administrative staff (in Latvian)

Annex 3. Questionnaire for students (in Latvian)

Annex 4. Overview of HE qualifications in Latvia

Annex 5. Results of the survey

Annex 6. Results of focus group discussion with teachers (and/or administrative staff)

Annex 7. Results of focus group discussion with students

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Annex 1. Interview and focus group discussion questions

Focus group discussion questions for students:

1. How would you characterize the aims of higher education and what is the role of HEIs in society as a whole?
2. How do you understand the concept of "social competence"?
3. Describe whether and how your social competences have been developed so far in study process.
4. Please list specific examples of good practice – which were the main factors influencing development of social competences?
5. What challenges do you see in the development of social competences in study process and what could be the consequences in the professional perspective?
6. What would be your suggestions in improving the development of social competences in HEI? What would be the most effective ways of learning for you?

Interview and focus group discussion questions for teachers:

1. How would you characterize the aims of higher education and what is the role of HEIs in society as a whole?
2. How do you understand the concept of "social competences"? How would you describe it in context of higher education?
3. To what extent do you think that the HEIs responsibility is to promote the development of student's social competences? Which parties and at what proportions share development of social competences?
4. Could you give some examples of good practice or idealistic initiatives to improve development of social competences in study courses?
5. What challenges do you see in the development of social competences in study process and in your professional perspective?
6. Can you list some documents on national or institutional level that emphasizes the importance of developing social competences in higher education?
7. In your opinion, what initiatives do you think should be implemented locally and internationally to promote the development of social competences in higher education?

Interview questions for study programme directors:

1. How would you characterize the aims of higher education and what is the role of HEIs in society as a whole?
2. How do you understand the concept of "social competence"? How would you describe it in context of higher education?
3. To what extent do you think that the university's responsibility is to promote the development of student's social competences? Which parties and at what proportions share development of social competences?
4. Could you give some examples of good practice or idealistic initiatives to improve development of social competences in study courses?
5. What challenges do you see in the development of social competences in study process and in your professional perspective?
6. Can you list some documents on national or institutional level that emphasizes the importance of developing social competences in higher education?
7. In your opinion, what initiatives do you think should be implemented locally and internationally to promote the development of social competences in higher education?

Interview questions for document analysis of HEIs

1. Which HE regulations were included in the analysis?
2. Does the legislation of HEI reflect the explanation of "social competences" or concepts that are ideologically close to it? If so, please give examples of the legislation.

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3. Does the legislation of HEI reflect the need to evaluate the acquisition of "social competences" and describe the assessment process? If so, please give examples of the legislation.
4. Does the legislation of HEI define actions to promote the development and improvement of social competences? If so, please give examples of the legislation.

Annex 2. Questionnaire for teachers and administrative staff (in Latvian)

Paldies, ka veltāt laiku anketas aizpildīšanai!

Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs piedalās projektā DASCHE (*Development, Assessment and Validation of Social Competences in Higher Education*), kura mērķis ir izpētīt kāda ir izpratne par sociālās kompetences jēdziena saturu un kā tās apguve tiek integrēta studiju procesā.

Anketas rezultāti tiks izmantoti apkopotā veidā.

Anketas aizpildīšana aizņems aptuveni 10 minūtes.

Vispārīgi jautājumi

1. Kuru augstākās izglītības iestādi Jūs pārstāvat?

_____

2. Lūdzu, norādiet jomu, kuru pārstāvat.

☐ Transports un sakari

☐ Uzņēmējdarbība un bizness

☐ Izglītība

☐ Inženierzinātnes

☐ Cits (*lūgums norādīt*) _____

3. Lūdzu, norādiet savu galveno lomu augstākās izglītības iestādē.

☐ Administratīvais personāls

☐ Docētājs

Sociālās kompetences augstākajā izglītībā

4. Kāds, Jūsuprāt, ir augstākās izglītības mērķis sabiedrībā? Var atzīmēt vairākus variantus.

☐ Nodrošināt cilvēkresursus darba tirgum

☐ Izglītot sabiedrību

☐ Būt virzītājspēkam zinātnē

☐ Attīstīt studentu personību

☐ Cits (*lūgums norādīt*) _____

5. Ar ko Jums saistās jēdziens "sociālās kompetences"? Kā Jūs to skaidrotu augstākās izglītības kontekstā?

_____
_____

6. Lūgums novērtēt iesaistīto pušu atbildības pakāpi par sociālo kompetenču apguvi.

	Visvairāk atbildīgi	Atbildīgi	Maz atbildīgi	Nav atbildīgi
Ģimene				
Iepriekšējās izglītības iestāde				
Docētāji				

