Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Baltic International Academy

Study field: Arts

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Summary of the Assessment of the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

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The study field is the backbone of the Baltic International Academy (hereinafter - BIA) for the Art and Design field, which needs to be sustained and supported. BIA Design School is the department in charge of this study field, hereinafter - BIA DS. There is a clear hierarchy in the higher management of the BIA with clear roles in various posts, nevertheless experts realised that the management of the study field and the only study programme, needs a better re-organization with responsibilities that go away from a single person but with teams/committees that will take up responsibilities and that can create more formalised procedures in the running of study field. These committees should concern Quality Assurance, Career Advising, Liaison with the Industry etc. The Internal/departmental Quality Assurance System needs to run horizontally as well as vertically from top management through to students with formalised procedures with meetings and minutes taken as well as implementation for action plans. Formalised committees need to involve persons from higher academic managers to teaching faculty, to students, alumni, and stakeholders.

Scientific research does not readily apply to this study field/programme, nevertheless, artistic creation needs to be encouraged further - through various cooperation both nationally as well as internationally through involvement in EU funded applied research projects and or exhibitions and competitions. This cause will also introduce new pathways towards life-long learning activity.

The resources and provisions for the study field both human and physical are adequate but when it comes to digital technologies quite outdated, and experts would encourage the Academy to seriously invest by updating and upkeeping as well as making the premises sustainable, all-inclusive and accessible, especially for people with disabilities. Human resources will benefit greatly by adding to the study field a portfolio of additional academics from diverse design backgrounds who are involved with new technologies such as digital processes, 3D printing, laser cutting etc.

There is a student-centred approach to teaching and learning which is to be commended, as well as an ongoing healthy communication which goes from top management to teaching staff to students and vice versa.

The study programme currently offers an excessive number of courses per semester, resulting in a shallow scope for each subject. Experts commend the adoption of the ECTS and suggest a thorough research and implementation of this system in the study programme content. Just to give an example a semester may consist of 5 to 6 courses maximum of 30 ECTS per semester. Adjusting to a standard of 5-6 courses per semester could enhance the depth of learning and student workload management.

The study field needs to expand its internationalisation profile further by inviting national as well as international scholars and practitioners to present their works and generally introduce a better creative input as well as friction towards the global contemporary art and design field. It is important to create such synergies that will elevate the professional ethos of its students as well as the academic stance of its faculty.

Experts would suggest for the Academy to reinforce the prospect of the Erasmus+ scheme but also investigate the inclusion for the instruction of the English Language through a focused English course in the programme’s structure, which will bring to both staff and students an opening of new doors for networking. Development in cooperation and Internationalisation needs to be growing on a continuous basis.

The BIA Design School offers the professional bachelor's study programme "Digital Visualization Design," aligned with EQF 6th level standards and focusing on communication design. Despite a decline in student enrollment, it aims to meet the needs of the Latvian state and labour market. The programme emphasises arts-related subjects and spans 4 years for full time students. Programme is implemented only in Latvian language in full time and part time studies and total volume of

240ECTS. The "Digital Visualization Design'' study programme content demonstrates strengths in design skills and industry preparedness, as acknowledged by employers. While the programme curriculum covers key areas such as psychology, design, and typography, notable gaps exist to have a full compliance with the needs of professional standard, e.g. in design thinking, creative writing. The experts suggest introducing modules to address these gaps and aligning the programme with the professional standard "KOMUNIKĀCIJAS DIZAINERA PROFESIJAS STANDARTS (PS-174)".

All information stated by the experts' team rely on the submitted documents as well as the information obtained during the site visit.
Experts' task is to provide an opinion of the possible ways to also advance the programme and curriculum to be developed in a sustainable way fit for the needs of the market and global tendencies.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1.
Baltic International Academy (hereinafter - BIA) is a private higher education institution with active study fields and, according to SAR p.6, 23 (in web page 26) study programmes in total. Study field "Arts" contains one programme - professional bachelor study programme "Digital visualisation design". In the reporting period, there used to be three study programmes in this field (according to publicly available information on eplatforma.aika.lv), but professional master study programme "Design" and short-cycle programme "Environmental design" have not been included in the evaluation and looks like they will no longer be implemented. This has not been evaluated in the self-assessment report, so the impact of this decision has also not been analysed.
BIA also has branches in 7 other cities than Riga, however this study field operates only in Riga. In 2021 the board of BIA took the decision that BIA complies with the title of University of Applied Sciences. Since 2022 BIA has made the decision to establish strategic specialisation of the BIA is the academic and scientific work in the branch group "Social Sciences" which includes the study fields "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" and "Social Welfare". As written in SAR p. 12: "Strategic specialisation serves as a basis for planning the strategic development of the university and is determining the science branches and study directions to be primarily developed".
As mentioned in SAR p. 14, BIA has set goals to achieve their mission and objectives:
1. Development of the competitive study directions, raising the quality of studies in accordance with the needs of the Latvian state, regions and cities and the labour market forecasts.
2. Integration of science and research in all study directions and ensuring scientific excellence and international competitiveness in the priority research areas: involvement in the international projects, mobility of students and lecturers, promotion of scientific activity, further development of doctoral studies.
3. Strengthening the importance of lifelong learning in education and ensuring the supply according to the needs of the state and regional population by monitoring the demand of the labour market, cooperation of the educational institutions in the supply of lifelong learning programmes.
4. Cooperation with the interested parties, strengthening cooperation at the national and regional levels, cooperation with entrepreneurs as the future employers of graduates, cooperation with the other Latvian universities and science centres.
5. Stabilisation and expansion of the international dimension of activities of the BIA in all areas of

