

H_5 University of Latvia - Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art

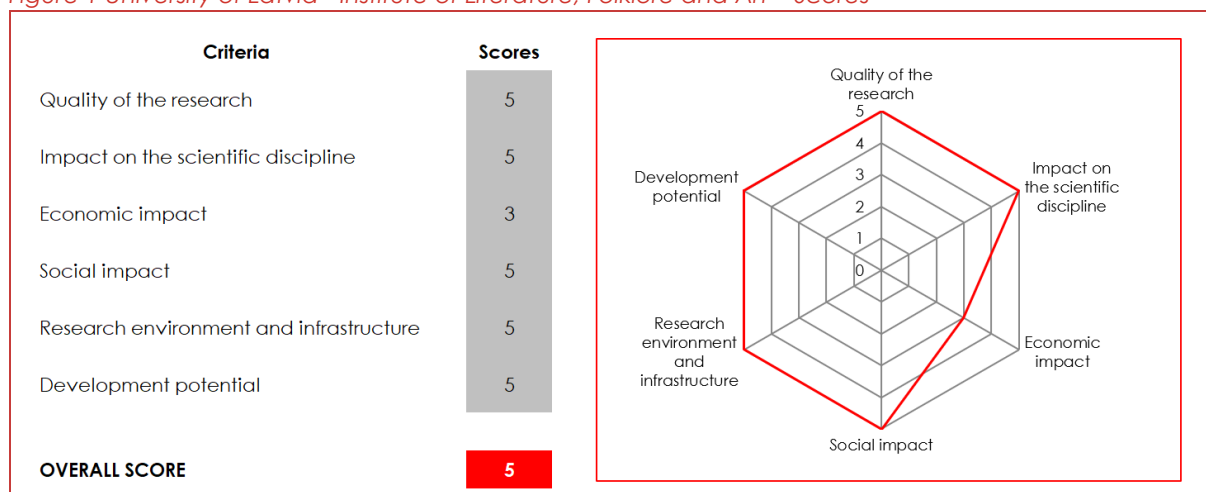
1.2.1 The unit

The Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art (ILFA) is a research institute affiliated with the University of Latvia, focusing on literature, folklore, arts, cultural and gender studies, digital and environmental humanities. ILFA is committed to fostering innovative research grounded in national heritage while engaging in global academic dialogue. The institute aims to advance high-level research, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, support open knowledge, and strengthen the role of the humanities in public life and policymaking. ILFA contributes to cultural and comparative studies in the Baltic area and maintains active international partnerships. ILFA's research is organised into four specialised departments: 1) Literary Studies, 2) Folklore Studies/Archives of Latvian Folklore, 3) Arts, and 4) Culture, Society, and Environment, along with a cross-departmental Digital Humanities Group. The research strategy emphasises a holistic and interdisciplinary view of culture, focusing on comparative and regional literary studies, folklore, and cultural heritage research, performing arts, environmental humanities, gender and queer studies, and Digital Humanities innovation.

1.2.2 Expert Group evaluation

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

Figure 1 University of Latvia - Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art – Scores



Overall score

Score 5: Outstanding level of research

The Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art is an outstanding performer and a global leader in its field. Based on the Archives of Folklore (1924), the present Institute for Folklore, Literature and Art (ILFA) is now affiliated with the University of Latvia as one of its independent research institutes. ILFA is still dedicated to the study of Latvian heritage with a permanent, innovative, and interdisciplinary approach made possible by the integration of broader core disciplines of the humanities, most notably literature and art, motivated by a clear mission and strategy, and an expanding international participation in projects, publications, conferences, and bilingual online platforms. The research balances Latvian and international perspectives in a cross-fertilising research dynamic that involves collaboration across disciplines and generations and takes its inspiration from recent international theoretical developments in environmental humanities, gender studies and Digital Humanities, the latter as a horizontal preoccupation

across the departments. Although it plays no formal role in doctoral education, ILFA's researchers act as mentors for doctoral students, and the unit offers an inspiring collegial environment for ECRs. Being located in the National Library of Latvia is ideal for ILFA's strong dependence on archival studies and the joint efforts with NLL to spearhead the development of Digital Humanities as both applied and potentially also fundamental research in Latvia. ILFA's succinct self-assessment report shows a productive self-reflection on its limits and potential, which is matched by a clear and realistic strategy for research, outreach and staff cooperation and development within a sustained network of important international partners and collaborations. The site visit's interviews with staff, stakeholders and doctoral students fully confirmed the report. Combining tradition and innovation, local commitment and international engagement, fundamental and applied science, academic ambitions and citizen interaction, ILFA is outstanding also in the international research landscape.