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Augstākā vadība				
Studenti				
Studentu pašpārvalde				
Studiju programmas vadība				

7. Lūgums nosaukt labās prakses piemērus, kā pilnveidot studentu sociālo kompetenču apguvi.

_____
_____
_____

8. Kuri, Jūsuprāt, ir galvenie izaicinājumi sociālo kompetenču apguvē studiju procesā? Lūgums izvēlēties trīs variantus.

☐ Nav attīstīta atgriezeniskās saites kultūra

☐ Nav izpratne par sociālajām kompetencēm

☐ Mācību tehnoloģisko rīku attīstība

☐ Digitalizācija

☐ Laika trūkums studiju procesa ietvaros

☐ Augstākajā izglītībā ir citas prioritātes

☐ Cilvēku vēlme attīstīt sociālās kompetences

☐ Finanšu resursu nepietiekamība

☐ Cits (_lūgums norādīt_) _____

9. Lūgums minēt starptautiska, nacionāla vai institucionāla līmeņa dokumentus, kuros uzsvērta sociālo kompetenču apguves nozīme augstākajā izglītībā?

_____
_____

10. Kādas iniciatīvas, Jūsuprāt, būtu īstenojamas, lai veicinātu studentu sociālo kompetenču pilnveidi augstākajā izglītībā?

_____
_____

11. Cik būtiskas ir sociālās kompetences, ko nodrošina augstākā izglītība?

Kompetence	Ļoti būtiska	Būtiska	Vāji ietekmē	Neietekmē izglītību
Prasme būt mērķtiecīgam				
Prasme uzņemties atbildību				
Prasme būt noturīgam pret stresu				
Prasme kontrolēt emocijas				
Prasme būt empātiskam				
Prasme uzticēties				
Prasme sadarboties				

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Prasme tiekties pēc zināšanām				
Prasme būt tolerantam				
Prasme būt radošam				
Prasme būt sabiedriskam				
Prasme būt pašpārliecinātam				
Prasme būt enerģiskam				
Prasme veikt pašrefleksiju				
Prasme konstruktīvi komunicēt dažādos apstākļos				

12. Cik liela uzmanība augstākās izglītības iestādes pārvaldībā tiek pievērsta konkrētajai sociālajai kompetencei?

Kompetence	Pievērš ļoti lielu uzmanību	Pievērš uzmanību	Pievērš maz uzmanības	Neņem vērā
Prasme būt mērķtiecīgam				
Prasme uzņemties atbildību				
Prasme būt noturīgam pret stresu				
Prasme kontrolēt emocijas				
Prasme būt empātiskam				
Prasme uzticēties				
Prasme sadarboties				
Prasme tiekties pēc zināšanām				
Prasme būt tolerantam				
Prasme būt radošam				
Prasme būt sabiedriskam				
Prasme būt pašpārliecinātam				
Prasme būt enerģiskam				
Prasme veikt pašrefleksiju				
Prasme konstruktīvi komunicēt dažādos apstākļos				

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Annex 3. Questionnaire for students (in Latvian)

Paldies, ka veltāt laiku anketas aizpildīšanai!

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Anketas rezultāti tiks izmantoti apkopotā veidā.

Anketas aizpildīšana aizņems aptuveni 10 minūtes.

Vispārīgi jautājumi

1. Kuru augstākās izglītības iestādi Jūs pārstāvat?

_____

2. Lūdzu, norādiet jomu, kuru pārstāvat.

☐ Transports un sakari

☐ Uzņēmējdarbība un bizness

☐ Izglītība

☐ Inženierzinātnes

☐ Cits (*lūgums norādīt*) _____

3. Lūgums norādīt studiju līmeni.

☐ Bakalaurs

☐ Maģistrantūra

☐ Doktorantūra

Sociālās kompetences augstākajā izglītībā

4. Kāds, Jūsuprāt, ir augstākās izglītības mērķis sabiedrībā? Var atzīmēt vairākus variantus.

☐ Nodrošināt cilvēkresursus darba tirgum

☐ Izglītot sabiedrību

☐ Būt virzītājspēkam zinātnē

☐ Attīstīt studenta personību

☐ Cits (*lūgums norādīt*) _____

5. Kas, Jūsuprāt, ir sociālās kompetences?

_____
_____
_____

6. Raksturojiet, lūdzu, vai un kā studiju procesā līdz šim tikušas attīstītas Jūsu sociālās kompetences? Lūgums minēt konkrētus piemērus!