activity: creating the appropriate offers to attract the foreign students, to attract the guest professors and researchers, involvement in the international organisations, cooperation with the foreign universities, scientific institutes, and companies, involvement in the implementation of international projects.
6. Development of human resources at the BIA to ensure the improvement of quality of the academic and administrative staff by increasing the number of staff with doctoral degrees, promoting the transfer of experience to the young scientists, and developing the doctoral studies.
7. Increasing the capacity of the BIA and ensuring financial efficiency by improving the resource management, implementing the result management and developing the infrastructure of the BIA.
Similarly, BIA DS has set their own goals:
1. Development of a competitive field of study by increasing the quality of studies in accordance with the needs of the Latvian state, regions and cities and labour market forecasts.
2. Integration of creativity and research in all study subjects and ensuring scientific excellence and international competitiveness in priority research areas: involvement in international projects, mobility of students and lecturers, applied scientific activities.
3. Strengthening individual study modules and ensuring the offer according to the needs of the citizens of the country and regions, monitoring the demand of the labour market, cooperation of the BIA DS in the offer of module programmes.
4. Cooperation with interested parties, strengthening cooperation at national and regional level, cooperation with entrepreneurs as future employers of graduates, ensuring cooperation with other Latvian universities, creative and scientific centres.
5. Stabilisation and expansion of the BIA DS's international activity in all areas of activity: creation of offers, attraction of foreign students, visiting professors and visiting lecturers, involvement of international organisations and foreign universities, applied scientific institutes, companies, international projects.
6. Development of human resources at the BIA DS to ensure the improvement of the quality of 25 academic and administrative staff by increasing the number of staff with doctoral degrees, promoting the transfer of experience to professionals of the next generation.
7. Increasing the capacity of the BIA DS and ensuring financial efficiency by improving resource management, implementing results management, developing the infrastructure of the BIA DS
It can be observed that the strategic goals of this study field are basically the same as the goals set for the Academy. Therefore, from one perspective it seems that this field falls into the overall direction of the Academy, but from the other side it seems that there is lack of strategic development to ensure that this field thrives. But given the fact that arts are not considered as BIA strategic specialisation, it seems like this field is not prioritised.
In SAR p. 25 BIA DS has determined 11 tasks to achieve the previously mentioned goals for the development of the study field (for a time period until 2029). For example, there are tasks that relate to joint study programmes created with other Latvian or foreign universities, development and introduction of new study forms and programmes, further development of quality assurance, development of study material base and attracting foreign students and closer development in certain Latvian regions.
Most of these tasks seem to be attainable and paramount to improve the study field (especially quality assurance), however it is unclear if the academy can achieve tasks like “joint study programme development” given the amount of cooperation with other universities and lack of Erasmus collaborations. Another task that seems doubtful is the attraction of the foreign students, because the only programme in the field will be taught only in Latvian language. A task “2.1.7. BIA DS cooperation development in Latvian regions” also seems questionable, because of the lack of cooperation agreements with local municipalities. Nevertheless, better quality assurance, teachers’ competencies, cooperation overall and increased feedback with industry and graduates can ensure a long-term development of a strong study field.

Nevertheless, it is clear that such an education in digital design is required in society and benefits the national economy. It still remains doubtful that this programme follows trends in the society due to the variety of answers experts received from employers during the visit - it is safe to say that more digital development and curriculum with digital programmes, methods etc. would be beneficial for this field. There is a clear lack of interdisciplinary cooperation (outside of sharing teaching staff) with other study fields that could be beneficial for the growth of this part of BIA.

