

**CERTUS**  
Policy Think Tank



# Latvia Competitiveness Report

2016

**The Higher Education  
Export Sector in Latvia:  
High Growth, High Potential**

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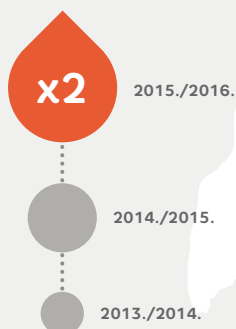
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Higher education has developed into a valuable international tradeable service. There are currently almost five million international students studying outside their home countries. The OECD estimates that global growth in international education will be 6% annually.
- The states that have had the most success in growing their international student numbers – Australia, New Zealand and Canada for example – have done this by universities and the government coming together to create a national strategy for the sector. They have identified potential export markets, created a unified branding and marketing strategy and institutionalized cooperation between universities and institutions dealing with migration and visa issues.
- Latvia's major competitors are Estonia, Latvia and Russia as well as Poland and the Czech Republic. Lithuania is the least competitive Baltic state in the export of higher education, considerably lagging behind Latvia and Estonia. Estonian universities have particularly benefited from a national strategy while Latvian universities have worked independently.
- Latvia's universities have sought to raise their international student numbers as a response to falling domestic enrollment. The World bank has estimated that by 2025 Latvia's universities will have 40% less students than in 2000.
- In contrast to Estonia, the great success that Latvian universities have enjoyed in attracting international students has been accomplished without a harmonized national strategy. In the 2015/2016 academic year there were 5,458 full-time international students studying for a qualification or degree in a Latvian higher education. The majority are undergraduates and finance their studies through their own resources. Moreover, Riga Stradins University (RSU) has the highest proportion of international students (25%) of any public university in the Baltic states, with 43% (765) of international students coming from Germany, 19% (350) from Sweden and 9% (154) from Norway.
- If the current rate of student growth is maintained there will be 17,000 international students in the 2020/2021 academic year. This would mean 250 million EUR of value added to Latvian GDP and 65 million EUR in additional tax income. Competitiveness could be raised by expanding the Ministry of Economics' role in promoting and developing a national strategy for the higher education export sector.
- Latvia's major export markets are (1) Germany and the Nordic states; (2) the CIS states (Russian, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan); and (3) India and Sri Lanka. Latvian authorities should update and harmonize the internet presence of Latvian higher education's exporters (with 43% of students choosing to study in Latvia after research on the internet), decentralize the diploma recognition process to the universities and harmonize the visa issuing process for international students between universities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.
- The city of Riga, the largest in the Baltic states, is an important factor in attracting international students to Latvia. The harmonized development of the left bank of the Daugava (Pārdaugava) as a modern campus for a number of major universities would be a catalyst to raise the competitiveness and attractiveness of Latvian higher education.

## HIGHER EDUCATION EXPORT IN NUMBERS<sup>1</sup>

### Higher education export is one of Latvia's fastest growing export sectors

It has doubled in  
size over the last  
three years



Added value of the higher  
education export sector in the  
2015/2016 academic year

**148 m EUR**

(0,61% of GDP)

direct  
**73 m EUR**

indirect  
**75 m EUR**

### 2015./2016. academic year



**5 458**

full-time international  
students in Latvia



**12,264 EUR**

average amount spent by  
one international student



**6,1 m EUR**

amount spent by family and  
friends visiting international  
students in Latvia



**3 432 EUR**

Accommodation



**3 696 EUR**

Other expenses



**5 136 EUR**

Tuition fee



**1 474 jobs**

created by international  
students in Latvia  
(10 international students = 2.7 jobs)



**20 m EUR**

taxes paid by international students

<sup>1</sup> SKDS surveyed 848 students (from a potential 4,376, or 80% of all those studying in Latvia in the 2015/2016 academic year) studying in 16 universities in Latvia. Avers, D., Gubins, S. 2016. Augstākās Izglītības eksporta ekonomiskā nozīme un ietekme Latvijā. Rīga: Domnica Certus. <http://certusdomnica.lv/agenda/augstakas-izglitiba-eksporta-ekonomiska-nozime-un-ietekme-latvija/>

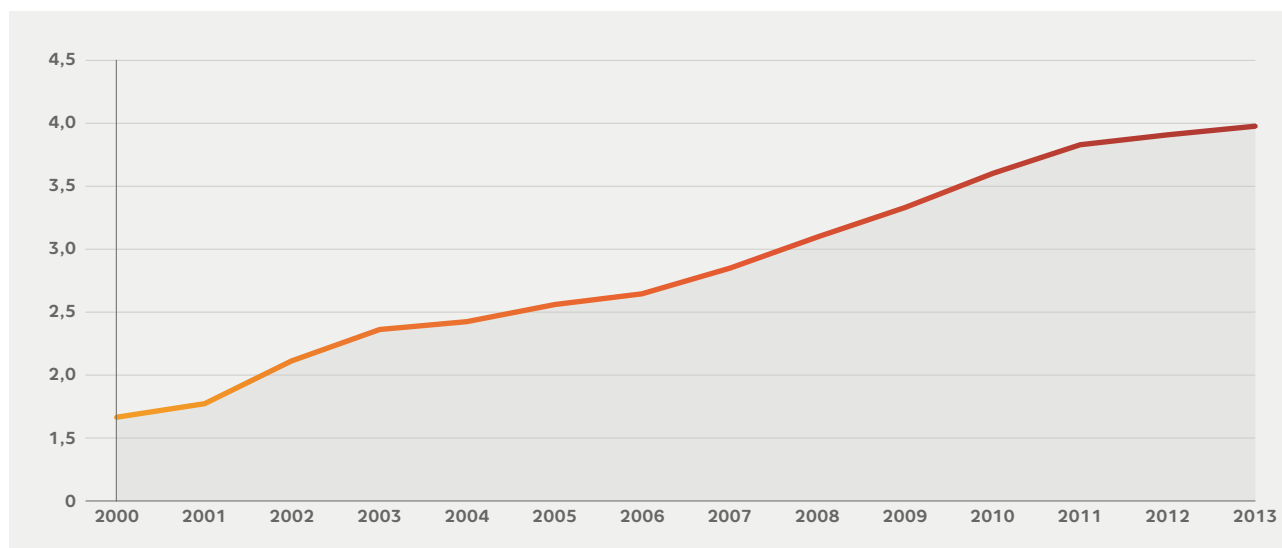
## INTRODUCTION

Higher education is one of the main drivers of national economic development. Universities roll out highly skilled engineers, doctors and managers and deliver cutting edge research for both public and private sectors. This educated human capital is particularly important to developing and enhancing the competitiveness of a small state with few natural resources like Latvia.

Over the last two decades' higher education has also emerged as a valuable and much sought after international tradeable service. Countries are increasing competing for the almost five million international students currently studying outside their home countries. Indeed, the OECD estimates the global growth in international education as being around 6% annually and global international student numbers have doubled since 2000 (see Figure 1).

Growth in international student numbers 2000-2013<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1



There are four main rationales for this growth in student numbers. First, incoming students can bring direct economic benefits in the form of increased revenues for universities and the state as well as long-term economic benefits in the form of international relationships and networks. Second, interaction with domestic students builds inter-cultural skills which are a key resource in the globalized world. Third, international students enhance the university environment, bringing different skills and perspectives to teaching and research. Finally, international students can also be used as an instrument that reinforces links between countries (especially if former students go on to become policy leaders).

Latvia has rapidly developed into a major exporter of higher education, with more than 5,500 full-time

international students for a qualification or degree in a Latvian higher education institution in the 2015/2016 academic year (and more than 1,000 Erasmus and other exchange programme students also studying in Latvia). Students come from both Western Europe (particularly Germany and the Nordic states), the Commonwealth of Independent States and South East Asia (particularly India and Sri Lanka). Most international students are undergraduates studying for a qualification or degree and are typically self-financed.

This research analyses the rapid growth of the higher education export sector in Latvia and abroad and then considers how to raise Latvia's competitiveness in this high growth sector of the economy. The final section offers recommendations for policy-makers.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO 2016. Global Flow of Tertiary Students.

## 1. THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICES

The last few decades have seen a sharp increase in the number of international students studying abroad. Demand for higher education has grown hand-in-hand with a growing global population, rising global prosperity and ongoing increases in economic complexity demanding graduate skills.

Moreover, regulatory changes have led to the liberalization of trade agreements, growth in visa-free regimes as well as significant falls in the costs of long-distance transport and increased global knowledge as a result of the internet. Moreover, many countries in Asia and sub-saharan African increased the capacity of their secondary education sectors without increasing university spaces, leading to student demand that the domestic tertiary sectors simply could not meet. Reforms to public sector universities in the UK and Australia underpinned the ability for universities to attract international students because universities were gradually allowed to pursue diversification of their revenues, which meant they could attract international students that would pay substantially higher fees than domestic students. The growth of English as the major international language of communication has also eased these flows of information.

Flows of international students across borders sky-rocketed to over four million in 2013, the most recent year for data on global student rates.<sup>3</sup> The figure for 2016 is likely to be around 5 million, with the OECD projecting 8 million international students by 2025.<sup>4</sup>

This international trade in higher education services is composed of several niches.<sup>5</sup> Some of the internationally better known universities in the USA, UK and elsewhere have been opening branch campuses abroad – particularly China and the middle east – as a way of raising their student numbers and increasing revenue flows.<sup>6</sup> Other universities have adopted twinning

programmes (where students pursue degrees in two different locations), joint degrees, distance education or even the franchising of programmes or university names.

However, by far the biggest part of the global international student sector is the recruitment of international students to study in the main campus of a university. Only about 10 percent of global international students are exchange students, although this number is likely to increase as students, universities and governments place a premium on the experience of studying abroad. Germany, for example, aims to have half of its student community spend at least one semester abroad by 2020. Similarly, the USA has created the 'Generation Study Abroad' programme that aims to double the number of US students experiencing study abroad from an annual 295,000 to 600,000 by 2019.<sup>7</sup> Latvian higher education institutions could tap into this growing demand by creating one-semester or one-year modules that combine teaching with field-trips that take advantage of Latvia's experience and knowledge with both European issues and the states that make up the Commonwealth of International States.

Nevertheless, the rapid growth in international student numbers is primarily driven by full-time students studying towards a degree or qualification abroad. These full-time students spend upwards of three years living, studying and occasionally working in a foreign country.<sup>8</sup> Although Europe and North America have traditionally been the destinations of choice for international students, these two continents' overall share of international students has now been in decline for several years primarily because of capacity and price. First, universities in Western Europe and North America operate at close to full volume and capacity building – building new teaching and research facilities, recruiting academic and administrative staff – takes time (although many universities have adopted aggressive growth strategies).

<sup>3</sup> HM Government. 2013. International education: Global growth and prosperity. London: Department for Business, Education and Skills and UNESCO, 2016. Global Flow of Tertiary Students.