_____
_____
_____

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7. Kuri, Jūsuprāt, ir galvenie izaicinājumi sociālo kompetenču apguvē studiju procesā? Lūgums izvēlēties trīs variantus.

☐ Nav attīstīta atgriezeniskās saites kultūra

☐ Nav izpratne par sociālajām kompetencēm

☐ Mācību tehnoloģisko rīku attīstība

☐ Digitalizācija

☐ Laika trūkums studiju procesa ietvaros

☐ Augstākajā izglītībā ir citas prioritātes

☐ Cilvēku vēlme attīstīt sociālās kompetences

☐ Finanšu resursu nepietiekamība

☐ Cits (*lūgums norādīt*) _____

8. Kādi būtu Jūsu ieteikumi sociālo kompetenču apguves pilnveidē augstākās izglītības iestādē?

_____
_____
_____

9. Cik būtiskas ir sociālās kompetences, ko nodrošina augstākā izglītība?

Kompetence	Ļoti būtiska	Būtiska	Vāji ietekmē	Neietekmē izglītību
Prasme būt mērķtiecīgam				
Prasme uzņemties atbildību				
Prasme būt noturīgam pret stresu				
Prasme kontrolēt emocijas				
Prasme būt empātiskam				
Prasme uzticēties				
Prasme sadarboties				
Prasme tiekties pēc zināšanām				
Prasme būt tolerantam				
Prasme būt radošam				
Prasme būt sabiedriskam				
Prasme būt pašpārliecinātam				
Prasme būt enerģiskam				
Prasme veikt pašrefleksiju				
Prasme konstruktīvi komunicēt dažādos apstākļos				

10. Cik liela uzmanība augstākās izglītības iestādes pārvaldībā tiek pievērsta konkrētajai sociālajai kompetencei?

Kompetence	Pievērš ļoti lielu uzmanību	Pievērš uzmanību	Pievērš maz uzmanības	Neņem vērā
Prasme būt mērķtiecīgam				

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Prasme uzņemties atbildību				
Prasme būt noturīgam pret stresu	59			
Prasme kontrolēt emocijas				
Prasme būt empātiskam				
Prasme uzticēties				
Prasme sadarboties				
Prasme tiekties pēc zināšanām				
Prasme būt tolerantam				
Prasme būt radošam				
Prasme būt sabiedriskam				
Prasme būt pašpārliecinātam				
Prasme būt enerģiskam				
Prasme veikt pašrefleksiju				
Prasme konstruktīvi komunicēt dažādos apstākļos				

Annex 4. Overview of HE qualifications in Latvia

Title of qualification in English/ Latvian	Access requirements	Nominal duration/ ECTS)	Graduation requirements	Type of awarding institution	Further pathways
LQF/EQF level 5					
First level professional higher education diploma *Pirmā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms*	Certificate of general secondary education (*Atestāts par vispārējo vidējo izglītību*) or Diploma of vocational secondary education (*Diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*)	2-3 years; 120-180 ECTS credits	State examination, including the graduation work	College or HEIs	Bachelor, professional bachelor or second level professional higher education programme, employment in the field
LQF/EQF level 6					
Bachelor's diploma *Bakalaura diploms*	Certificate of general secondary education or Diploma of vocational secondary education	3-4 years full-time; 180-240 ECTS credits	State examination, including the graduation thesis	HEI	Master, professional master or second level professional higher education programme, employment in the field
Professional Bachelor's diploma and higher professional qualification diploma *Profesionālā bakalaura diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*	Certificate of general secondary education or Diploma of vocational secondary education	Min. 4 years full-time; at least 240 ECTS credits	State examination, including the graduation thesis	HEI	Master programme, employment in the field
Professional higher education diploma and higher professional qualification diploma *Profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*	First level professional higher education diploma (*Pirmā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms*)	1-2 years. Total duration of HE studies at least 4 years; at least 240 ECTS credits	State examination, including the graduation thesis	HEI	Master programme, employment in the field
Professional higher education diploma and higher professional	Bachelor's diploma (*Bakalaura diploms*), Professional Bachelor's diploma	At least 1 year. Total duration of HE studies –	State examination, including the graduation thesis	HEI	Master programme, employment in the field

