

Information Management Pioneers Launch Pure in Latvia



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Rīga Stradiņš University: The Pioneer Pure Adopter in Latvia

Located in the capital of Latvia, Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU) is a modern and prestigious institution of higher education that is recognized for its high-quality healthcare and social science programs. It is the highest ranked university in Latvia and second highest in the Baltic States. The institution is organized into nine faculties that provide undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral studies and houses four research institutes. At present, RSU is home to 9,160 students and 2,300 faculty and staff members.

As the only university in Latvia that is integrated into the healthcare system, RSU places an emphasis on research-based, high-quality, and exportable higher education. Students are provided with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to succeed in professional and practical work environments.

Recently, the Latvian government granted RSU the status of research university and is recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science as one of four research universities in Latvia. As part of this development, senior administrators aim to demonstrate transparency in the research process, track and report on research output, and increase the visibility of its researchers. Importantly, RSU's strategic goal is to increasingly participate in international research networks in the Baltic region as well as globally and to contribute to the European research agenda and the UN's sustainability goals.

Success in the abovementioned areas is linked to the availability of research information management (RIM) systems that can produce high-quality data, demonstrate research capacity at the university, and measure professional engagement. However, at

the time of the transition RSU did not have a system that could produce the required results.

To address this, university management assembled a RIM team made up of research administrators, IT professionals, and librarians to create one central platform of data on research. After extensively evaluating information systems that have been implemented in Latvia and across Europe, conducting feasibility studies and holding conversations with university stakeholders, RSU became the first institution in Latvia to adopt Pure as their preferred RIM system.

The Challenge: Developing an Information System for a Growing Research Community

Research information at RSU was previously collected with two products: Ex Libris and Microsoft Excel. Staff spent a significant amount of time manually entering data, producing reports, and running quality checks on report results. Because staff used local copies of Excel files it was difficult to standardize data entry and data was spread across multiple files in multiple versions. In this environment, staff did not have the necessary tools to efficiently track or report on research output at RSU.

"One of the historic background problems we had was that we didn't have an information system for our research outputs or research results, so this was the primary issue that we had to solve," says Dr. Elina Dace, Research IT Project Coordinator.

Stakeholders requested precise information that allowed the university to pinpoint available research capacity and administration required reports that quantified research output and impact. It became clear that it was not possible to support

the strategic objectives of RSU without investing in a robust RIM system.

With the support of university senior management, the RIM team began researching system options. The first step was to document feedback from existing users. They consulted with three main stakeholders: the Research Department, the Library, and the Human Resources (HR) department.

Across the university, importance was placed on both the availability and quality of data. The system had to be capable of standardizing data and providing accurate research profiles. At a higher level, RSU implemented a [Quality Policy](#) that encourages collaboration across disciplines and defines research quality. The three tenants of the policy are summarized as follows:

1. A student-centered approach fosters interaction between academic staff and students and develops up-to-date research infrastructure and environments.
2. Partnerships foster interdisciplinary relationships, link healthcare with social sciences, and support innovation through cooperation with interested parties.
3. Quality frameworks demonstrate results-oriented quality improvement.

Although the activities of the RIM team were not specifically guided by the Quality Policy, many of the values, including up-to-date research infrastructures, cooperative interdisciplinary relationships, and results-oriented quality improvement, are evident in the methods used to evaluate RIM systems.

The Evaluation Phase: Selecting a Research Information Management System

To begin the process of evaluating and selecting a RIM system, the team surveyed the local market. Findings indicated that many institutions of higher education in Latvia had built in-house systems. Zigmunds Zitmanis, Director of IT Department, believes that due to the growth of research activities at RSU, the size of the system required was beyond the scope of what could be accomplished by designing it in-house.

“Everything was a bit new to us because our research capacity is growing, our Research Department is growing, and our needs for reporting are growing,” explains Z. Zitmanis

The team expanded the scope of their research and examined the information management landscape across Europe. The RIM team considered commercial and open-source solutions. After careful examination, they felt that a ready-made commercial product would be the best fit for the project’s goals and timeline.