Quality of Research

Score 5: Outstanding

ILFA is an outstanding research unit conducting fundamental and applied research in literature, folklore, performing arts, heritage, digital and environmental humanities, and gender studies, with special expertise in Latvian, Baltic, and post-Soviet cultural history. Its core strengths lie in interdisciplinary humanities research, digital infrastructure, and cultural heritage, supported by four departments and a cross-departmental Digital Humanities Group. The institute demonstrates high research excellence, particularly in literary history, folkloristics, Digital Humanities, and environmental humanities, with internationally recognised outputs including folklore editions, annotated archives, and monographs on Soviet cultural practices and cultural memory, musicology, narratology, folklore, feminist theory, as well as literature theory. ILFA shows a sustained effort across all activities to ensure an innovative approach to Latvian heritage and in relation to present-day cultural issues (environment, gender, etc.) in collaboration with international partners across the region, Scandinavian Europe, and beyond. It is well aligned with recent international theoretical developments, such as postcolonial and trauma studies, posthumanism, ecocriticism, and gender theory. Its strategy is clear and productive, balancing basic and applied research. ILFA fosters a culture of creative research that bridges academic and artistic practice, advances socially relevant themes, and situates Latvian humanities within multiple international research networks.

Impact on scientific discipline

Score 5: Outstanding

ILFA's efforts to combine strong conceptual research with applied outputs such as digital platforms (e.g., *garamantas.lv* (digital folklore archive), *literatura.lv* (Latvian literature database), *humma.lv* (digital humanities portal), *womage.lv* (women's cultural history), *iesaisties.lv* (citizen science platform)), annotated editions (e.g., of exile literature), and exhibitions (e.g. in collaboration with the National Museum of Literature and Music), are exemplary for achieving an outstanding impact both in academia and in the public sphere. The efforts are supported by a comprehensive bilingual dissemination strategy (mainly Latvian and English) to ensure that projects reach international and national peers, policymakers, and wider audiences through monographs, critical editions, digital tools, exhibitions, podcasts, and educational resources. Its award-winning publishing house and the open-access journal *Letonica* significantly enhance international visibility, while the series *Theoria* makes a string of translations of contemporary theories available for Latvian scholars. This two-way traffic is exemplary, not only in Latvian studies but also in general for national and regional studies in

small or underrepresented languages and cultures. The increase in international publications (~30%) and contacts since the last evaluation testifies to the sustainability of international collaborations with parallel research units in the region, including Scandinavia and Germany, fostering mutual inspiration for the unit's partners as well as for the unit itself. The Digital Humanities group positions ILFA at the forefront of Latvia's cultural infrastructure, with growing participation in Horizon Europe, COST, Erasmus+, and Nordic-Baltic networks. However, encouraging long-term foreign researcher presence in the Institute and taking on the coordination of large-scale EU projects remain future strategic challenges.

Economic impact

Score 3: *Good*

ILFA's economic impact is good. Its research generates cultural, educational, and socio-economic benefits, strengthening Latvia's national development, regional identity, and international visibility of importance for the positioning of Latvian business and policy making in the European political, economic, and cultural landscape. Economically, the unit provides reusable digital resources for exhibitions, tourism, and publishing, and supports regional museums, SMEs, and NGOs in developing heritage-based innovations and educational products. Flagship projects such as *Green Heritage* and *Living Next to the Port* link cultural research to ecological transition and climate resilience, demonstrating the relevance of humanities research to broader sustainability goals. ILFA also delivers expert services such as lectures, consultations, strategy development, and evaluation for municipalities, ministries, and civil society. However, engagement with the business sector and the innovation ecosystem remains modest, limiting the transfer of applied research, cross-sectoral collaboration, and the commercialisation potential of digital tools and methodologies.

Social impact

Score 5: *Outstanding*

ILFA has an outstanding social impact, resting on a dialogical and interactive engagement in citizen science, contributing to national identity formation, cultural sustainability, education, and social inclusion. It preserves and reinterprets Latvian cultural memory, most notably through the Archives of Latvian Folklore, which is one of Europe's most advanced open-access folklore collections. It also ensures broad societal access via digital platforms, created and curated by ILFA, such as *garamantas.lv* and citizen science initiatives like *iesaieties.lv*. The Institute engages diverse publics through exhibitions, festivals, educational resources, crowdsourcing campaigns, and collaborations with schools, libraries, museums, and NGOs. The unit plays a leading role in shaping cultural policy, advising ministries, municipalities, and heritage institutions, while initiatives such as the Latvian Literature Award, oral history projects, and participatory research further strengthen civic participation and cultural dialogue. ILFA's integration of research excellence, open science, digital innovation, and community partnerships positions it both as a cultural memory institution and as a socially engaged research hub, making its societal contribution exemplary at national and international levels, not least documented by the first Baltic *Honorary Mention* in the *European Union Citizen Science Award* for *iesaieties.lv*.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 5: Outstanding

ILFA's location in the National Library with office space, technological resources, archival and other materials, and possibilities for collaboration outside ILFA is outstanding and provides a major asset for the unit. The plan to hire technological expertise (information from the site visit) is a commendable strategic decision that will further strengthen cooperation with the National Library, its staff and resources. ILFA maintains a supportive and participatory research environment that encourages collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the development of early-career researchers, including doctoral students integrated into funded projects. Its strength lies in a well-developed research infrastructure and cross-departmental collaboration, combining physical resources, archives, and advanced digital platforms. The Archives of Latvian Folklore, one of Europe's most extensive and technologically advanced folklore collections, together with open-access digital tools and daily access to the National Library of Latvia's extensive collections, enables high-quality interdisciplinary research and public engagement. These resources support a dynamic, collaborative research culture across all departments, innovative scholarships, and international connectivity.