1.1.2.
BIA DS has identified several weaknesses of the study field such as weak material condition of students, relatively low support from employers compared to international practice, weak previous preparation of students, limited contact hours, relatively low activity in attracting funds from outside etc. Several strengths have also been determined: compliance with professional standards, clear and attainable study programme goals, modernity of study material, practical orientation in studies, clear didactic concept, quality assurance system, innovative aspects of the study programme, student participation in study process, balance between formal requirements and opportunities and others.
BIA DS has identified several threats as well, such as demographic decrease, decreased request for design specialists in the labour market, sharp drop of workload for academic staff, increased competition and low wages in the industry. Several opportunities have been identified as well: remote work for students studying abroad, attraction of EU funding, distance learning element introduction, study exchange within ERASMUS, combining activities of designers and entrepreneurs and others.
Based on the documents obtained during this procedure and the visit, some of those factors identified are logical, but some strengths are arguable (e.g. this report points out serious weaknesses in the QA system, as well as partial compliance with professional standards etc.). Nevertheless, BIA does integrate these identified factors into their study field development plan (see annex 2.1.2.). This development plan allows BIA to gradually eliminate all shortcomings that are detected. There is a large emphasis on any issue resolvement when it comes to the technical and infrastructure aspects, but there should be more emphasis on internal risks that are more related to swot analysis (e.g. lack of cooperation partners providing traineeships, workload of academic staff and others).

1.1.3.
Since 2003, the management and administration of the study filed ‘Arts’ and study programme Digital Visualization Design has been the responsibility of one person, which poses a great risk for the long-term quality implementation of the study programme, especially if we also take into account the fact that this person is also the holder and implementer of as many as 15 study courses in the study programme. The study programme is one of 26 study programmes offered at the Baltic International Academy (hereinafter BIA). There is no representative of the Digital Visualization of Design study programme in the present management of BIA. From the interview with the BIA management, the latter's support for the study field and study programme is evident in strategic regulatory decisions and the purchase of equipment. According to the BIA structure document available as annex in 2.1.3 in SAR and from the information obtained in the interviews it is evident that the director of the Design School (hereinafter DS) is responsible only to the Vice-rector for studies as a member of the BIA management. Based on the interviews the head of the study programme, on an annual basis, asks a member of the management for funds to purchase equipment, which is approved or rejected based on the number of enrolled students and the eligibility of the requests. The Head of the study field and study programme twice a year conducts a survey among students, in which the head obtains feedback on the implementation of the study programme. The results obtained from these surveys are not shared among the rest of the teaching

staff, nor among the students (information obtained during the interviews), and therefore the decisions remain within the framework of the leader himself, which represents a less efficient decision-making system. The extent of the duties of the head of the study programme can also be seen from the information in the SAR: control of the study process, control of students' and lecturers' scientific activity, operational management of the study process and preparing work plan for each semester. In addition, as stated in the SAR (2.1.3), the head of the study programme is also responsible for the preparation of documentation, implementation of the study process, preparation of archival material, provision of information to students and external stakeholders, and provision of information to other BIA units. During the onsite visit to the premises, the experts were not familiar with the technical staff that would provide support to the head of the study programme. In contrast to the information obtained from the interviews, it is stated in the SAR (2.1.3) that the results of surveys among students are forwarded to the analytics department, discussed at the Council of the study programme (the latter is not named or visible from the organisation chart of the BIA structure; have only three councils, namely Promotion council, Council of professors and Science council) and at the BIA Senate. Besides the BIA structural organisational chart, there is also a document BIA Management system (annex II Description of the Study Field - 2.1. Management of the Study Field), that is very general and weak in terms of content, and does not enable the operation of an effective decision-making system with broad involvement horizontally and vertically throughout the system. The statements in the SAR demonstrate the outline of the structure of an effective decision-making system and awareness of the importance of effective, inclusive and transparent management of the study programme. It would be necessary to strengthen the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making system, which must be efficient and functioning and primarily aimed at introducing improvements to the study programme. For a more effective long-term sustainable management of the study programme, it is expedient to establish two departments related to the contents of the subfields defined on the website (Design of the environment, interior or their components and Advertising design and communication), and to redistribute some of the duties of the director of the study programme to their heads. In this way, it would be possible to establish a dispersed decision-making structure and, at the same time, greater involvement of teaching staff and a plurality of opinions in the academic community.
Experts consider the current efforts/process of survey analysis untransparent - there is not enough discussion between staff and students of the reasons and solutions to the issues. The mentioned article in the document "2.2.1. Conclusions of BIA DS DD job title graduate student survey 2023 2024 1 " in no way challenges the opinion of the group of experts regarding the effectiveness of the decision-making system in the study program

1.1.4.
BIA has developed a regulated admission procedure, which was approved at the October 25th 2022 Senate meeting (Minutes No. 150). This admission procedure takes in account the level of centralised examinations. There are also additional enrolment requirements mentioned: a test for theoretical knowledge in the field of visual arts and a computer test for checking practical abilities and skills. These additional enrolment tests are not mentioned in the BIA webpage (https://www.BIA.edu.lv/index.php/lv/bakalaura-studiju-programmas/datordizains.html). BIA has also described the procedure for initiation of studies in subsequent study stages, and a procedure for recognizing prior formal and nonformal education. Candidates have the right to appeal the decision to the BIA Board. And afterwards the ruling can be appealed in court with accordance to the procedures in Administrative Law. (https://BIA.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/regulation_procedures_formal_education_ENG.pdf)
The assessment of students' achievements and learning outcomes is defined in the regulations approved by the BIA Senate "Regulations of Studies at the Baltic International Academy" (https://BIA.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Stud_nolikums_eng.pdf) and "Regulations for Evaluation of the