At the same time, the RIM team hired a consulting company to analyze differences between RIM products, collect procurement documents, and conduct feasibility studies of metadata attributes. The results indicated that Pure contained the most fields that RSU required and very few iterations would be required to successfully implement the system.



Dr. Liene Nikitina-Zake
Director
Research Department

“Our researchers have started to think about their research activities in new ways. We didn’t collect a lot of data about research activities before, and now they can enter this information into a single platform. We can assess the impact that researchers have on policy makers, for example, or on society. I think that by seeing all this data in one place, researchers look at their own work and results in a different way.”



Dr. Elina Dace
Research IT Project Coordinator
Research Department

“We clearly knew what data requirements we have from research administration side. In addition, we consulted our professors and research staff to understand what they find useful and what they find not so useful, and we received feedback on what we can improve.”

The RIM team also discovered a survey conducted in 2016 by the European University Information Systems organization that examined systems used in individual countries or national grid systems. The survey found Pure among the most frequently used current research information systems.

The team also located contacts at the [University of Helsinki](#) and [Aalto University](#), both of which use Pure. Team members travelled to both institutions to view practical demonstrations and engage in detailed discussions about Pure’s implementation and maintenance requirements, functionality, and so on.

“The visit to Helsinki helped the core project team to be sure that the road we were starting on had a specific endpoint and gave us the confidence that it was possible to get results in a foreseeable time. I think this was an important part of implementing this project,” says Z. Zitmanis.

After visiting their peers, the RIM team was confident that Pure aligned with the strategic goals of RSU and supported high-quality data, transparency in research practices, accurate reports, and public-facing profiles for researchers.

The Planning Phase: Change Management and Pure Implementation Achievements

One element sets RSU apart from many other institutions of higher education in regard to information management: the speed at which systems are implemented. Pure was up and running three months after the procurement contract was approved, a fact that astounds many in the field.

The RIM team attributes this success to their knowledge of change management strategies and dedicated project planning time. This phase included detailed discussions about risks and how they would be mitigated or managed. Importantly, the RIM team had a clear structure of the data about research performance in mind.

An integral part of the planning phase was the availability of

a Pure sandbox. After the RIM team spoke with their peers at the University of Helsinki and Aalto University, they contacted Elsevier to discuss stakeholder needs and project goals at RSU. Project managers at Elsevier created a sandbox that allowed the RIM team to test samples of data in Pure. Through this process, IT professionals at RSU identified and solved logistical issues tied to the technical implementation process. They also established a workflow that supported uploading of data from existing Excel spreadsheets.