<sup>4</sup> OECD. 2012. Assessment of higher education learning outcomes. Feasibility study report. Paris: OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/AHELOFSReportvolume1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Bashir, S. 2007. Trends in international trade in higher education: Implications and options for developing countries. Washington D.C.: World Bank

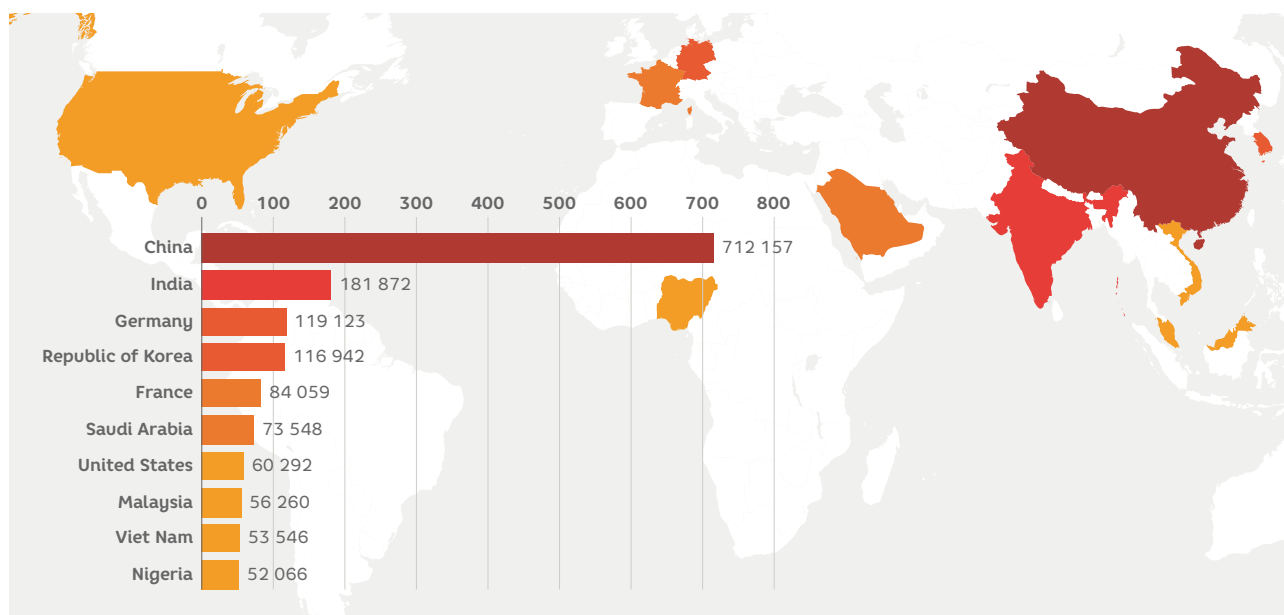
<sup>6</sup> In Dubai alone, for example, there are branches of Australia's University of Wollongong, the Strathclyde Business School and even the Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics.

<sup>7</sup> University of Oxford International Strategy Office. 2015. International Trends in Higher Education 2015. Oxford: University of Oxford.

<sup>8</sup> Bashir, S. 2007. Trends in international trade in higher education: Implications and options for developing countries. Washington D.C.: World Bank

### Top 10 countries of origin of international students in 2014<sup>9</sup>

Map 1

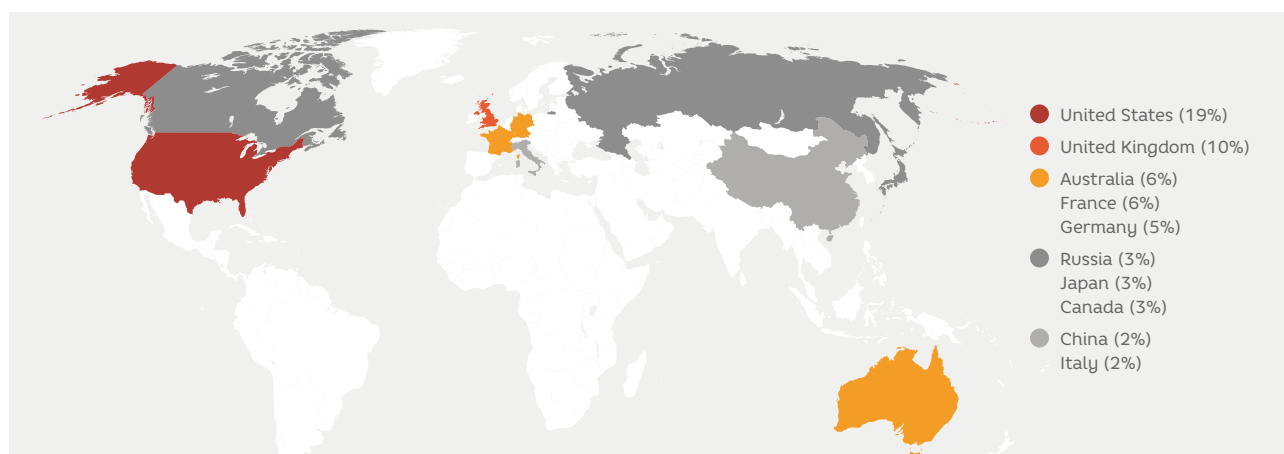


Second, the supply of higher education services in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia has grown and an increasing number of international students elect to study in these states. This has offered a greater choice of regional universities for students from Asia, who still make up the greatest cohort of international students globally (see Map 1).

The most popular destination countries in 2014 remained the US (19%), UK (10%), Australia (6%), France (6%) and Germany (5%). However, the huge size of the US higher education market is such that international students only make up 5% of all students in the US while in the UK they are 11% and in Australia 20% of all students.<sup>10</sup> To put this into context, in 2014 Latvia's universities had a 0.1% share of the global market.

### Top-10 international student destination countries (2014)

Map 2



<sup>9</sup> UNESCO, 2016. Global Flow of Tertiary Students.

<sup>10</sup> Archer, W. 2015. International undergraduate students: The UK's competitive advantage. London: International Unit.  
<http://www.international.ac.uk/media/3663524/UG-Competitive-Advantage-report.pdf>



The US has long been the most popular destination for international students largely because of the high quality of its educational institutions and the desirability of living and working in the US.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, a significant share of international students study the STEM (Science, technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects that are less attractive to American students and thus international students are key to sustaining STEM disciplines and driving innovation in the US.

The direct and indirect economic benefits that the US has gained from its cohort of international students has led to other countries consciously identifying higher education as an area of significant growth potential. Universities in the US are largely either state or privately financed, with little federal funding which means that attracting international students has been a primarily private or sub-national level activity. In contrast, most OECD states principally fund higher education through public funds and thus their state institutions have played a far bigger role in developing their international education strategies.

Higher education is Australia's second biggest export industry behind mining. To pool their resources and knowledge, the biggest Australian universities banded together and created IDP Education Australia, that collectively markets all its members but has now expanded to market education in New Zealand, the UK and other states.<sup>12</sup> IDP now has 89 offices in 30 different countries that provide a full range of services for potential students – from applications to visa requests to pre-leaving information seminars. Australian universities were also regularly added to trade delegations and other international missions. Moreover, the Australian government has specifically identified international higher education as one of the nations 'super-growth' sectors and in 2016 published a detailed 'National Strategy for International Education 2025'.<sup>13</sup>

Canada has also grown its number of international students by 70% between 2007 and 2014 through a combination of federal and state-level activities (because education is a sub-national (provincial) competence in Canada). In 2014 Canada's federal government published an International Education Strategy that set out the aim of doubling the number of international students in Canada (from 239,000 in 2011 to 450,000 by 2022) primarily by identifying key student markets and beginning to brand Canadian education as a venue for higher education.<sup>14</sup>

In 2011 the New Zealand government similarly set a target of doubling its number of international students by 2025 after having seen a tripling of international students between 2000 and 2012.<sup>15</sup> New Zealand is also one of the few countries to have introduced a specific tax on international students (known as the Export Education Levy). Any university or other education provider that enrolls a fee-paying international student must pay the levy of NZ\$185 as well as 0.45% of tuition fee income to a ring-fenced *Export Education Levy Trust Account* that is administered by the Ministry of Education. In the financial year ending in June 2015 eight universities in New Zealand had paid NZ\$1,602,077 into the fund which then used these funds to update statistical data on international students, market and promote New Zealand as a higher education destination as well as support seminars for the industry.<sup>16</sup>

European states have also started to pay more attention to the international student market. The UK has long been established as the second most popular destination for international students after the USA. However, the European Union also has three other states in the global top 10 destinations – France, Germany and Italy – while Latvia's eastern neighbor Russia is the sixth biggest destination country with a 3% share of the global market in international students (or approximately 140,000 students).

<sup>11</sup> For example, 18 of the top 25 universities in the world in 2016 were in the USA and another 6 were in the UK according to the 2016 Times Higher Education World University Rankings: [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2016/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/sort\\_by/rank\\_label/sort\\_order/asc/cols/rank\\_only](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2016/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank_label/sort_order/asc/cols/rank_only)

<sup>12</sup> See IDP Education Australia: <https://www.idp.com/global/studyabroad>

<sup>13</sup> Australian Government Department of Education and Training. 2016. 'National Strategy for Education 2025'. <https://www.education.gov.au/national-strategy-international-education>. The five 'super growth' sectors of agribusiness, gas, tourism, international education and wealth management were identified in a 2014 report by Deloitte. 2014. 'Positioning for prosperity? Catching the next wave': [https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Deloitte\\_au\\_business\\_positioning\\_for\\_prosperity\\_2014.pdf](https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Deloitte_au_business_positioning_for_prosperity_2014.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Government of Canada. 2014. Canada's International Education Strategy. Ottawa: Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. <http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/overview-apercu-eng.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Education. 2013. International Student Enrolments in New Zealand 2006-2012:

[http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/115050/Enrolments-of-international-students-2006-2012.pdf](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/115050/Enrolments-of-international-students-2006-2012.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Education. 2015. Export Education Levy Annual Report. [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/170122/Export-Education-Levy-Annual-Report-for-2014-15-Attachment-TR15.6250.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/170122/Export-Education-Levy-Annual-Report-for-2014-15-Attachment-TR15.6250.pdf)

The four European Union states benefit from being large, states with positive international images and well-regarded education institutions. They also benefit from state strategies that focus on the recruitment of international students. For example, Germany benefits from both a very strong and well-financed marketing mechanism – the German academic exchange service, DAAD – as well as a recent scholarship scheme aimed at high-achieving domestic and international students that covers fees and pays a scholarship of approximately 800 euros a month (half covered by public money, the rest by private sponsors) that was granted to over 10,000 students in its first year in 2011.