Study Results in the Baltic International Academy" (https://BIA.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Regulations_Evaluation_Study.pdf)
During experts' visit, academic staff and students confirmed that the assessment process is understood and applied in practice. Although the information is in the admissions section, it should also be included in the overall program description

1.1.5.
During the interviews, both teaching staff and students pointed out that at the beginning of each semester, for each course, students receive detailed instructions with information on how to implement study content and methods and criteria for evaluating learning outcomes. The same is stated in the SAR (pp. 38-39) in which it is also stated that assessment is consistent, fair and appropriate for all students and is implemented with BIA procedures. They also use Moodle for this purpose. The students at the interviews pointed out that the evaluation method is too rigid, since only the frontal method is used, where they do not defend their work, but only the teachers comment on the work, which differs from what is stated in the document Regulations for Evaluation of the Study Results in the Baltic International Academy (p. 3 , SAR, document in section 2.1.5) namely: "3.2.3 The development of the study project ends with the defence of the study project". From the latter, it is clear that there is a gap between written provisions and actual implementation. In the document regulatory requirements are clearly defined - forms for evaluation of study results, responsibilities of teaching staff in evaluation of the study results and students' rights and obligations in the evaluation of the study results. The document lists two requirements, which experts conclude from interviews with students, are not implemented at the Design School, namely 5.2.3 (receive explanations from the teaching staff about the obtained evaluation) and 3.2.3. (development of the study project ends with defence of the study project), and provide a reference method for a more modern approach to the methods of evaluating study work. Experts suggest that the rules include assessment methods that are suitable for the content of the study programme, such as in-class discussions, group work on short tasks, surveys, considering blind grading, short reflection writing assignments, and encouraging teacher and peer dialogue around learning. The methods, principles and procedures for assessing the achievements of the students are also written in a clear and defined manner (SAR, pp. 38-42). However, the experts found out from interviews with students and graduates who completed their studies several years ago that, given that the system of student involvement in the various governing bodies of the BIA has not been developed, the system of evaluating student work has remained unchanged for many years. It is noticeable that there is no process of obtaining feedback from students on the effectiveness of such implementation of assessment methods, although they conduct twice a year surveys (in autumn and spring) on student satisfaction with the implementation of the study programme (interviews and SAR, p. 50). Experts suggest including, as one of the survey questions, a question about the opinion of students regarding the assessment methods used in the study process, and using the analysis of the results as a basis for adjustments with the aim of improving the quality of assessment as one of the learning procedures in more contemporary methods.

1.1.6.
BIA has established a Code of Academic Integrity and Ethics, which describes clear rules for academic honesty and ethical behaviour of students, academic, scientific and administrative staff and areas of implementation of the code. The Ethics committee observes any issues regarding these issues. Another regulation on plagiarism control is also implemented (https://BIA.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/nolikums_plagiata_kontrole_ENG.pdf). During an expert visit - meeting with the director of the study field and meeting with the faculty - it was clear that plagiarism is most often controlled for final works development. It is most important to facilitate this process in more daily work to ensure that students don't use artificial intelligence tools or other