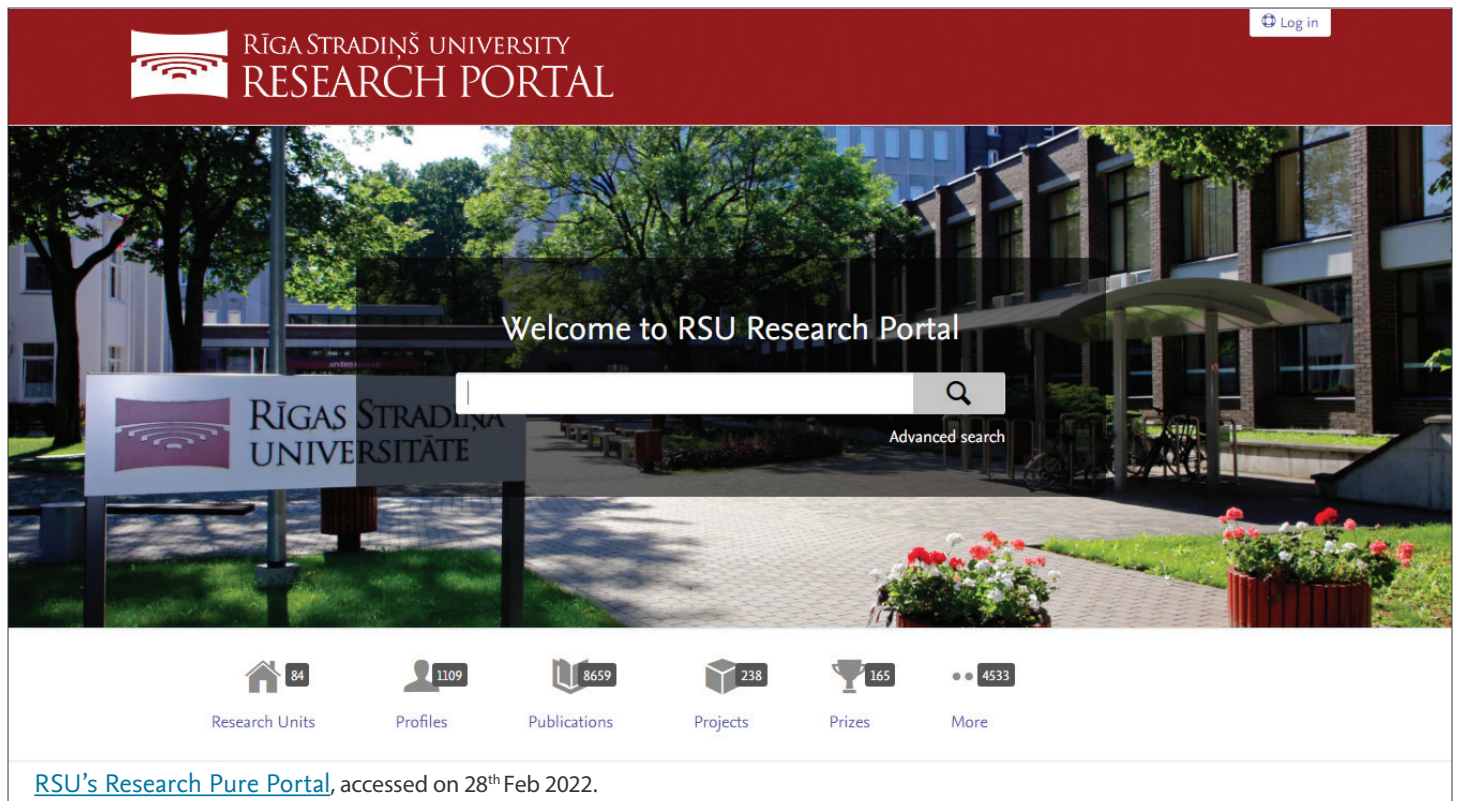
During this phase, the research administrators, IT professionals and librarians spoke about stakeholders' needs and how Pure would address them. These discussions allowed the team to map project goals and build a final product that supported all users at RSU.

"We had to figure out which research units, users and research staff to add to Pure and how. These decisions were made during the sandbox. Together with research administrators we outlined the processes and how research units and data would be added. We created a technical process and had a great background process that automatically made the inputs and the data changes," says Aigars Zupa, IT Project Manager.

Because of the preparation work done in the sandbox, the IT team had already uploaded a large portion of RSU's data to Pure. Since the final policies and workflows were in place, the path for success was already laid out. When the procurement contract was approved, the IT team could implement Pure without a hitch.

"The main goal was to get precise information and a transparent picture about what research capacity we really have, to have the capability to analyze data, and the ability to provide all necessary reports in a timely way resulting in less stressful submissions. And we have achieved this."

– Dr. Nikitina-Zake.



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Katrīna Liepiņa
Research Data Analyst
Research Department

“The quality of data has improved. I don’t need to check fields twice because they are predefined. Users can only fill out what is required and not provide variations of their data.”

The final piece of the project was to generate immediate interest and engagement with Pure. During the RSU Research Week, an international scientific conference, the RSU hosted a virtual kick-off event and research administrators and librarians organized email campaigns and training sessions. The Research Department worked with stakeholders to promote the system, set up bonuses for researchers who created profiles in Pure, and integrated it into the performance management and motivation system. The team estimates that within the first year, 95% of the original uptake goal was achieved.

The Benefits: Unexpected Outcomes Linked to Pure

Now that implementation is complete and most researchers at RSU have created profiles in Pure, the RIM team has had time to reflect on their experience.