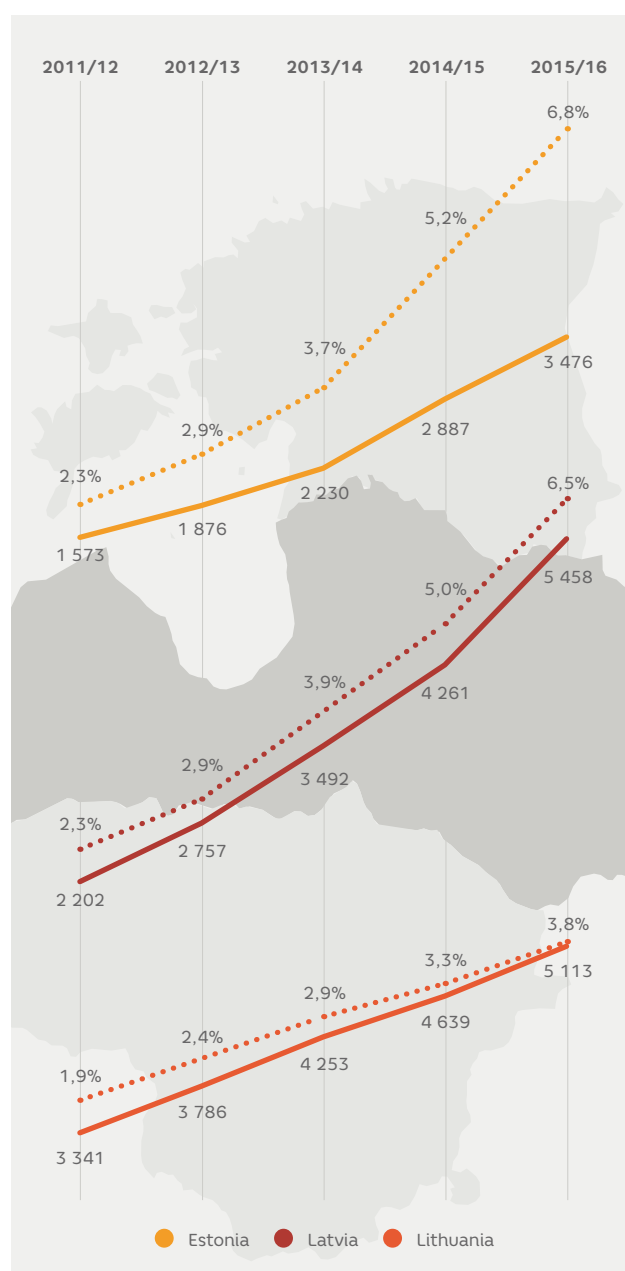
However, as in so many other areas of the economy, Latvia's primary competition in the international higher education market are its close neighbours – Estonia, Latvia and Russia.

Russia has followed the recent global trend of also prioritizing the recruitment of international students. In 2014 Russia hosted 213,347 international students (with 50,642 Russian students studying abroad<sup>17</sup>), with around three-quarters coming from Commonwealth of Independent States countries (Kazakhstan led the way in 2014 with 49,000 students followed by Belarus with 25,000) and just 8,000 from China (less than 4% of the total).<sup>18</sup> Although the recruitment of international students has been announced as a state policy, Russia struggles to attract students from outside the CIS region because of distance, language and, most particularly, a negative international image.

The Baltic states have seen contrasting fortunes in the recruitment of international students. While Lithuania had the highest absolute number of international students until the 2015/2016 academic year (when Latvia's rapid growth in this sector saw it overtake Estonia) it is the least competitive Baltic state in the international student market, consistently lagging Estonia and Latvia in terms of international students as a percentage of all students. While the Lithuanian government has a long-stated aim of attracting 15-20,000 international students, the lack of state support or strategy means that Lithuania is a long way from achieving this aim. By far the biggest share of international students (approximately half) are from Belarus.

**International students studying for a degree or qualification in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 2011/12-2015/2016 (total number and % of all students)**

Map 3



<sup>17</sup> Latvia was the 22nd most popular destination for outgoing students from the Russian Federation with 482 studying in Latvia in 2014.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, 2016. Global Flow of Tertiary Students.



In contrast, Estonia has been far more successful at attracting international students. The Estonian government had set a target of attracting 2,000 international students by 2015, a figure that it reached already in 2013/14. Estonia has focused on attracting students from its neighbours and universities in both Tartu and Tallinn have advertised heavily in Finland, Russia and Latvia (also the top three incoming student countries) – primarily playing on their international reputations for excellence – to attract students. In addition to these three states Estonia also targets China (about 20% of all global international students comes from China) and Turkey because of the high number of potential students interested in receiving an education in the European Union as well as their economic strength and existing ties with Estonia.

Estonia's great success in attracting international students is based on a harmonized government strategy that initially focused on internationalizing and raising the competitiveness of the higher education sector (the Estonian Higher Education Strategy 2006-2015<sup>19</sup>) followed by an explicit emphasis on marketing Estonian higher education abroad (Study in Estonia brand from 2008 onwards<sup>20</sup>). Thus, the government supported Estonian universities through attendance of industry events, marketing via embassies, social media and other public relations activities as well as participating in the International Student Barometer.

As map 3 indicates, Latvian universities have achieved similar success to Estonia albeit with no formulated state strategy or governmental support.

## 2. THE EXPORT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN LATVIA

Latvia's universities looked to recruit international students to at least partially make up for a shortfall in finances and a continued fall in domestic student numbers. First, universities were financially hit by the fact that students were spending less time in higher education, as the majority of degree programmes switched from a four-year bachelor's degree to the post-Bologna norm of three years. Second, there was a big fall in student numbers. The biggest fall came in 2009 when Latvian higher education experienced a 26% fall in the number of first year students in comparison to the previous year, and a 10% fall in the absolute number of students. Even including the 5,500 full-time international students included in the data, in the 2015/2016 academic year there were 46,790 less students in Latvia higher education than a decade earlier. Finally, from 2004 onwards, an increasing number of school leavers used the opportunities offered by Latvia's membership of the European Union to study abroad, with the UK rapidly emerging as the most favoured destination. By 2014 almost 6,300 Latvians were studying abroad, with 1,839 in the UK, 815 in Denmark and 672 in Germany.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the World Bank has estimated that the decline

will continue and by 2025 there will be 40% less students in higher education than there were in 2000.<sup>22</sup>

As figure two shows, the number of students in Latvian higher education had started growing in the mid-1990s as school-leavers enrolling in universities were joined by early and mid-career professionals seeking to retrain in a profession more relevant to the demands of the new market economy – especially economics, business and law. The peak was reached in 2005-2006. Increased demand for higher education was met by an increased supply of both new programmes and institutions. In 2009 there were 60 higher education institutions in Latvia (although this has shrunk to 58 in 2016) which is well within the norm for small states in the region. Zane Cunska calculated that this amounted to 27 institutions per one million inhabitants, compared to 29 per one million in Estonia, and 32 in Denmark.<sup>24</sup>

This student enrollment crisis prompted several universities to begin looking abroad for new students. Latvia has a Big 4 group of universities that have proven particularly successful in attracting international students.

<sup>19</sup> Estonian Higher Education Strategy 2006-2015:

<http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Estonia/Estonia-Higher-Education-Strategy-2006-2015.pdf>

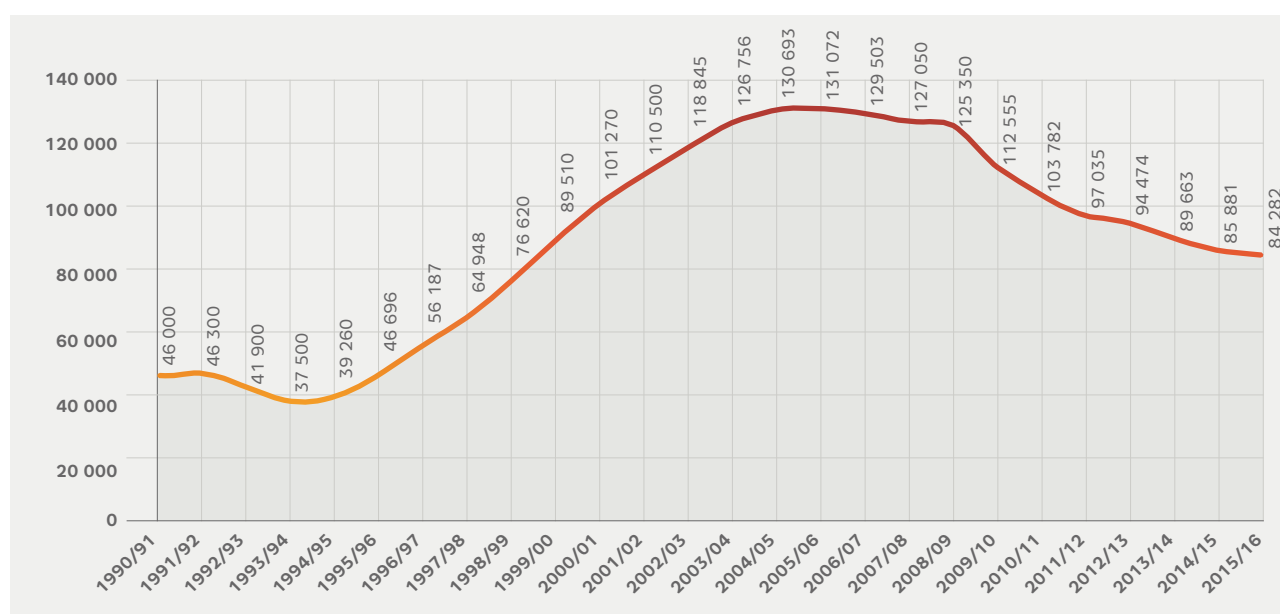
<sup>20</sup> Study in Estonia: <http://www.studyinestonia.ee/>

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO 2016. Global Flow of Tertiary Students. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>

<sup>22</sup> Chawla, M. et al. 2007. From red to gray: The 'third transition' of aging populations in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. The World Bank: Washington, D.C.

Higher education students in Latvia (1990-2016)<sup>23</sup>

Figure 2



### Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU)

In 2016 RSU, Latvia's leading medical university, training a whole host of medical specialists – doctors, nurses, dentists, public healthcare professionals – as well as social scientists and lawyers, has the biggest proportion of international students (1,918 of 8,059, almost 25% in 2016/2017) of any public university in the Baltic states. Indeed, this proportion of international students is higher than in three-quarters of the top 100 medical universities in the world.<sup>25</sup>

RSU has proven remarkably good at recruiting medical students from all over the world, but especially western Europe. 43% (765) of these international students are from Germany, 19% (350) from Sweden and 9% (154) from Norway. RSU has students from 56 different countries.<sup>26</sup>

RSU has benefitted from several long-term trends in global and particularly European medicine. First, countries like Germany and the Nordic states have a strictly limited number of student places in their medical programmes.

Many thousands of students apply to study medicine but do not get in. Rather than settle for another programme of study or wait to reapply in a years' time, an increasing number of students have chosen to pursue a medical degree elsewhere in Europe. At the same time, there is also a growing demand for medicine professionals as Europe's population continues to age and the European Union introduced tighter restrictions on medical workers' working hours in 2009.

### Rīga Technical University (RTU)

RTU is the only other Latvian university, in addition to RSU, to have recruited more than 1,000 degree-seeking international students (1,141 in 2015/2016 or 8% of all degree-seeking students).<sup>27</sup> As a result, RTU has experienced only a small fall in its student numbers and, in 2014, RTU overtook the University of Latvia as the institution with the largest number of students. RTU's international students are largely from Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (India and Uzbekistan are major student markets).