ways that are illegal. Nevertheless, the regulation has stated 4 types of grades of academic integrity breaches and describes the action for each type of grade and offence. All academic breaches can be reported to the study programme director and they decide on the action. This decision can be challenged within 3 (three) working days from the day of adoption of the Decision.
Experts conclude that this procedure has some lack of transparency and that it should be done via committee or council (or aforementioned Ethics commission) involving a larger variety of representatives.
The work of the previously Ethics commission is regulated by Baltic International Academy Regulations of the Ethics Commission (https://BIA.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Ak_godiguma_etikas_komisijas_nolikums_eng.pdf).
The ethics commission consists of three members: the Vice Rector of BIA Studies, a representative of the Legal Commission of the BIA Senate and a representative of the BIA teaching staff.
Experts find it unusual that there is no student representative on this commission and once again, it shows the lack of systematic student representation and involvement in quality assurance. Furthermore, it seems that BIA compliance with Law on Higher Education Institutions (article 53, section 3.1) should be further investigated to determine if this committee does not contradict the requirements.
Furthermore, since this committee consists only of three members and if one of them is involved; that person abstains from participating in the meetings. Nevertheless, in case if the rest of the two committee members are equally divided between a solution, the vote of the chairman is decisive (Regulations of the Ethics commission, points 3.7. - 4.2.). This type of decision making looks very undemocratic and is prone to bias of an individual and other serious risks.
There is no other body/committee/council that investigates academic honesty and ethics breaches at BIA. The decision of the Ethics Commission within its competence is final, meaning that there are no other ways to appeal their ruling within the academy.
Furthermore, lack of this committee's enlistment among structures/institutions in BIA Constitution could mean that not all of the areas are covered to ensure academic freedom of staff and students.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The study field “Arts” falls into the overall direction of the academy, but there is a clear risk of lack of support due to the fact that art is not determined as one of the strategic specialisation fields of the BIA. The goals of the study field mostly seem to be achievable, but goals as attraction of foreign students seem to be less realistic, given that, at least for now, the only study programme will be implemented only in Latvian.
This study field has determined its strengths and weaknesses using SWOT analysis and integrated these factors into their development strategy. A system of admission has been developed as well as assessment of students’ achievements and learning outcomes is defined in a logical way. There is a possibility to recognize previously gained professional experience, formal and nonformal education.
The structure of the decision-making process is very rigid and focused on one person. There is no involvement of different members of the teaching staff and students in various decision-making forms such as the Studies Methodological Council, Study Quality Management Center or Admissions Committee nor Promotion council, Council of professors and Science council. Departments for individual narrowly focused subfields of expertise (Design of the environment, interior or their components and Advertising design and communication) do not operate at Design School (DS) is a structural unit of a BIA. In general, there is insufficient integration of the study programme into the entire BIA, decision-making is centralised, there is little international cooperation, and as a result, there is a lack of modern approaches in the management of the study programme that would help to raise the quality of the study programme and study field in the long term. The methods of evaluating student work are outdated. Decision-making should be dispersed among several

decision-makers and levels. There is a serious concern regarding mechanisms for academic integrity breaches or ethics observance and effective anti-plagiarism tool usage in daily student assessment.

Strengths
1. Study field goals correspond with the goals of the BIA.

Weaknesses.
1. The decision-making structure is limited to one person, which represents a certain level of risk.
2. There is no developed decentralised and transparent decision-making system (departments for individual professional areas, commissions for different areas of decision-making), in which various stakeholders would be involved, e.g. teaching staff, students and others.
3. The system of evaluating academic work is outdated. There is insufficient monitoring of modern approaches and methods like in-class discussions, group work on short tasks, surveys, considering blind grading, short reflection writing assignments, and encouraging teacher and peer dialogue around learning.
4. Serious lack of transparency regarding procedures of academic honesty breaches, ethics breaches and assurance of academic freedom for staff and students.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1.
During the site visit the higher management of the BIA outlined the importance of the study field and committed to the development and the maintenance of a quality assurance system which contributed to the achievement of the learning outcomes of this study field and its study programme. This QA system by the BIA ensures the continuous improvement and development of the study field.

According to the SAR (p. 42) BIA has developed an internal management quality system, which ensures that quality management and procedures are established. The information on Quality Assurance was made available through the SAR and the Appendices but it is not published on the Academy's digital platforms (https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/).The info is only in Latvian which was not accessible by all members of the team of experts.
Meetings, for example, with the BIA higher management and with members of the group responsible for the preparation of a Self-Assessment report, convinced of the quality assurance implementation in practice. However, during the team of experts' visit to the Academy between the days 20th and 21st of February 2024, it became evident that the implementation of the quality assurance policy is still in the development stage and not systematic in all matters and not applied vertically or horizontally among the programme fields. The procedures came across as not very formalised and seemed that the policy for Quality Assurance although in place has not been embedded by everybody. The small volume of the total population of the study field and its only one study programme may be the main reason for this.
During the visit, it also became evident that the BIA quality assurance system lacks the ability to measure staff satisfaction with the academy etc. Such a system is currently in the design process (as mentioned during the visit by BIA representatives). The quality assurance within the study field mainly is based on one person, which significantly limits the involvement of other stakeholders. There is doubt that the system in its current way ensures continuous improvement or efficient performance because it lacks formalised involvement of all parties, especially at the level of the study field. This fact was confirmed by the QA person of the BIA, that there is no general system for collecting data to analyze staff satisfaction. From one perspective it is good that this issue is being

addressed now, but from the other side such a system should have been implemented in a centralized manner from the previous accreditation 10 years ago.

1.2.2.
According to the SAR (pp. 43–44), the study programme in the BIA is regularly evaluated and developed. Because of the structure of the study field and study programme which is quite small in population and its policy on an entry door policy the feedback mechanisms are quite efficient despite the fact that the process is not very methodical. It became evident after the site visit on 20th and 21st of February 2024, and especially after meeting with students and graduates, that many suggestions set by students and graduates were considered and implemented.
The development and review processes of the study programme is regulated by the Rules "Development, approval and amendment of the study programmes at the Baltic International Academy" which defines the BIA procedure as a whole.