Since Pure has been implemented, stakeholders at RSU (including researchers, librarians, and HR professionals) can produce evidence-based reports that demonstrate the research capacity of individual academic departments and transparent research processes. They also have access to new data sets that provide insight into researchers’ professional activities including

membership on boards or mentions in the media. Going forward, these metrics will inform key performance indicators for staff members, laboratories, and departments.

As a central RIM system, Pure has supported the strategic goals of university leaders, and they could not be more pleased with its functionality. Researcher profiles in Pure boost staff visibility, show interdisciplinary and international collaborations and measure the impact of research on goal attainment and public policy. These outcomes support the three tenants of RSU’s Quality Policy and ultimately provide the evidence required to transition from being a teaching institution to a research university.

“The main goal was to get precise information and a transparent picture about what research capacity we really have, to have the capability to analyze data, and the ability to provide all necessary reports in a timely way resulting in less stressful submissions. And we have achieved this,” says Dr. Nikitina-Zake.

The team has also seen a significant improvement in the quality of data, which has allowed them to run reports in an efficient and timely manner.

Besides achieving the central goal of the project, Pure has provided several unexpected benefits to the RSU community:

- **Communication and cooperation between departments.** Pure addressed common needs across all departments and provided opportunities for discussion. Departments have a better understanding of each other and find opportunities for cooperation.
- **Researchers consider research impact outside of academia.** Data and metrics allow researchers to understand how their work impacts policy makers, the media, professional associations and so on. They look at their research from a new perspective and understand how results are used in society.
- **Researchers have tools to assess their work.** Interest in h-index metrics has increased as researchers measure the impact of their own work.
- **New relationships and communication with university administrators.** Senior management is supportive of Pure and the efficiency it brings to research initiatives. RSU is pleased to have one central location for research data and the ability to run reports in a timely manner.

Looking Forward: The Future of Pure at Rīga Stradiņš University

Based on the success of the project, the RIM team is planning to add all Pure modules in the future, including the Awards Management Module (AMM), which allows universities to manage research grants, contract applications, and awards processes. In the meantime, they are still discovering new data types and learning more about RSU research activities.

“There were many data types we didn’t collect or were not aware of, but since we have the functionality to add these types

of results to the system, we now can collect and analyze them. Now that these results are visible to us, we can think about how to use them,” says Dr. Dace. “For example, we can view press or see memberships in associations or on boards. We had scattered knowledge about this from our staff, but we did not know if we had the most accurate information. We were therefore not able to apply the data to staff evaluation systems, but now we can.”

The ability to run reports in Pure has supported strategic planning activities at RSU. Now, administrators can evaluate the research capacity of any structural unit at the university.

“If we want to see results from a certain institute or certain laboratory, we can choose that structure in Pure and see everything, including how many researchers they have and how many publications they had in the last couple of years. From that, we can plan the future and set certain key performance

indicators for them,” says Dr. Nikitina-Zake.

For instance, we see which structural units and faculty members have established international networks and which work locally. The next challenge for us is to make the best possible use of the data and information that Pure provides, and to make using it a daily habit for academic personnel, researchers, and administrators alike”, concludes Dr. Agrita Kiopa, Vice-Rector for Science.

It will be exciting to see how RSU uses Pure to support research output and strategic objectives in the future. RSU has established a framework and workflow for implementing Pure that will undoubtedly be used by others. The information management community looks forward to updates regarding how newly accessible data types and Pure modules are used by RSU stakeholders and university leaders in the coming years.



Dr. Agrita Kiopa
Vice-Rector for Science

“Pure positions us as a peer among leading research universities and allows anyone who is interested in our research and activities to discover us easily. The quality and transparency of research performance data allows us to clearly see not only successes, but also shortcomings - areas where additional efforts and stimuli are required to move forward with the RSU strategy. For instance, we see which structural units and faculty members have established international networks and which work locally. The next challenge for us is to make the best possible use of the data and information that Pure provides, and to make using it a daily habit for academic personnel, researchers, and administrators alike.”

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