<sup>23</sup> LR Izglītības un Zinātnes Ministrija. 2016. Pārskats par Latvijas Augstāko Izglītību 2015.gadā. Galvenie Statistiskie Rādītāji: [http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/izglitiba\\_augst/Parskats\\_2015.pdf](http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/izglitiba_augst/Parskats_2015.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> However, Cunska does point out that ratio is typically much smaller in larger countries – the author counted 14 per one million for the US, 15 for the UK and 8 for Germany. Cunska, Z. 2009. Tertiary education enrolment trends and projections in Latvia. Joint Eurostat/UNECE Work Session on Demographic Projections. 28-30 April 2010, Lisbon, Portugal.

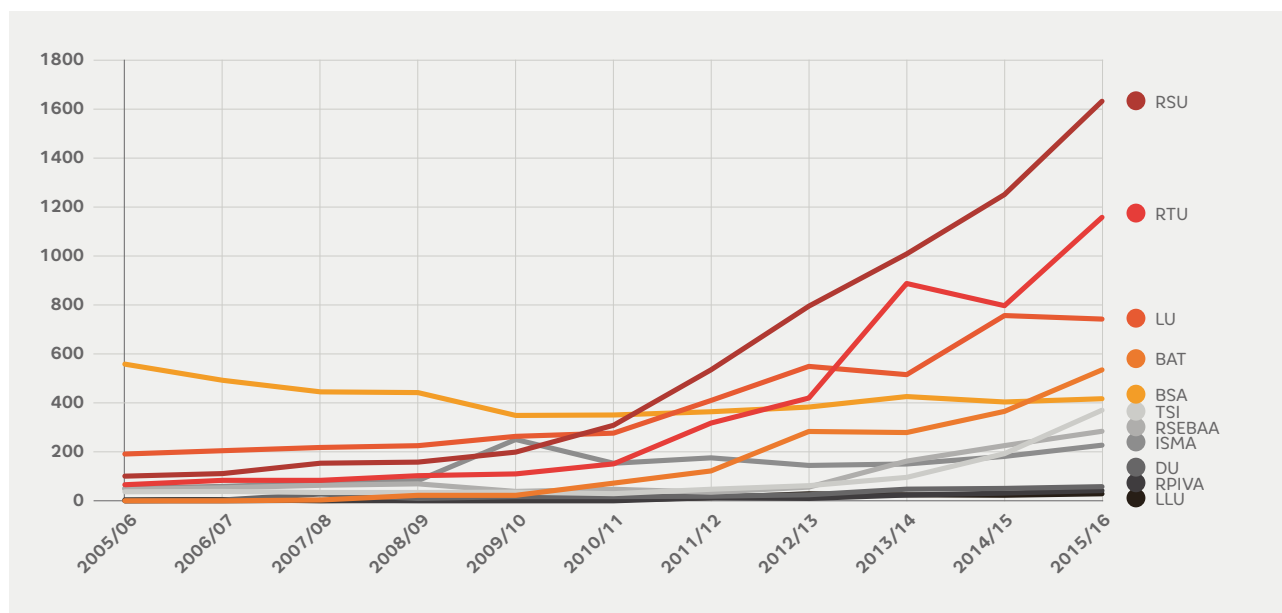
<sup>25</sup> See Times Higher Education. 2016. World University Rankings 2016-2017. Clinical, Pre-clinical and Health. [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2017/subject-ranking/clinical-pre-clinical-health#/page/0/length/-1/sort\\_by/field\\_key\\_statistics\\_2/sort\\_order/asc/cols/stats](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2017/subject-ranking/clinical-pre-clinical-health#/page/0/length/-1/sort_by/field_key_statistics_2/sort_order/asc/cols/stats)

<sup>26</sup> Rīga Stradiņš University. 2016. Arvalstu Studentu Staistika. <http://www.rsu.lv/fakultates/arvalstu-studentu-nodala/arvalstu-studentu-statistika>

<sup>27</sup> Rīga Technical University. 2016. Skaitļi un Fakti. <http://www.rtu.lv/lv/universitate/skaitli-un-fakti/studejoso-skaitis>

Number of international students in Latvian universities (2005-2016)

Figure 3



The most popular of the approximately 40 different degree programmes offered by RTU are in the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management (and which are largely oriented towards the social sciences) although a great number of students also study for computer science and information technology degrees as well as the engineering and technical programmes that RTU is best known for teaching.

### University of Latvia (LU)

In comparison to RSU and RTU, the University of Latvia has been far more sluggish in recruiting international students to study for degrees. This is partially explained the more humanitarian nature (history, philosophy, pedagogy and so on) of many of the University of Latvia's programmes. These are less attractive to international students. It also means that LU has been unable to create a clear vision of what it is and what it can offer to international students, in clear contrast to RSU and RTU.

Nevertheless, LU's medical programmes haven proven to be increasingly attractive and in the 2015/2016 academic year LU had enrolled just under 800 international students.

### Turība University (BAT)

BAT is Latvia's largest private business university, focusing on business administration, law, tourism and other commercially-oriented programmes. The university was founded in 1993 to meet the growing demand for business programmes and had grown to 500 students in the first five years of study.

BAT was one of the first universities to develop a strategy to attract international students and has now developed network's and experience across both South-East Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. At the start of the 2016/2017 academic year BAT had enrolled students from 35 different states. Indeed, BAT has set out the ambitious aim of having 30% of its student community from abroad by 2020/2021 (growing from a base of 8.8% in 2014/2015).

## The impact of higher education export on the Latvian economy<sup>z</sup>

The export of higher education adds significant value to the Latvian economy.<sup>28</sup> International students primarily finance their studies through family resources (77%), and/or personal savings (35%), and/or student loans taken out in their home country (17%). Only 6% finance their studies through paid employment in Latvia.

International students pay tuition fees, rent (or occasionally buy) accommodation, have other daily living expenses and also have friends and relatives visit them in Latvia. In 2016/2016, international students paid 28 million EUR in tuition fees. Higher purchasing power means that 83% of students from the European union and Norway rent apartments (paying an average of **4,332 EUR** a year), while students from CIS and Asian states tend to stay in student housing and pay significantly less (**2,338 EUR** and **2,892 EUR** a year respectively). International students on average spend another **3,696 EUR** on other expenses. Family and friends visiting international students stay for an average four days and spend 405 EUR each, contributing some **6.1 million EUR** to the Latvian economy.

As a result, international students contributed some **73 million EUR** to the Latvian economy in 2015/2016. Higher education also has a significant multiplier effect. Using four relevant OECD multipliers, the total impact of international students on the Latvian economy is **148 million EUR** (0.61% of GDP).<sup>29</sup>

The Latvian government collects approximately 28% of GDP through different taxes, meaning that international students contribute about **20 million EUR** a year to the Latvian budget in taxes. International students also **created about 1.474 jobs (2.7 for every 10 students)** in the 2015/2016 academic year.

It should be noted that short-term students – exchange students from the Erasmus programme staying for one academic year, or one semester, also contribute to the Latvian economy as do students from other exchange programmes, short-term language students as well as study groups of US and European students who pass through Latvia in study trips. This study has focused on international students pursuing a degree thus we have not calculated this additional data although it is clear that it would add many more millions of euros to higher education exports share of GDP.

International students clearly make a significant contribution to the Latvian economy and government revenue in particular. As a result, the *export of higher education* sector should be adopted as a sector of the economy under the Ministry of Economics. This would allow for closer cooperation between government and universities, the collation of relevant statistics and the eventual formulation of a strategy to further grow and develop the sector.

Figure 3 sketches in two possible scenarios in the growth of international students over the next five years. The first, conservative, scenario is based on the OECD's estimate that the global growth in international education will be an annual 6% over the next decade. This would see the number of students grow to reach 7,300 by 2020/2021. The second, positive, scenario is based on current annual growth rates of 25.6% continuing over the next five years, with student numbers reaching over 17,000 by 2020/2021. While it is unlikely that Latvian universities could maintain this high rate of growth over the medium-term, growth will be well above the 6% global growth rate, because Latvia's key markets (CIS, South East Asia and medical students in Western Europe) are among the fastest growing global markets. A conservative estimate would see the number of international students doubling to 11,000-plus over the next half-decade.

<sup>28</sup> D. Auers and S. Gubins. 2016. *Augstākās Izglītības Eksporta Ekonomiskā Nozīme un Ietekme Latvijā*. Rīga: Domnica Certus. <http://certusdomnica.lv/agenda/augstakas-izglitibas-eksporta-ekonomiska-nozime-un-ietekme-latvija/>

<sup>29</sup> The OECD multiplier for education expenses is 1.6147; housing 2.2224; retail 2.3007 (under the assumption that most other expenses are in the retail sector); and tourism is 2.5306.

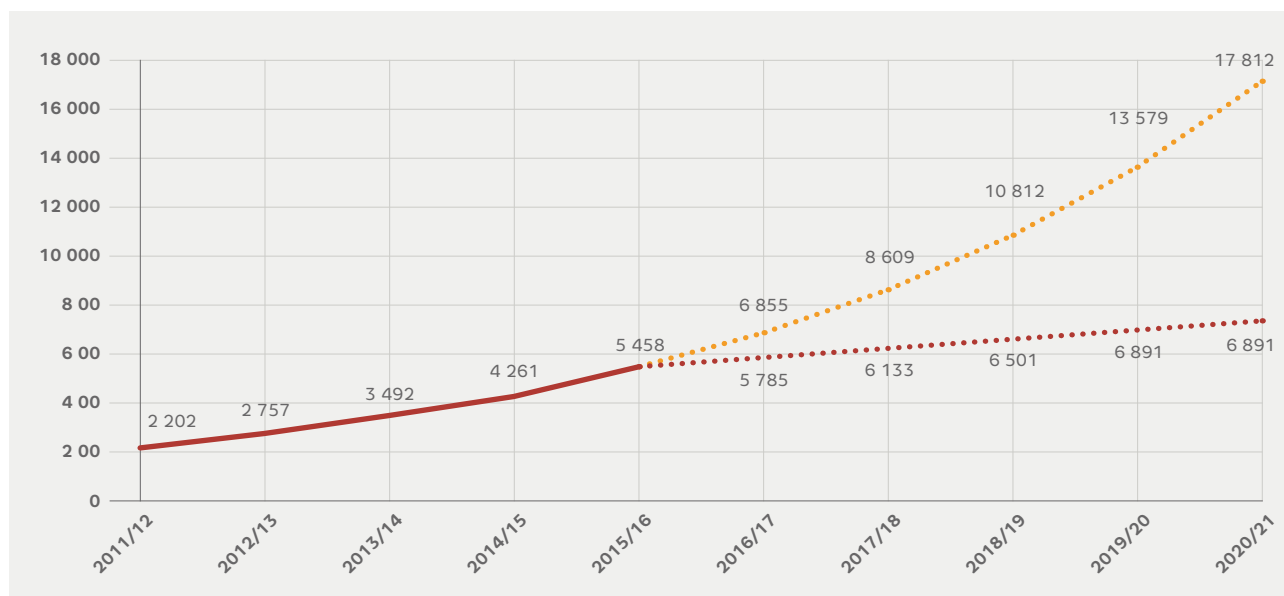
### 3. STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH

Latvia and Estonia are the Baltic leaders in attracting international students. However, while Estonia's growth has been the result of careful and coordinated planning between government and universities, Latvia's growth has been based on the more or less isolated and uncoordinated efforts of Latvia's leading universities.