During the site visit, the team of experts witnessed the involvement of students and graduates, academic staff, and employers in the development and review of the study programme. Considering the small size of the study field/programme and its community (number of students and staff), the evaluation and development of the study programme is often carried out in informal mutual discussions, thus providing an effective feedback mechanism. This became evident during the site visit and was confirmed by both the Head of the study programme as well as faculty and students. In general, peer-to-peer discussions were found to be the most effective way to review and develop the curriculum, as they provide immediate feedback for analysing problems and making changes. Nevertheless, this activity can easily be elevated into a formalised procedure where official meetings among faculty, students, graduates and stakeholders are set and implemented on a regular basis throughout the academic year.
Because of the informal approach, feedback to the stakeholders is questionable because it seems to be distributed unevenly without a structural approach. Feedback to the involved parties could also be improved, by explaining how their feedback has been taken into consideration and what has been changed. For example, academic staff could explain that at the beginning of their courses; graduates and employers could receive this feedback via formalised meetings or councils that happen annually or more often.
1.2.3. The mechanism developed for submission of student complaints and suggestions is effective, promotes the implementation of improvements, students are informed about such opportunities and receive feedback.

There is a formal Quality Assurance procedure that is implemented and followed as part of the annual evaluation process. According to the SAR (p. 45) students' complaints and proposals may be submitted to the director of the study field/programme in person or electronically, signed or anonymously (as quoted from the information received on visit "sent to BIA general email without a signature or via different email or printed and anonymously submitted to the mailbox). In reality the lack of secure anonymous feedback poses a threat on serious issues and whistleblowing. Additionally, during the meetings, it was also found out that students can give feedback readily at any time throughout the semesters to all the faculty from administration staff to the higher management.
The BIA provided evidence on students' feedback and provided records of solutions to complaints, suggestions etc.
According to the opinion of students - during the team of experts on-site visit - suggestions and or changes were made and the general students consensus was that their voice is strong and it is heard and that students are informed and receive feedback.
Nevertheless, during the visit it became evident that submissions and complaints can only be

submitted and resolved via staff (study field/programme management etc.) involvement and there are no other ways (e.g. a formal Student council or other organisational support). As mentioned previously, since the current quality assurance mainly relies on informal feedback with programme management, it could be that they are not offering any other options of mechanisms because there are none other. This could be a sign that a formal student representation in different organisational bodies (study programme councils etc.) should be supported more.
Development for automatic feedback mechanisms via Moodle or other platforms is strongly advised. This would allow students to submit more anonymous feedback than currently.

1.2.4.
According to the SAR (p. 49) all data statistics are collected and analysed for BIA management reports. Information on graduates' working lives in the previous years was collected and included in the long-term development strategy and other development documents, as well as in the BIA management reports.
During the team of experts on site visit it became evident that the holistic Quality Assurance Policy – which appears in place on paper – in reality is still in the early stages, and it is not fully implemented or at least it does not yet utilise formal procedures. Because of the small tight community, it has been so far easy to collect data and statistics, but this process needs to abide with formal procedures and be documented and archived so that it can develop into a robust QA policy that will act as the main tool towards the development and the sustainability of the study programmes with formal action plans and proposed solutions.
For the time being the open door policy for students, graduates and stakeholders may prove as a positive element in collecting feedback but there must also be a clear mechanism for the representation of statistical data to all stakeholders (students, graduates, employers and staff, etc.), that would provide a closure of the feedback received from them previously. The surveying process can be implemented as a mandatory action via the Moodle platform, ensuring feedback from each course and resolving the issue of relying on the goodwill of students to provide this feedback

1.2.5.
Information on the study programme of the study field "Arts": Digital Visualization Design is available on the site https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/en/bachelor-study-programmes/computer-design.html. The information provided on the public site of the BIA does not fully correspond to the information that was made available through the Self-Assessment Report and all the documents listed on the AIKA e-platform. The website makes a very generic introduction to the study programme and does not provide full details on the structure and content of the programme, the progression sequence by semester and the courses with their equivalent ECTS. The information provided for students about the study programme is not fully explanatory nor in great detail nevertheless the BIA Moodle platform contains all the important information. It is the opinion of the experts' team that academic information must be uniformal in all digital platforms of BIA.
The information regarding admission exams on the study programme is stated in the admission regulation which can be found on the BIA website, https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/admis-sion/admission-process.html. The information is provided in Latvian, English and Russian.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The BIA has developed Quality management guidelines and a Quality management policy, which are also taken into account in the implementation of the study field and the study programme. To assure the quality of studies, the opinions of various stakeholders—students, graduates, academic

staff, and employers—are taken into account.
Given the small size of the study field/programme, less formal approaches such as peer discussions and debriefings are more often used to ensure the quality of studies. For the most part, such methods are quite effective in providing fast feedback mechanisms. However, there is a need for a better and a more efficient Internal Quality Assurance System that also needs to run horizontally as well as vertically from top management through to students with formalised procedures with meetings and minutes taken as well as implementation for action plans.