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Title of qualification in English/ Latvian	Access requirements	Nominal duration/ ECTS)	Graduation requirements	Type of awarding institution	Further pathways
qualification diploma *Profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*	(*Profesionālā bakalaura diploms*) or Second level professional higher education diploma	at least 4 years; at least 60 ECTS credits			
LQF/EQF level 7					
Master's diploma *Maģistra diploms*	Bachelor's diploma, Professional Bachelor's diploma or Second level professional higher education diploma	1-2 years full-time; at least 60 ECTS credits. Total duration of HE full-time studies at least 5 years	State examination, including the graduation thesis	HEI	Doctoral programme, employment in the field
Professional Master's diploma and higher professional qualification diploma *Profesionālā maģistra diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*	Bachelor's diploma, Professional Bachelor's diploma or Second level professional higher education diploma (after at least 4 year full-time studies)	At least 1 year; at least 60 ECTS credits. Total duration of HE studies at least 5 years	State examination, including the graduation thesis	HEI	Doctoral programme, employment in the field
Professional higher education diploma and higher professional qualification diploma *Profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*	Certificate of general secondary education or Diploma of vocational secondary education	At least 5 years; at least 300 ECTS credits	State examination, including the graduation thesis (18 ECTS)	HEI	Doctoral programme, employment in the field (after medical studies – medical residency)
LQF/EQF level 8					
Doctor's diploma *Doktora diploms*	Master's diploma (*Maģistra diploms*) or Professional Master's diploma and higher professional	3-4 years full-time; 180 ECTS credits	Doctoral exams and promotional work (doctoral thesis or set	HEI	Employment, research

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Title of qualification in English/ Latvian	Access requirements	Nominal duration/ ECTS)	Graduation requirements	Type of awarding institution	Further pathways
	qualification diploma (*Profesionālā maģistra diploms un augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*)		of scientific papers at a definite topic or a monograph)		
Professional Doctor's diploma in arts ***Profesionālā doktora diploms mākslās***	Master's diploma (*Maģistra diploms*)	At least 3 years; at least 198 ECTS credit points	State exams and development and defence of artistic work in the field of artistic activity	HEI	Employment in the field

Annex 5. Results of the survey

General Questions (for administrative staff, teachers and students)

Which HEI do you represent? (230 responses)

HEI	Number	Percentage
RTU	80	34.8
LU	65	28.3
TSI	44	19.1
BA	41	17.8

Please specify the field you represent (230 responses)

Field	Percentage
Education	31.3
Entrepreneurship and business	26.1
Engineering	25.7
Transportation and communication	12.2
Social sciences	1
Psychology	0.9
Finances	0.4
Marketing	0.4
Design	0.4
Computer science	0.4
Economics	0.4
Natural sciences and chemistry	0.4
Chemistry	0.4

Please specify your main role in HEI (230 responses)

Role in HEI	Number	Percentage
Student	136	59.1
Teacher	84	36.5
Administrative staff	10	4.3

Please specify study level (for students) (136 responses)

Study level	Number	Percentage
Bachelor	108	79.4
Masters	26	19.1
Doctoral	2	1.5

Social competences in HE (for students)

In your opinion, what is the goal of HE in society? (multiple answers possible) (136 responses)

Goal of HE in society	Percentage
To provide human resources for labour market	72.8
To educate society	71.3
To develop personality of students	52.9
To be the driving force in science	42.6
To widen contacts and vision	1.4
To be competitive in labour market	1.4

In your opinion, what are social competences? (136 responses)

What are social competences?	Percentage
Ability to cooperate, communicate, work in a group	44.1
Ability to fit in society and collective	13.2
Ability to learn, analyse, think	11.0
Characteristics that build a personality	10.3
Social norms, behaviour	7.4
I do not know	2.2
Ability to communicate in multiple languages	2.2
Professionalism	2.2
Ability to act and make decisions	2.2
Other	5.1

Please explain if and how social competences have been developed in the study courses (136 responses)

Development of social competences in study courses	Percentage
Presentations, group work	42.6
Communication with teachers and others students	16.2
Modules for development of social competences, indirect part of study courses	14.7
Social competences were not developed	6.6
Extracurricular activates	3.7
I do not know	3.7
Other	12.5

In your opinion, which are the main obstacles for developing social competences in study process? (multiple answers possible) (136 responses)

Obstacles for developing social competences in study process	Percentage
Lack of time in study process	58.1
No feedback loops	44.9
No understanding about concept of social competences	44.1

Reluctance to develop social competences	34.6
Digitalisation	33.1
Other priorities in HE	31.6
Development of technological tools in teaching/learning process	21.3
Lack of financial resources	21.3
Other	4.2