A coordinated approach, embedded in a jointly crafted strategy, as has been the case in Estonia as well as Australia, New Zealand, the UK and other leading countries in the international higher education market, would be sure to support a swift and sustained growth in student numbers.

Projected growth of international students (2016-2021)

Figure 4



Tackling issues connected to administrative, living and educational capacity are key to supporting the export of international education in Latvia.

These different challenges can be best understood as two critical phases of the international study experience:

1. Administrative capacity  
(The application and decision-making process);
2. study and living environment.  
The first part of the process determines first, if a student even considers Latvia as an option and the ease of which that student can turn an application into arrival. The second part concerns the quality of the study and living conditions for international students.

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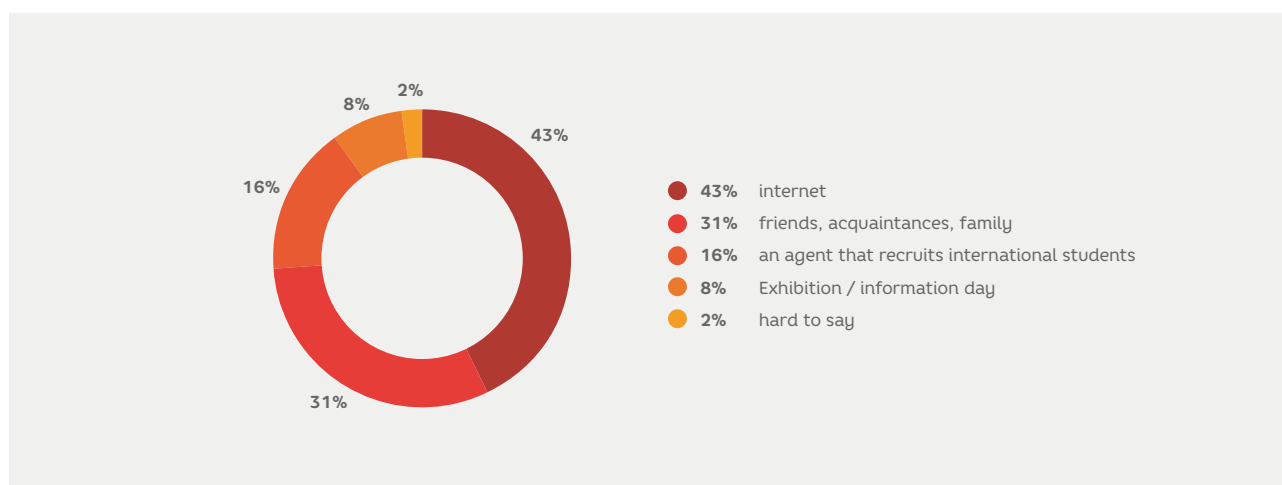
## Administrative Capacity

How do students choose to study in Latvia? The Certus/SKDS survey of international students in 2016 found that the most popular tool for international students choosing to study at a university in Latvia was the internet. 43% of students (rising to 53% for those students coming from the EU and Norway) had used the internet to find their university and study programme. An additional one-third of students had heard about Latvia and their university from friends and relatives

and it can be assumed that the majority of these students then further explored their study opportunities via the internet. Only 16% of students had used an agent (and only 10% of students from the EU and Norway as opposed to 20% of students from other parts of the world) and 8% discovered Latvia via a fair or public presentation (although this seems particularly important in the CIS states where 15% of students discovered Latvia this way).

### Where did you find initial information about your university in Latvia?<sup>30</sup>

Figure 5



Internet usage only grows every year, thus it is clear that a powerful internet presence is key to attracting students. RSU, RTU and BAT already have excellent webpages that cater to international students. This is not, however, the case when it comes to the Latvian states internet pages for international students.

As of November 2016, Latvia still had two rather muddled and competing “studyinlatvia” (.eu and .lv) internet portals.<sup>31</sup> This clearly affects the competitiveness of Latvia’s higher education sector because a coordinated and harmonized internet presence increases the visibility and attractiveness of an education system. Moreover, a thoughtful coordinated presence is particularly important for a small country like Latvia which is less well-known than, for example, neighbouring Denmark and Sweden, and thus has to work harder to

build a positive image. A positive example comes from Estonia, where the Study in Estonia web site advertises the seven universities that offer English language degree programmes in a common Estonian brand.

It should also be noted that the two Latvian web sites are available only in English. The Study in Estonia web site is also available in Russian and Finnish. This is because Estonian institutions have identified their major target countries and address their advertising material directly at students from these countries.

The different public and private partners recruiting international students to Latvia should similarly reach agreement on the primary target markets. Estonia concentrates on attracting students from Latvia, Finland, Russia and China.

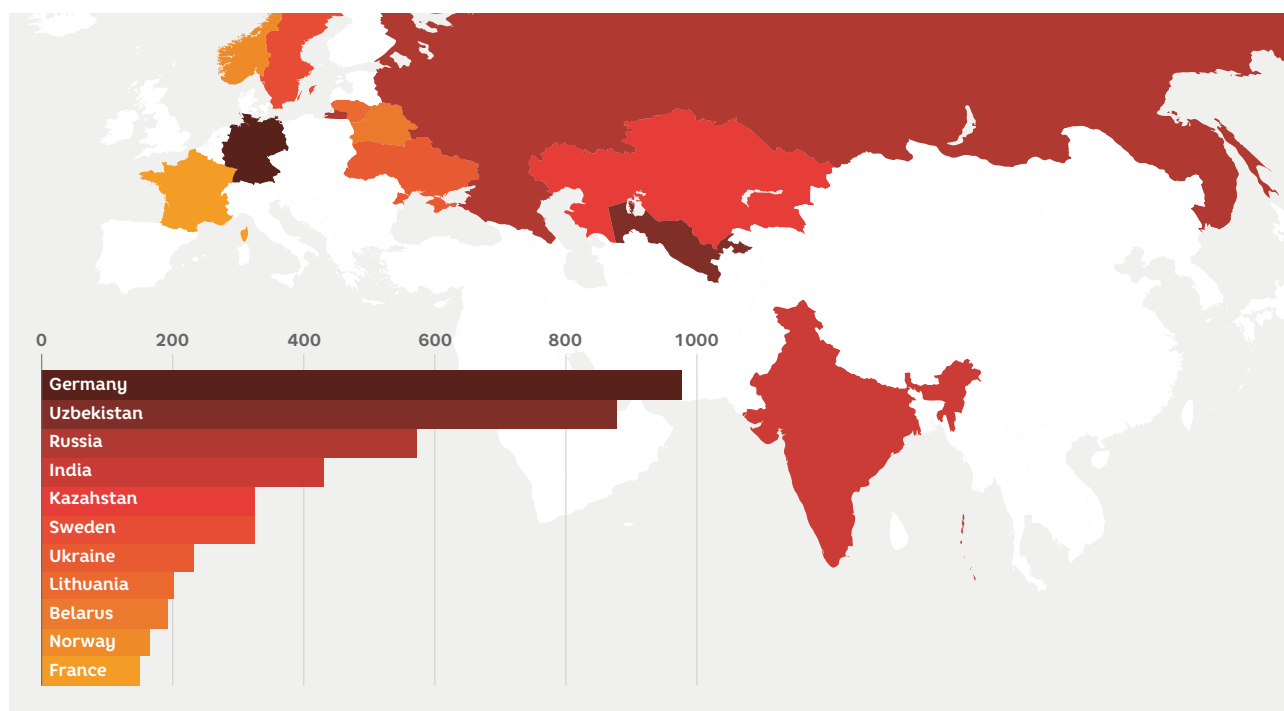
<sup>30</sup> SKDS. 2016. Ārvalstu studentu aptauja par studijām un dzīvi Latvijā. Rīga: SKDS.

<sup>31</sup> The [www.studyinlatvia.lv](http://www.studyinlatvia.lv) web site is run by the State Education Development Agency while the [www.studyinlatvia.eu](http://www.studyinlatvia.eu) is managed by the Academic Information Centre.



Top-10 origin countries for international students in Latvia in 2015/2016

Figure 6



Based on current recruitment data (see Figure 5) it seems logical that Latvia should focus on three distinct blocks of states: (1) Germany and the Nordic states<sup>32</sup>; (2) Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan; and (3) India and Sri Lanka. Students from the first block of countries will continue to seek a medical education in Latvia. In the second block of countries Russia has a large group of students that seek to gain an education abroad and Uzbekistanis already make up the second biggest group of students in Latvia and even more are expected to seek a higher education abroad as the country is expected to have the second highest growth in household income (after Sri Lanka) over the next decade.<sup>33</sup> India, in turn, projected to have the largest 18-22 year old population in 2025, exceeding China (which has a fast-shrinking youth population).

Having established *how* students choose to study in Latvia, it is equally important to understand *why* students choose Latvia. Figure 6 reveals the major factors that prompted students to choose a Latvian university.

Latvia's status as an EU member (64%), an internationally recognized diploma (45%) and a better quality of education than that received in the home country (26%) clearly underpin the logic of international students relocating to Latvia and this clearly needs to be emphasized in all communication. Next comes a reasonable cost of living (51%) and comparatively low university fees (38%). At the same time, it is clear that Latvia could enhance its national image (20%) as well as the reputation of the education system (18%). Thus the results of the 2016 survey are in line with a previous 2014 survey that found that international students studying in Latvia were attracted by the low tuition fee (43%), good references from other students (33%) and high quality (30%).<sup>34</sup> This evidence also emphasizes that Russia and Belarus, who are of course not members of the EU, are not direct competitors to Latvia. Rather, in terms of EU status and relatively low cost, Latvia's Baltic neighbours of Estonia and Lithuania are the most direct competitors.