Development potential

Score 5: Outstanding

Combined with its resources and track record, ILFA's clear strategic thinking provides it with outstanding potential for further development, particularly in strengthening the expanding scope of its research capacity and international engagement. Commendably, attracting and developing national and international research talent is outlined as a key priority, and the unit offers a supportive environment for early-career researchers through mentoring, project integration, and internal training. Its development plan for 2025–2030 focuses on consolidating core strengths, interdisciplinary humanities research, digital infrastructure, and cultural heritage expertise. Particularly promising is the integration in European networks of Digital Humanities (e.g., DHN) which will enable ILFA to be at the forefront of new developments. In this larger European context, an opening to the development of LLMs for small languages could be made possible, maybe in collaboration with the National Library and national departments of linguistics and communication studies. With its clear strategic vision, balanced integration of basic and applied research, social engagement, active support for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, and emphasis on internationalisation, ILFA is well placed to strengthen its national leadership and grow as an internationally competitive humanities research unit.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

Interviews with highly motivated and well-integrated doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers during the site visit showed ILFA's capacity to support doctoral student training at a high level. Doctoral students and other ECRs are integrated in research projects within a both national and international horizon, in an inclusive research environment, in close contact with mentors, internal seminars across ILFA's departments, international conference participation, internal peer review processes for planned publications and project applications as well as a good physical infrastructure. With ILFA's active and wide-ranging public engagements, the unit also offers students the experience of broader research dissemination and public interaction, supported by the location at the NLL.

ILFA does not issue doctoral degrees; yet, many senior researchers are involved in supervision and doctoral education at other institutions, first of all University of Latvia and the Latvian Academy of Culture, but also at a number of other Latvian universities and the University of

Tartu. The establishment of doctoral schools in Latvia and, for ILFA in particular, the unit's planned formalised participation in the doctoral school of University of Latvia, will be an important step forward for the education of doctoral students and ECRs in Latvia.

Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

ILFAs satisfies the RIS3 strategy by intersecting knowledge dissemination across many sectors of society with digital technology development. The unit carries out interdisciplinary research in Latvian literature and culture, intangible heritage, environmental humanities and various art forms in research and public outreach. This work is channelled via a number of digital platforms, created and curated by the unit, advisory functions and other forms of public engagement as well as promoted in open summer schools. This work contributes to RIS3 priorities like environmental economics and sustainability, open society, education, and public engagement in crowdfunding. The broad international engagement in EU-funded projects and networks (Horizon, COST, Erasmus+, DARIAH) provides Latvia with a visibility of importance for policymaking and business.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

ILFA aligns clearly with the national objectives of scientific and technology development by its contributions to national democratic cohesion in its research areas and its interdisciplinary research practice as well as in its public outreach. The unit plays an important role in digital development within the humanities both on a national and international level, shows a competitive international research profile enhancing the international visibility of Latvia, and fosters an innovative intersection of research and broader dissemination with its interactive engagement in open citizen science.

Recommendations

The Expert Group's recommendations are as follows:

- ILFA is encouraged to follow its strategy and continue to build on its interdisciplinary and inter-generational organisation of research and its international collaborations in projects, publications, and conferences. The unit has a level and a cohesiveness that make it internationally attractive. It would be a worthwhile ambition to host a major international project, probably in the EU context and probably as a joint effort of several research institutions in Latvia.
- ILFA is recommended to strengthen its relationship with the creative industries via joint projects. Experience with crowdfunding and creation/curating of digital platforms has the potential to further develop economic impact.
- ILFA's engagement in the Digital Humanities is strong and diversified. The topics of the regional summer schools 2019-2024 show the range of dimensions taken up by ILFA. However, the latest developments in large language models (LLM) and generative AI are not much taken up in Latvian humanities research. In collaboration with other research units, ILFA could take the lead and use its international connections to explore these new areas through international partnerships.
- ILFA is recommended to take on a more formal role within the doctoral school of the University of Latvia. This would be an asset to doctoral education and to ILFA as well. It is also recommended to push for an increase in the number of supervisors that can be allocated to academic doctoral students. Academic doctoral projects should involve two supervisors to align them with professional projects, and to make use of international co-supervisors (whom ILFA would be well-positioned to identify).
- ILFA is recommended to continue its efforts to attract international staff, long-term guest professors, and exchange agreements. This is difficult given the present structure of

academic positions in Latvia. However, ILFA may be in a position to convincingly lobby for increasing such opportunities, which would strengthen the Latvian research sector.

- ILFA is recommended to rethink its use of performance incentives and to allow beneficiaries to choose among extra sabbaticals, bonuses, international research visits, or other benefits important to their work.