What would be your recommendations for developing social competences in HEIs?
(136 responses)

Recommendations for developing social competences in HEIs	Percentage
To include more group work activities	16.2
To communicate more in study courses	14.7
To include development of social competences in more study courses	12.5
No recommendation given	7.4
I do not know	6.6
Extracurricular activities	5.9
To restructure lecture times	4.4
To include more practical tasks	4.4
To pay more attention to acquisition of social competences	4.4
To evaluate acquisition of social competences	3.7
To develop social competences for teachers	3.7
Feedback loops	2.9
To improve quality of learning process	1.5
Other	14

Social competences in HE (for teachers and administrative staff)

In your opinion, what is the aim of HE in society? (multiple answers possible) (94 responses)

Goal of HE in society	Percentage
To educate society	72.3
To provide human resources for labour market	69.1
To develop personality of students	65.9
To be the driving force in science	64.9
Other	7.7

In your opinion, what are social competences? How would you explain them in the context of HE? (94 responses)

Meaning of social competences	Percentage
Communication and cooperation skills	36.2
Ability to fit in society and collective	21.3
Ability to learn, analyse, think	6.4
Characteristics that build a personality	6.4

Social norms, behaviour	6.4
Ability to adapt to various situations	5.3
I do not know	4.3
Other	13.8

Please evaluate the responsibility level for development of social competences (93 responses)

Responsibility level for development of social competences				
	Most responsible	Responsible	Little responsible	Not responsible
Family	**63**	28	1	1
Prior education institutions	10	**77**	5	1
Students	30	**51**	11	1
Teachers	9	**66**	17	1
Study programme directors	15	**51**	24	4
Students' self-government	5	**50**	27	11
HEI management	9	**40**	41	3

Please list good practice examples for developing students' social competences (94 responses)

Good practice examples for developing students' social competences	Percentage
Group work	35.1
Study courses	13.8
Extracurricular activities	11.7
Expression of opinion, discussions	10.6
No good practice examples to list	10.6
Practice	6.4
Other	11.7

In your opinion, what are the main challenges for developing social competences in study process? (three options could be chosen) (94 responses)

Challenges for developing social competences in study process	Percentage
No understanding about concept of social competences	59.6
Feedback loops not fully developed	51.1
Lack of time in study process	47.9
Reluctance to develop social competences	29.8
Other priorities in HE	28.7
Digitalization	25.5
Lack of financial resources	25.5
Development of teaching/learning technological tools	12.8
Other	13.2

Please list institutional, national or international documents which emphasizes development of social competences in HE (94 responses)

List of institutional, national or international documents emphasising development of social competences in HE	Number
Law on Higher Educations Institutions	4
Occupational standards	3
Internal rules of procedure	3
Strategical development documents	2
Code of Ethics	2
EU guidelines	2
Education development guidelines	2
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	2
Regulations on the education classification of Latvia	2
I do not know	45
Other	27

In your opinion, what initiatives should be implemented to develop students' social competences in HE? (94 responses)

Initiatives for developing social competences in HE	Percentage
Increased the number of group works	21.3
Development of teaching/learning methods	13.8
Competence development of teachers	7.4
Development of new study courses which would emphasize development of social competences	4.3
Increased number of contact lessons	2.1
No suggestions for initiatives were given	26.6
Other	24.5

Importance of social competences in HE

How important are social competences which are ensured by HE? (teachers and administrative staff) (94 responses)

Importance of social competences which are ensured by HE (by number of responses, in order of significance)				
	Very important	Important	Less important	No importance
Ability to cooperate	63	26	3	2
Ability to be purposeful	47	40	6	1
Ability to communicate constructively in different circumstances	49	37	5	3
Ability to take responsibility	63	22	8	1
Ability to strive for knowledge	52	33	8	1
Ability to be creative	36	48	9	1
Ability to be tolerant	31	46	13	4
Ability to be social	22	53	17	2

Ability to carry out self-reflection	38	34	16	6
Ability to be resistant to stress	26	44	21	3
Ability to control emotions	19	51	22	2
Ability to trust	20	50	20	4
Ability to be empathetic	25	41	24	4
Ability to be self-confident	21	44	23	6
Ability to be energetic	20	42	30	2

How important are social competences which are ensured by HE? (students) (136 responses)