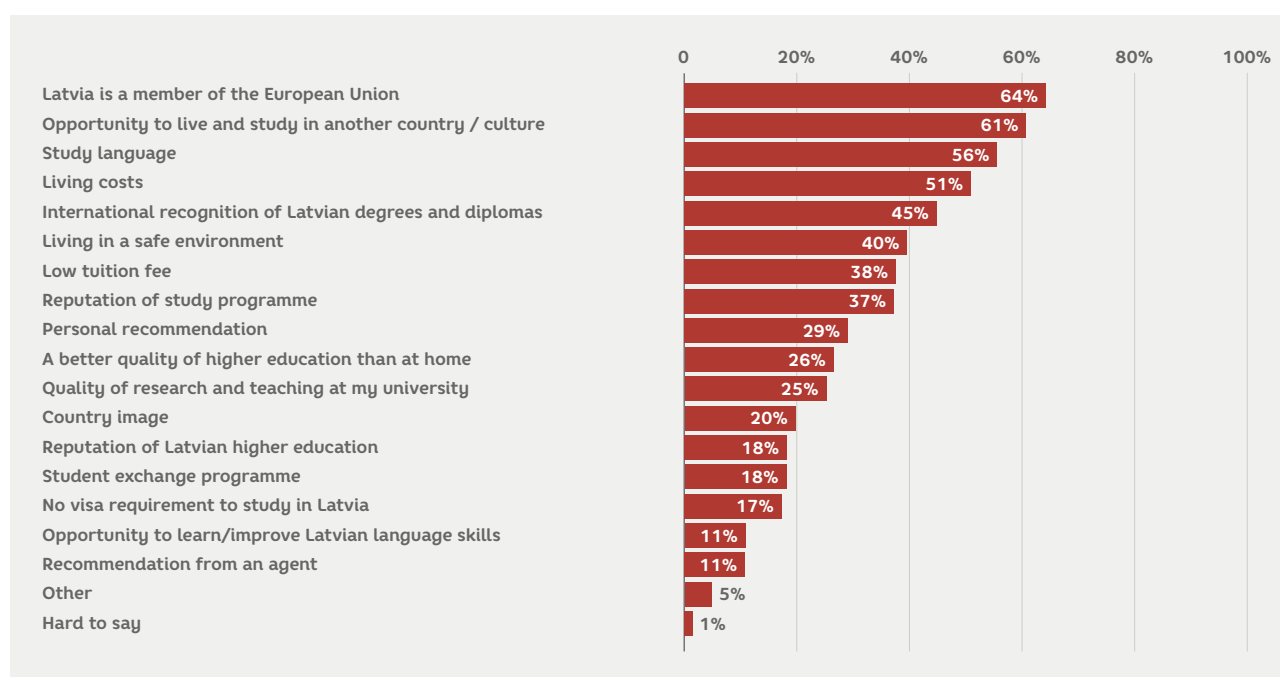
<sup>32</sup> As UNESCO has pointed out, there is a trend for students to stay within their regions in order to lower travel costs and for reasons of cultural familiarity. Riga ticks these boxes for both students from Western Europe (especially Germany and the Nordic states) as well as states to the east of Latvia.

<sup>33</sup> British Council. 2015. The shape of international education to 2025. London: British Council

<sup>34</sup> Kārklīņa, I. 2014. Latvijā studējošo saliedētības veicināšana un ārzemju studentu diskriminēšanas mazināšana. Rīga: GFK.

## What were the main reasons for choosing to study in Latvia?<sup>35</sup>

Figure 7



Having chosen to study at a Latvian university, international students then face the application process. This involves two major phases: (1) applying to a university and particularly diploma recognition; and (2) applying for a visa.

There is no centralized system of EU-wide recognition of diplomas – member states decide on their own rules and procedures.<sup>36</sup> There are two basic models for recognizing diplomas. The task can either be handed to a centralized authority (as is the current case in Lithuania as well as Latvia where the Academic Information Centre handles the task) or the task can be decentralized to the universities (as is the case in the UK, Denmark, Norway and Finland, for example). The main argument for decentralization is that it leads to faster and more consistent decision-making.

The speed and ease of getting a visa is equally crucial for international students as is the possibility for a graduate to remain in a country for a set period of time in order to find a job. Visa regulations can have a clear impact on a country's ability to attract international students. For example, the British Council found that the imposition of a stricter visa regime by the Conservative government in the UK directly led to a fall in the number of international students applying to study in the UK.<sup>37</sup>

The current student visa system in Latvia sees students first apply for a Latvian residence permit at the closest Latvian Embassy or Consulate (having received an official invitation from their chosen university) and submit a whole host of documents, including means of subsistence (according to figure 6 this is the most difficult document to obtain) and an address of residence as well as a payment to process the visa (with higher payments granting faster appraisal). However, Masters and PhD students have their application fees waived.

<sup>35</sup> SKDS. 2016. Ārvalstu studentu aptauja par studijām un dzīvi Latvijā. Rīga: SKDS.

<sup>36</sup> See Recognition of Academic Diplomas: [http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/education/university/recognition/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/education/university/recognition/index_en.htm)

<sup>37</sup> British Council. 2015. The shape of international education to 2015. London: British Council.

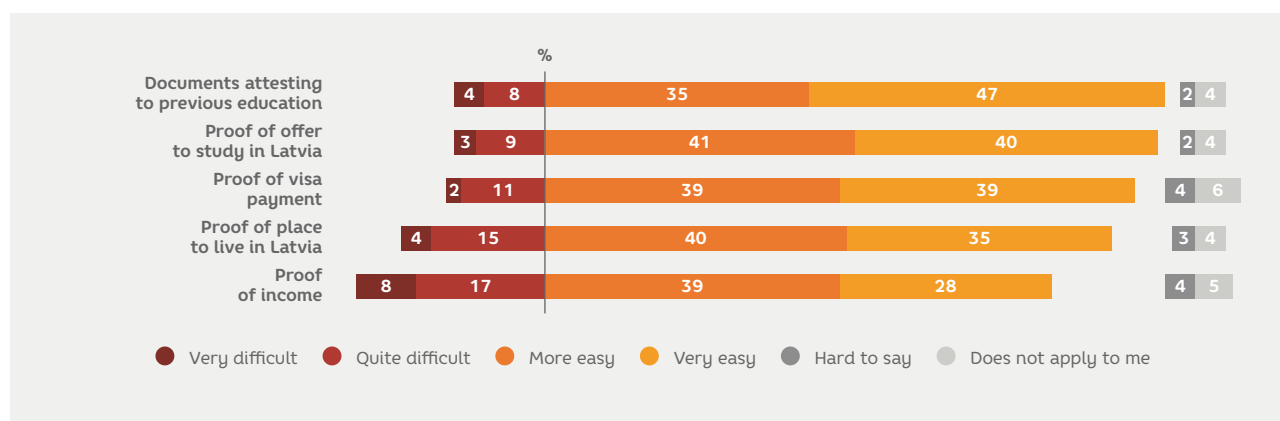
For many student's the most onerous and difficult part of this process is the requirement for a personal interview at the Latvian Embassy or Consulate, particularly bearing in mind that Latvia has a smaller network of diplomatic representations than its larger European nations. While there is no getting around this requirement (because it is for a residence permit rather than a short-term visa), it is clear that a closer cooperation between universities and Latvia's Foreign Ministry and Office of Citizenship

and Migration Affairs (PMLP) would allow the public institutions to plan a greater number of people working on these visa issues, both abroad in diplomatic missions and in Riga, during times when student applications are at their peak (in the spring and summer).

Having jumped these hurdles and arrived in Latvia, how do students find the study and living environment?

**Please evaluate how difficult or easy it was to fulfill the following requirements / submit documents in order to gain an entry visa**

Figure 8



## Study and Living Environment

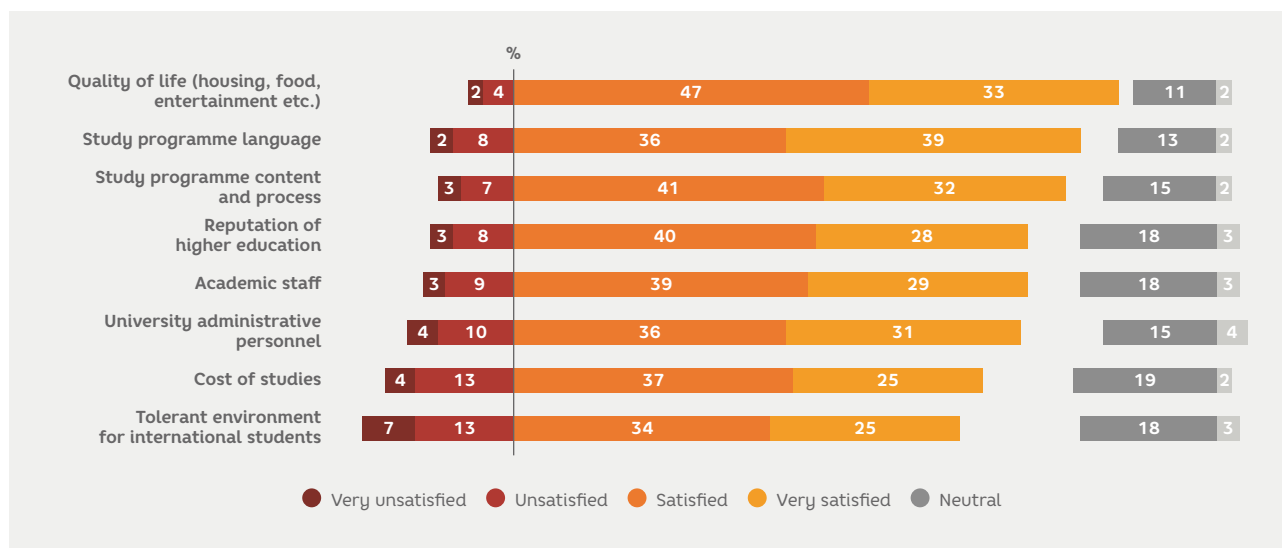
Both these elements tend to be intertwined. Students ideally seek both good universities and interesting communities and cities to live in.

students gave a negative evaluation of academic programmes while just 12% gave a negative evaluation of academic staff and 14% of administrative personnel. 80% of students were satisfied with the general quality of life in Latvia although the general level of tolerance received a much lower evaluation.

Current university facilities and staff appear to be sufficient for the current number of international students. This is perhaps unsurprising, bearing in mind that just one decade ago there were 46,000 more students in higher education in Latvia, indicating that current facilities should indeed have excess capacity. Moreover, EU funds have been used to finance first PhD and, from 2017, post-doctoral scholarships which have created a greater pool of academic talent that universities can draw on.

Apmierinātība ar studiju un dzīves apstākļiem. “Lūdzu, novērtējiet savu apmierinātību ar šiem faktoriem, kas saistīti ar Jūsu studijām un dzīves apstākļiem.”