Strengths:
1. The mechanism for obtaining feedback by employers who are invited to take part in the assessment of student performance through open exhibitions and by participating in the assessment of the final work presentation.
2. The student-centric approach by the BIA and the open-door policy throughout the academy where students' voice is constantly heard and taken in for consideration.

Weaknesses:
1. More active involvement of all the population of the BIA DS (management, faculty, administration, students, alumni, stakeholders) in the quality assurance processes of studies.
2. The study quality assurance process is not completely systematic or fully formalised; and relies mostly on informal feedback processes.
3. The official BIA website must be enriched with further details and information on the study programme and must comply with the information provided in official registers.
4. Lack of secure ways of providing anonymous feedback.
5. Lack of formal student involvement in various governing bodies.
6. No ability to measure staff satisfaction with the academy.

Assessment of the requirement [1]

1 R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

A quality assurance system has been established and is being implemented at the academy, but for the specific study field/programme it does not take place in a systematic and formalized way, and some of its elements are not fully implemented (for example, formalized student surveys and formalized recording and feedback from employers).

2 1.1 - The higher education institution/ college has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

BIA has established Quality policy and assurance processes and procedures, written in Quality Manual (SAR, p44) where notices are responsible bodies and personalities for quality. There is some evidence this is a working activity (SAR, Annex 2.2), but still in progress and not fully developed yet especially for the specific field/programme.

3 1.2 - A mechanism for the development and internal approval of the study programmes of the higher education institution/ college, as well as the supervision of their performance and periodic inspection thereof has been developed.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

There is a responsible body for the mechanism of development and internal approval of the study programme: "Council of Study Programme". Also, there is a text describing this activity and this process in the SAR (p. 45-46). The study improvement actions and changes are taken into consideration and are made, but all the procedures and changes are new beginning processes and should be continued in the future that could become part of quality culture.

4 1.3 - The criteria, conditions, and procedures for the evaluation of students' results, which enable reassurance of the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, have been developed and published.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

In the beginning of each study subject students are introduced with criteria for successful passing of each study subject methods of evaluating students. Detailed information is available in study course descriptions, and the Moodle platform.

However, the experts found out from interviews with students and graduates who completed their studies in the past that, given that the system of student involvement in the various governing bodies of the BIA has not been developed, the system of evaluating student work has remained unchanged for many years. It seems that while the procedures of evaluation have been developed and published indeed, but not really implemented or practised.

5 1.4 - Internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the work quality have been developed.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

There are procedures very common to any Higher education school, electing staff to academic positions (SAR, p. 42). The evaluation of academic staff and their qualifications take place firstly cyclically - before the election to the academic post and at the end of the election period; on an annual basis.
But during the experts' visit it became evident that the academy still needs to push further for assuring the development of the work quality by creating circumstances for further international participation in conferences and exhibitions.

6 1.5 - The higher education institution/ college ensures the collection and analysis of the information on the study achievements of the students, employment of the graduates, satisfaction of the students with the study programme, efficiency of the work of the academic staff, the study funds available and the disbursements thereof, as well as the key performance indicators of the higher education institution/ college.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The analysis of SAR documents and the discussions during the evaluation site visit showed that data and information is collected efficiently and a systematic analysis is carried out (e.g., satisfaction of the students with the study programme etc).

7 1.6 - The higher education institution/ college ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its quality assurance systems.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The analysis of SAR documents and the findings of the evaluation site visit proved that the study field/programme is regularly improved, for example, taking into account the opinions of students, the evaluation of graduates, or the suggestions of employers. This is reinforced by the actual volume of the staff/student population which is relatively small and makes communication easier and direct. Nevertheless the whole process -although is currently compliant - needs to be

reinforced and standardized for the future.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1.

BIA has established a comprehensive system for determining and redistributing financial support required for the implementation of study field and programme. BIA has a unified budget, and principles of budget formation and distribution are approved by the founders. BIA's financial strategy aims to ensure stability and adapt to market changes by programme requirements. The budget for the "Arts" study field is developed through a dialogue between founders, BIA management, and heads of study fields. The study field "Arts" maintains a positive balance between incomes and expenses. Expenses per student are covered by income per student, and tuition fees are set by the BIA Board and approved by the Senate. (SAR pp. 52-54). During the site visit (at meeting with the BIA management and meeting with the study field director and director of study programme “Digital Visualisation Design”) experts could not get information about minimum student numbers in the study field to run it sufficiently.

The breakdown of BIA's expenses for research activities is presented across the entire academy without specific details regarding the study field "Arts" (SAR pp. 55-56). The funding for scientific activities is from internal resources and EU structural funds. The absence of specific information about the study field of "Arts" prevents experts from conducting a thorough analysis to determine the effectiveness of the system for funding applied research, and artistic creation. During the site visit, during a meeting with academic staff, questions were made regarding support for applied research and artistic creation. The response from the academic staff indicated that although there isn't specific financial support allocated for artistic research, financial assistance is available through the BIA programme to cover travel expenses associated with participating in international conferences.