Importance of social competences which are ensured by HE (by number of responses, in order of significance)				
	Very important	Important	Less important	No importance
Ability to cooperate	82	48	6	0
Ability to be purposeful	74	54	7	1
Ability to take responsibility	77	50	8	1
Ability to be stress resistant	71	56	9	0
Ability to communicate constructively in different circumstances	74	53	8	1
Ability to strive for knowledge	69	57	9	1
Ability to be tolerant	38	82	13	3
Ability to control emotions	57	61	18	0
Ability to carry out self-reflection	32	84	17	3
Ability to be social	45	69	20	2
Ability to be self-confident	51	63	21	1
Ability to be creative	42	70	21	3
Ability to be energetic	41	63	26	6
Ability to trust	31	63	35	7
Ability to be empathetic	26	61	45	4

How much attention is being paid to each specific social competence in HEIs? (teachers and administrative staff) (94 responses)

Attention being paid to each specific social competence is HEI (by number of responses, in order of significance)				
	A lot of attention	Attention	Some attention	No attention
Ability to cooperate	27	47	15	5
Ability to strive for knowledge	27	43	18	6
Ability to be creative	20	47	20	7
Ability to be purposeful	16	50	23	5
Ability to take responsibility	15	51	21	7
Ability to communicate constructively in different circumstances	13	53	19	9
Ability to be social	7	48	29	10
Ability to be self-confident	9	41	29	15

Ability to be energetic	5	42	31	16
Ability to carry out self-reflection	7	39	30	18
Ability to be tolerant	2	37	43	12
Ability to be stress resistant	4	24	41	25
Ability to control emotions	3	25	44	22
Ability to trust	1	27	53	13
Ability to be empathetic	1	26	45	22

How much attention is being paid to each specific social competence in HEIs? (students) (136 responses)

Attention being paid to each specific social competence is HEIs (by number of responses, in order of significance)				
	A lot of attention	Attention	Some attention	No attention
Ability to cooperate	45	84	7	0
Ability to strive for knowledge	42	69	23	2
Ability to take responsibility	32	76	24	4
Ability to communicate constructively in different circumstances	40	61	32	3
Ability to be social	36	63	33	4
Ability to be purposeful	23	73	35	5
Ability to be creative	27	63	38	8
Ability to be tolerant	17	71	41	7
Ability to be self-confident	19	59	51	7
Ability to carry out self-reflection	20	58	47	11
Ability to be energetic	19	46	57	14
Ability to be stress resistant	18	45	59	14
Ability to trust	13	50	54	19
Ability to be empathetic	6	46	59	25
Ability to control emotions	14	37	62	23

Annex 6. Results of focus group discussion with teachers (and/or administrative staff)

1. How would you characterize the aims of higher education and what is the role of HEIs in society as a whole?

Several teachers emphasised that the role of HE is to educate young specialists and develop their personalities, provide them with knowledge and skills to be used in their work, as well as teach them to learn lifelong. The first goal of HE is science and to direct science, as for development of knowledge, it is important to learn every two to three years; thus, lifelong learning is the second purpose of HE. Since learning occurs during all lifetime, – and HE is for adults, too – purpose of HE is adult education, providing knowledge for adults in terms of their work. One of aims of HE, while working closely with science, is to prepare specialists for labour market, who know what to do and how to communicate, and when necessary complement their knowledge. Therefore, HE has to ensure lifelong learning. HE has to develop personality of students, so they are useful for society and able to think ethically.

To summarize, the discussants pointed out four main aims of HE: 1) to educate young specialists for labour market; 2) to develop science and conduct research; 3) to ensure lifelong learning as due to changes in labour market age of students is varied; 4) to foster the development of students' personality (values, ethics, soft skills, attitudes etc.).

2. How do you understand the concept of social competences? How would you describe it in context of higher education?

Teachers indicated that concept of social competences is highly complicated and unclear, it has various interpretations. Several discussants suggested "competence" to be used only in singular, because a person is socially competent, not that they have numerous social competences.

The term "social" refers to "social skills", which is very large concept. Scientists are still researching whether emotional competence is a part of social competence. The term "social" means that the concept focuses on cooperation in different ways – in studies, further work, family, developing attitudes, intercultural relations. Social competence imparts development of tolerance, and patience, communication skills, self-assessment, coping with stress, ability to assess situation, discipline.

The concept of social competences has been formed since 1960-ties and it is still under development. Social competences mean ability to cooperate and engage, adapt in social environment and society normally, be efficient and productive, achieve their goals and help others. Social competences are ability to behave properly, i.e. to be successful, in a society. Social competence also involves cognitive aspects; work in groups, reflection, self-reflection, understanding others.