Figure 9



Evaluate the quality of services in the city that you are currently living

Figure 10

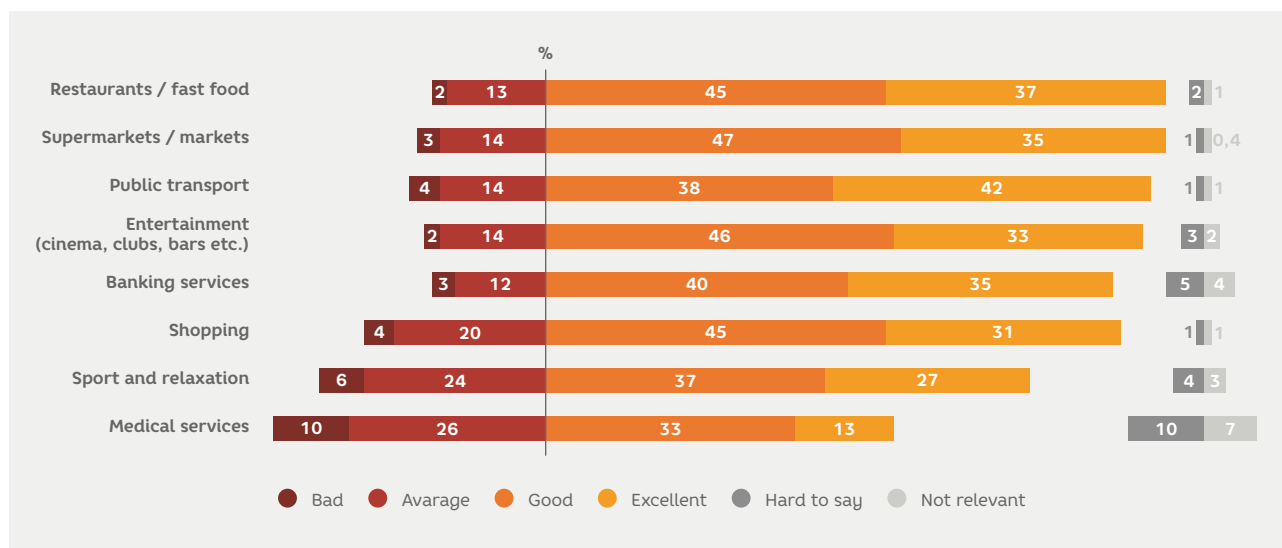


Figure 9 looks at these issues in more detail. It confirms that shopping, dining and recreational facilities in Latvia are fine. However, students are more critical of sports facilities (perhaps because Latvia's harsh winters limit non-winter sport outdoor activities for half the

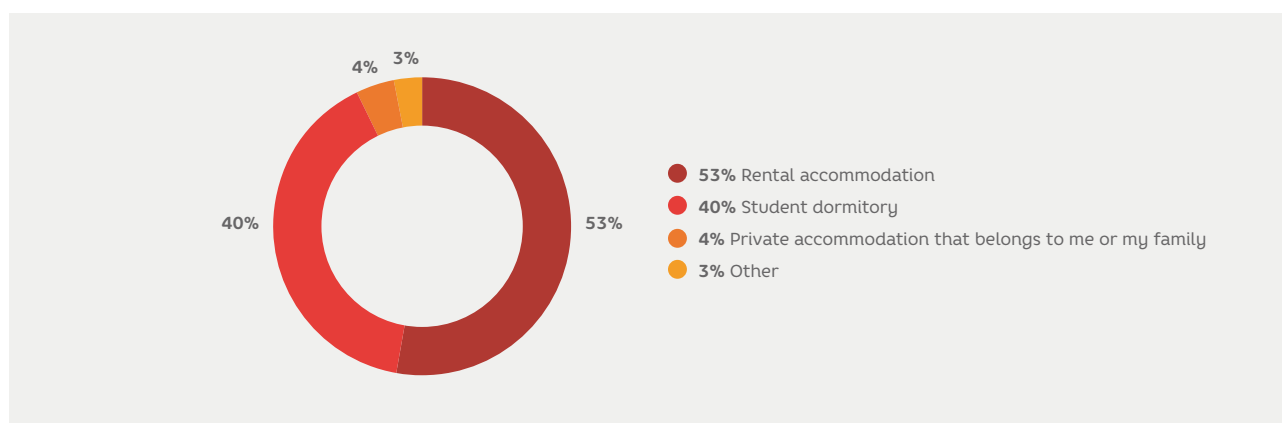
year) and of access to medical and health services in particular. This is likely because students have to purchase private medical insurance or pay out-of-pocket for medical expenses.

Universities need to have the teaching and research facilities to absorb increased flows of students. Just as importantly, there needs to be a large enough selection of housing – from basic student dormitories for undergraduates to apartments for PhD students – to deal with the increased demand that will come with student number growth.

Figure 10 shows that more than half of all international students in Latvia live in private accommodation and 40% live in student hostels. Moreover, 83% of students from the EU and Norway live in private accommodation while students from other regions are more likely to live in student dormitories.

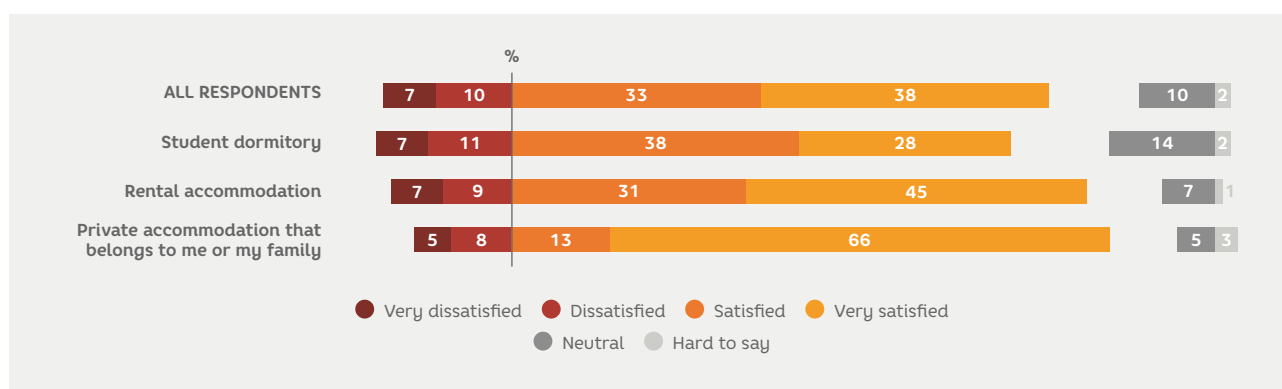
#### Where do you live?<sup>47</sup>

Figure 11



#### Satisfaction with current accommodation<sup>48</sup>

Figure 12



The forecast rise in international student numbers is likely to put this infrastructure under some stress. While there is little that can be done in terms of

increasing the number of teaching staff, facilities can be enhanced by developing common facilities for the major universities in Riga.

<sup>47</sup> SKDS. 2016. Ārvalstu studentu aptauja par studijām un dzīvi Latvijā. Rīga: SKDS.

<sup>48</sup> SKDS. 2016. Ārvalstu studentu aptauja par studijām un dzīvi Latvijā. Rīga: SKDS.

## Riga Campus

Latvia does have one very clear comparative advantage over Estonia and Lithuania and this is the capital city of Riga which is by far the biggest and most cosmopolitan city in the region – important factors that can help attract students to the region. Moreover, Riga has first rate (and low cost) internet and telecommunication connections, the largest airport in the Baltic states and a lively nightlife. It is no surprise that the overwhelming majority of international students in Latvia already study in Riga. They are also largely based in the Pārdaugava region of Riga which will develop into the main academic area of Riga over the next few years.

This kind of planned development has proven successful elsewhere. After World War Two Philadelphia in the US began to develop the “University City” neighbourhood in order to enhance the attractiveness of the two large universities – the University of Philadelphia and Drexel University – and other smaller educational institutions and research centres based in this part of the city. It also aimed to counter the urban blight that had started to surround the new campus. Housing, traffic and safety had all become major concerns for both the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. Thus, it was a revitalization project as much as one for university development. This area has now developed into one of the most vibrant parts of Philadelphia, boasting many

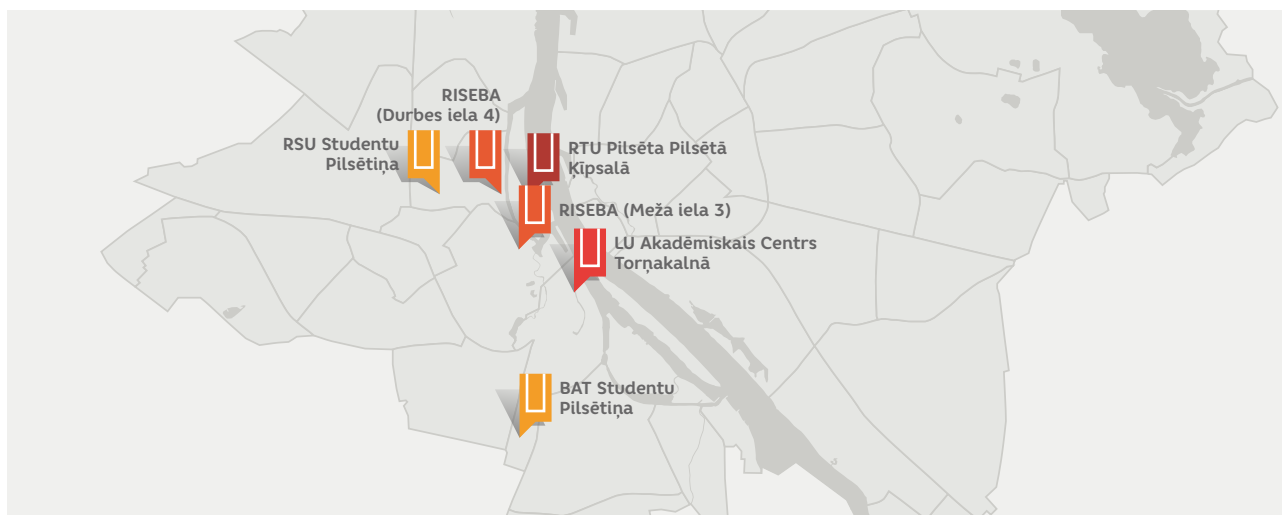
small innovative companies (startups) as well as artists and other cultural events as well as having restaurants regions and nightlife areas.<sup>39</sup>

In a similar vein, a new Otaniemi campus was developed in the Espoo suburb of Helsinki where existing Helsinki University of technology and VTT Technical Research campuses were used to drive collaboration and innovation between individuals and organisations, including collaboration between the public and private sectors.<sup>40</sup> The area had seen dormitories constructed for athletes for both the 1952 Olympic games and the 2005 World Athletics Championships. These were then later converted into student housing. Thus students and universities were already clustered together.

Much of the facilities of the higher education sector in Latvia remain dated. Moreover, both the University of Latvia and Riga Technical University have university buildings scattered around different parts of Riga. This is problematic for both students and faculty. For students, this means that they have no reason to remain on campus when lectures are finished, thus missing out on the networking dimension of higher education. For faculty, this means that the opportunity for ad hoc cross-disciplinary collaboration is strictly limited.

University campuses on the left bank of the Daugava (Pārdaugava)

Figure 13



<sup>39</sup> See University City: <http://www.universitycity.org/>

<sup>40</sup> See for example the Espoo innovation garden: <http://www.espooinnovationgarden.fi/en>



The Pārdaugava region of Riga can be constructed in a similar way. Hitherto the major universities in Riga have been actively developing their campuses with both RSU and RTU having undertaken major modernization projects and LU developing a whole new campus in Torņakalns.