A human is a social being. We all life in a society and communicate and that is social competence. Social competence is ability to get along with others; it imparts all knowledge (e.g. how to behave), skills (e.g. to communicate), and attitudes to be able to cope with other people. Social competence includes other competences, e.g. emotional competence.

According to pedagogy, a person is born with abilities, then through various situations, in family and school, these abilities is developed as skills. Only 77 social skills have been defined so far in literature. When skills are trained and person is able to transform the skills to real life, competence is formed.

Teachers pointed out that social competences are developed in earlier stages of education and family; therefore, HE has the role of refining or improving social competences in particular social environment, i.e. HEI. HE may foster the development of social competences that students already possess. Social competence is a dynamic concept that

alters in course of time, e.g. at present digital technologies have a significant impact on interpersonal communication.

Teachers highlighted the terminological issues related to the concept of "competence", since it is not clearly defined in legislation, as a result the interpretations of the term are different.

3. To what extent do you think that the HEIs responsibility is to promote the development of student's social competences? Which parties and at what proportions share development of social competences?

All discussants stated that the main responsibility of developing social competences lies with family. The teachers emphasised that although children start their education (socialisation) early in kindergarten, more attention to social competences may be provided within family as teaching staff in institutions are not capable of ensuring sufficient attention to all children.

A teacher expressed their doubts whether a HEI can assume responsibility for professionals and their actions in labour market, because students are responsible for themselves and their actions. Teachers may provide opportunity for students to acquire social competences, but students themselves learn and select what to acquire. Several teachers mentioned that in fact HE might provide students with knowledge and skills, while competence may be formed in real work environment of life situations.

4. Could you give some examples of good practice or idealistic initiatives to improve development of social competences in study courses?

A teacher pointed out that the methods of developing social competence vary by study course, e.g. in mathematics more individual work is possible rather than group work.

The most frequently mentioned example was teamwork. Large groups of students is divided in smaller teams to solve a particular issue (with clear objective and learning outcomes), students have to reach an agreement how to approach and solve the problem.

In this context, extracurricular activities – student self-government, student social life, social events – provide a great contribution, as well as participation in international mobility projects, e.g. Erasmus+ programme. One of the issues is that only young students (and not working) are engaged in these activities, as elderly students lack time and motivation.

5. What challenges do you see in the development of social competences in study process and in your professional perspective?

Several teachers highlighted that lack of common requirements and demands stipulated by teaching staff is the major challenge, as they have different views whether and which social competences should be developed in study process. Annually a HEI's representatives have discussions with employers about the skills they need to be developed, and these demands for skills are changing through the years. Designing scenarios for the development of social competences is time-consuming work.

The discussants mentioned that significant challenge is teachers' lack of social competences and their ability to foster their development in study process. Although teachers are required to participate in further education to acquire innovative skills and approaches, they often do not apply them in their practice.

6. Can you list some documents on national or institutional level that emphasizes the importance of developing social competences in higher education?

The discussants named the following documents: Law on Higher Education Institutions, documents of European Commission on lifelong learning, as well as on modernisation of HE, the new European Standards and Guidelines, ISP 9001 documents, documentation of

study process (e.g. study programmes, course programmes), as well as occupational standards.

Some of the teachers could not mention particular example of documents related to the development of social competences.

7. In your opinion, what initiatives do you think should be implemented locally and internationally to promote the development of social competences in higher education?

The discussants emphasized the necessity to improve professional and teaching competences of teachers as precondition for development of social competences in HE. Teachers should be more involved in extracurricular activities to have more interconnection with students, e.g. study visits and excursion. Both teachers and students could be involved in projects implemented by several HEIs, although often students are not motivated to participate in the projects. Joint lectures and creative workshops could be arranged.

Annex 7. Results of focus group discussion with students

1. How would you characterize the aims of higher education and what is the role of HEIs in society as a whole?

The aim of HE initially is educating society, integrate students in society and later on – in labour market. The main purpose of HE is to acquire a profession and new knowledge and skills, to become a competitive in labour market. HE should aim at ensuring skills, which would help in adapting to current changing world, because present knowledge and skills possessed by students now will be out-dated in a few years. HE provides not only more opportunities for graduates in their further development, but also ensure new specialists for labour market, who contribute to the development of their professional field.

HE provides scientific contribution to the development of country and foster common progress. As regards social competences, as more intelligent a person is, more they can give to their country, e.g. in terms of paying taxes and involving in charity. Thus, HE ensures development of not only professional competences, but also general competences.

Two types of clients may be observed for HEIs – students and indirectly employers who hire them.