A more harmonized approach – supporting the construction of private student housing, common facilities (such as the Latvian National Library also becoming a joint Latvian Academic Library) and a joined-up transport and IT infrastructure would give Latvia's academic community a focus and enhanced image that it currently lacks. A modern campus would attract both domestic and international students reaping long-term rewards for the Latvian economy.

In 2014 the QS global ranking of universities also put together a ranking of the "Top 10 Student Cities in Europe".<sup>41</sup> The ranking was based on five indicators: (1) the size and diversity of the student community; (2) the all-round quality of life; (3) affordability based on tuition fees plus living expenses; (4) the number of internationally ranked universities; and (5) employer activity. Riga clearly fares well in the first three indicators – which also indicates that it is worthwhile developing the Riga campus – and although it fares worse with the latter two indicators, it is at least clear as to where attention should be focused.<sup>42</sup>

Alas, it should be noted that the universities based outside Riga will have little opportunity to benefit from the export of higher education. Some – such as LLU with its strong veterinary science and forestry programmes – have niches that could well attract large numbers of international students. However, it is simply a fact that universities based in Latvia's small provincial cities will struggle to attract significant numbers of international students.

The idea of developing a campus in Riga is not new. In 2007, prior to the economic crisis, the BA School of Business and Finance (Banku Augstskola) had planned a large new campus in Riga, partly to attract more international students to Riga. Moreover, Latvia's largest universities are also focusing on campus projects that aim to centralize and modernize their campuses.

Approximately half of all students in Latvia already study on left bank of the Daugava River. This number is sure to increase as Latvia's biggest universities develop and grow their campuses in this part of Riga. RTU has already centralized its campus in Ķīpsala, building new dormitories, research laboratories as well as a library to create an attractive and international study environment. BAT has similarly upgraded its facilities and even ensured a railway station on the campus to ease student traffic to and from the centre of the city.

Moreover, this concentration of students in Pārdaugava will grow as the University of Latvia further develops its Torņakalns campus project – which will eventually bring together about 15,000 students and researchers. The first stage saw a modern new Academic Centre for the Natural Sciences bring together five faculties under one roof. The next stages will develop new facilities for the computer sciences, the social sciences and the humanities as well as student dormitories with approximately 2,500 beds, sporting facilities and a research centre that aims to bring together researchers in several different university institutes and faculties with the private sector.

RSU is expanding its administration, teaching and research facilities on the left side of the Daugava River, not least because its international medical students learn, intern and have residencies in the medical hospitals on this side of the river. Indeed, if both RSU and LU continue to expand their medical student numbers then RSU will soon require its own teaching hospital in addition to sharing the facilities of the *Paula Stradiņa Klīniskā universitātes slimnīca* with LU, to teach the next generations of health-care workers and promote hospital research to develop new technologies and approaches to patient care. For these reasons teaching hospitals (such as Mount Sinai Medical Centre in New York, the University College London Hospital or the Karolinska in Stockholm) are among the finest medical institutions in the world. Concentrating teaching, research and medical practice in one part of Riga will further support the development of a medical technology cluster in Latvia. After all, Latvia is the only Baltic state with medical universities and hospitals as well as an advanced research institution (OSI) and pharmaceutical manufactures (*Grindex*, *Olainfarm* and other smaller players).

<sup>41</sup> In 2015 the top three in Europe were Paris, London and Zurich. The 2016 global ranking was topped by Paris, Melbourne and Tokyo. QS. 2014. Top 10 Student Cities in Europe 2015: <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings-articles/qs-best-student-cities/top-10-student-cities-europe-2015>

<sup>42</sup> However, Riga is currently not among the 98 cities in the 2016 ranking because only the University of Latvia (#651-700) is in the top 1,000 ranking.

The Riga municipality will play a central role in developing the Riga Campus. Although it has no formal role in higher education one of the municipality's planning priorities is the Research and Innovation Centre (ZIC – Zinatnes un Inovācijas centrs) on the left bank of the Daugava stretching from Tornakalns to Kipsala. This territory also takes in the Latvian National Library which has emerged as a major conference centre in Latvia and also has the capacity to serve as a research library for all the universities based in the Riga campus territory. Indeed, the ZIC mission fits in perfectly well with the Riga Campus objective: ↓

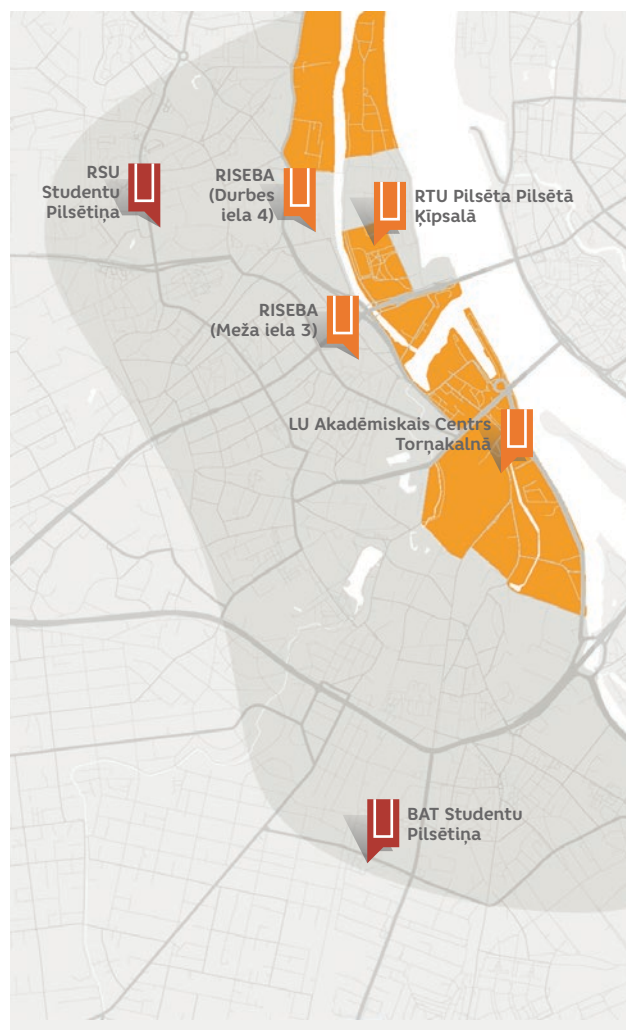
*"The ZIC mission is to strengthen the intellectual potential of Riga and Latvia as a whole. Development will be based on existing institutions in the region: Riga Technical University, University of Latvia and RISEEBA, Latvia's National Library as well as financial institutions. Cooperation between academic institutions, entrepreneurs and the Riga municipality will create synergies that will upgrade Latvia's academic and research capacity, strengthen creativity, improve the economic and social environment and make the city more accessible."*<sup>43</sup>

However, the ZIC currently embraces just the Torņakalns, Klīversala and Ķīpsala parts of Pārdaugava. It should be expanded to also include RSU, the *Paula Stradiņa Klīniskā universitātes slimnīca* as well as the BAT campus. This expansion of the ZIC should also be taken into account when planning travel links from the soon-to-be expanded Torņakalns Train Station which will be the central transport hub for Pārdaugava.

In addition to the universities, the Riga local authority and, of course, the Ministry of Education, the private sector also has an important role to play in the Riga Campus. Private sector actors are particularly active in developing plans for private student housing. As the number of students expands and exceeds the number of beds that the universities can offer, students will increasingly rely on the private accommodation market.

### Zinātnes un inovācijas centrs Rīgā un Rīgas Kampus teritorija

Map 3



In recent years the private sector has been meeting most of these accommodation needs on an *ad hoc* basis. However, many of the apartments that students have been renting are not purpose-built or approved by university management. It would, of course, be better and safer for students, particularly more vulnerable international students that have less *know-how* of Latvia, to rent apartments that have been university approved.

<sup>43</sup> Rīgas domes Pilsētas attīstības departaments. 2014. Rīga 2030: Rīgas ilgtspējīgas attīstības stratēģija līdz 2030.gadam. Rīgas dome: Rīga. 70.lpp.

The sharp rise in international students has been noted by property developers in Riga and there are several different student dormitories projects at the planning stage. There is a great deal of expertise in this field among developers. For example, New Century Holdings Inc (NCH) has been involved in the construction of student accommodation in several university cities in the UK, including Plymouth, Liverpool and London. However, these are projects that are planned independently from universities, largely because the increase in international students is still a relatively new phenomenon in Latvia and it is unclear what kind of growth in international student numbers Latvian universities can expect over the next few years. As a result, universities are reluctant to make the kind of commitments that developers typically expect from universities in return for privately financing the construction of dormitories.

Over the last twenty years there has been a sea change in the way in which universities in Europe provide student accommodation. While most dormitory housing was traditionally university-owned private actors are now market players, providing dormitories in a number of different categories and varying levels of rent.

## CONCLUSION

State support for the export of higher education is important if Latvian institutions are to continue taking advantage of the sustained global increase in international student numbers. After all, an increase in the number of international students would not only

The key challenge here appears to be one of coordination – ensuring that the different actors in the Riga Campus are adequately informed about what each other is doing. There has already been some cooperation between the Riga local authority and the university of Latvia via the *Live Baltic campus* project. This cooperation should be expanded to include all the universities in the expanded ZIC territory as well as the Riga municipality, the Ministry of Education and representatives of property developers.

A model for this form of cooperation can be found in the London Mayor's Academic Forum which was established in 2013 to ensure that the city could cope with the expected growth in international student numbers.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the establishment of the forum was first mooted in 2010 after the first objective of the city's new 2010 Economic Strategy was 'to promote London as ...the world's leading international centre of learning and creativity'.

benefit the wider economy, as this analysis has shown, but also help bring Latvian universities closer to their full capacity, raise the quality of education and the study environment and ultimately make the domestic education market more attractive to Latvian students.

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<sup>44</sup> The London Mayor's Academic Forum. 2016. <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/who-we-work/planning-working-groups/mayor%E2%80%99s-academic-forum>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. PĀRDAUGAVA – RIGA CAMPUS

Public investment in the transport and communication infrastructure on the left bank of the Daugava river in Riga (Pārdaugava) would build up the study, living and research space and help to position Riga as an international centre for higher education.

A Riga Campus Coordination Council, set up under the office of the Mayor of Riga, would bring together officials from the Ministries of Education and Economics, the universities, NGOs and private sector to share student number projections, planned investments and other forward looking information that would contribute to the harmonized development of the left bank of the Daugava river.

### 2. ENHANCE THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMICS

The Ministry of Economics should take responsibility for the export of higher education sector in the same way as the UK's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills developed a strategy and oversaw the growth and development of the sector.

### 3. SIMPLIFIED AND ACCELERATED RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

- A consolidated and modernized [www.studyinLatvia](http://www.studyinLatvia) homepage would allow students to find information on Latvia and easily enrol in the right university.
- Amendments to article 85 of the Law on Higher Education would allow appropriately qualified and accredited university staff to evaluate international academic diplomas and qualifications.
- Embassys and diplomatic missions with a high international student demand, as well as the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs should take on additional personnel to cope with the seasonal increased flow of paperwork in the spring and summer.

## Author:

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