Sometimes an opinion has been expressed that students are not the main actor at a university (but teachers are), and it is not correct. A student considered that role of HEIs in society has been underestimated because students may start working after first study year. HEIs should have greater role in students' daily schedule, and provide more teacher-student activities in study process.

2. How do you understand the concept of social competence?

Social competences are characteristics and skills, which are provided for students and afterwards they are able to show in their work and speciality. Social competences cannot acquired when teachers only deliver lectures or when sitting at desk. The discussants emphasized that to develop social competences; students need a practice training and real hands-on experience.

Social competences impart many skills, not only communication skills. Social competences may be developed only in interconnection with other people. For example, task of family is to teach a child to speak, if no one speaks with the child, they will not learn to speak.

Development of social competences takes time, already from kindergarten teacher have to work with children in order to develop their social competences. HE moves the development of social competences to the next level because it focuses on national processes for students to take part in political life and be interested in processes around them.

Social competences are acquired knowledge and how students are able to use them in surrounding world. Human has social competences already since birth, but they may be cultivated and improved during the lifetime and through self-education.

All discussants agreed that social competences are highly important in life, studies and work.

3. Describe whether and how your social competences have been developed so far in study process

One of the discussants mentioned that during the studies, they had teamwork, they had to present and speak in front of audience; thus, their presenting skills were developed, and learnt how to overcome fear from public performance. However, according to several students, not all HEIs ensure development of speaking and presentation skills; while some HEIs focus more on technical aspects of study field, other provide more study courses that are oriented towards development of social competences. When participating in students' self-government, students can develop their social competences.

A student representing a technical study programme admitted that their HEI do not pay great attention to the development of social competences. HEI ensures feeling of belonging to professional world, knowledge and ability to use this knowledge in communication and work.

A discussant expressed opinion that a HEI is a good environment where social competences may be developed, because students may communicate with each other, exchange opinions and listen to others. Furthermore, master level studies were more appropriate for developing social competences, as teachers were more professional.

In general, the discussants supported view that development of social competences (level and type) varies by the field of study programme, as well as by HEI.

4. Please list specific examples of good practice – which were the main factors influencing development of social competences?

A good example of developing social competences was study course of business communication. The students emphasized that applied teaching methods are highly important.

Another good example is providing opportunity for students to have a public performance. In the first study year all students had to make a presentation, which is recorded on video; thereafter video was analysed and discussed what was successful and what should be improved. This exercise was very useful in order to learn presentation skills.

When studying, students develop to cope with stress, and managing anger. At a HEI all behave and react adequately to the situation, and everyone can find a common ground in problem situations.

Several discussants highlighted that HEI usually provides different opportunities to learn and improve skills, but it depends on students themselves whether they choose to learn anything.

5. What challenges do you see in the development of social competences in study process and what could be the consequences in the professional perspective?

A discussant said that often students have to manage studies and work, which creates a lot of stress and may hinder the development of social competences, as HEIs do not focus on them.

As a significant challenge was mentioned lack of funding as HEIs do not have resources to attract more experienced and professional teachers or improve studying environment. Lack of funding for teachers' salaries is great issue because teachers are not motivated to waste their efforts. Teachers do not want to try new approaches or innovative methods.

Several students pointed out that teachers are unable to motivate students to attend lectures and be interested in study process. If students do not attend classes, they miss possibilities to acquire knowledge and skills foreseen in study programme. Some students consider that since they are paying for studies they do not need to spend their time for classes and learning. Therefore, raising students' learning motivation is highly important.

To summarize, the discussants highlighted that motivation of both teachers and students should be raised for developing students' social competences.

6. What would be your suggestions in improving the development of social competences in HEIs? What would be the most effective ways of learning for you?

More psychology should be taught in studies to develop social competences. People are diverse; therefore, everyone learn and form their competences differently. A discussant pointed out that necessity to develop social competences is evident, yet how to do that is not clear as acquisition process is very complicated and everyone learns differently.

When studying education sciences, dramatics should be included in curriculum, as teachers have to be able to perform and train their voice.

Development of social competences should be addressed at national level; the state should communicate with citizens and provide funding for developing social competences. At present some opportunities exist, e.g. free education courses, but people are not informed about them. Therefore, at national level information campaign should be arranged about developing social competences. More attention should be paid to career guidance in order to help young people selecting the most appropriate study programme and future occupation.

At bachelor level, a compulsory study subject focusing on development of social competences could be ensured involving practical activities.

HEIs could involve more in the European projects, in which social competences could be developed.