1.3.2.

BIA has established an environment conducive for the study field “Arts”. The premises in both buildings (Lomonosova iela 4 and Lomonosova iela 1/4, Riga) have been deemed sufficient for the study process, as observed during a site visit where experts were reassured of the availability of resources for both students and educators. However, there is room for improvement in systems and procedures, particularly concerning resource management. During site visits, the current approach for experts appears to be largely one-person-centric, with the director of the study field shouldering the responsibility for system enhancements and material acquisitions. Notably, there is a lack of a dedicated board or group of individuals overseeing and actively contributing to the improvement of the resource base.

In order to make an inclusive learning environment, experts acknowledge the current lack of accessibility throughout BIA. This encompasses a physical premise, where it is imperative that facilities are accessible to individuals with diverse needs. For example, access to drawing class was not possible with a wheelchair. By fostering a culture of inclusivity in education and international collaboration, BIA aim should be to empower a diverse range of students, faculty members, and visitors to fully engage in the learning and academic experiences offered at BIA.

During the site visit, experts inspect the available workstations and their software. While the overall state of the computers seems up-to-date, it’s not contemporary to have Adobe Creative Suite CS2, which is clearly outdated and requires immediate updating. The institution should invest in the latest software to align with contemporary industry standards and ensure an enriched learning experience.

In discussions with the study field director and students during the site visit, it became apparent that students predominantly rely on their personal computers and software for individual work. This

approach seems to be an integral part of the study programme's organisation. However, experts believe that higher education institutions should take the lead in providing updated software and workstations for the study process. This includes consideration for diversity by incorporating new Macintosh systems to cater to a broader spectrum of needs and preferences.
To enhance the study field and align it with the current demands of the labour market, experts propose that the BIA consider establishing a specialised lab, such as a Digital Visual Design Lab. This facility could be equipped with cutting-edge tools, including a plotter printer, die-cutter, 3D printer, and 3D scanner etc. This initiative would not only provide students with hands-on experience but also ensure that the study field remains attuned to the contemporary requirements of the job market.

1.3.3.
BIA has successfully established a well-equipped Scientific Library, demonstrating a commitment to meeting the diverse needs of its academic community, as outlined in the SAR pp 59-61. The institution's strategic approach to modernization, collaboration with external library networks, and a dedicated focus on continuous improvement underscore its commitment to providing high-quality methodological and informative support for the study and research process.
However, there are certain differences in the information provided regarding library resources and databases. The list of academic databases presented in the SAR Chapter 2.3.3 appendix document titled "BIA electronic databases.docx" does not align with the information available on BIA's official website under the Library section, specifically in the "Subscribed databases" (https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/en/subscribed-databases.html [checked on 03.03.2024]) and "List of academic databases and search engines" (https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/en/list-of-academic-databases-and-search-engines.html [checked on 03.03.2024]). Differences, such as the inclusion of the LURSOFT database in the SAR appendix but not on the BIA web page, and the presence of the JSTOR database only on the BIA web page Library section, raise concerns about the accuracy and consistency of information available to students.
Experts recommend conducting an outsourced expertise review of the library's resources, particularly the available literature in the Russian language issued from 1945 to 1991. This expertise would aim to ensure that the available literature meets the necessary standards expected of a scientific library. A similar expertise review is suggested for the databases mentioned on BIA's web page (https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/en/subscribed-databases.html [checked on 03.03.2024]), for example, RUBRICON and CIR Russia, to validate their relevance and accuracy.
While the SAR (SAR pp. 60-61) did highlight the dynamic nature of the library collection and total visits to the library in the 2022 academic year (11,635 (SAR pp. 60)), there was an absence of information provided regarding statistical data on the utilisation of online databases. Statistical insights into the library's usage patterns would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how these resources contribute to the students and professors' needs and may inform future enhancements or adjustments to the library services.

1.3.4.
BIA has launched the Moodle e-learning platform as a main learning management system (LMS) solution in its study process. Institution has adopted Moodle to introduce educational technologies and provide students with the flexibility to engage in study processes anytime and anywhere. (SAR pp. 61-62) In general, Moodle system ensures a variety of information presentation methods (e.g. interactive learning experiences, continuous learning and methodical assistance, learners' self-control, creation and execution of individual education plans, learning confidentiality) if it’s successfully implemented in teaching/learning processes.
As highlighted in the SAR, the rector's order mandates the recording of students' attendance in the Moodle environment (SAR pp. 62). However, during the on-site visit and discussions with

administrative staff, there was no confirmation that Moodle was being utilised for attendance recording.
In terms of feedback gathered through Moodle, students expressed a perception that these surveys were somewhat formal during the on-site visit. Instead, they indicated a preference for the feedback survey forms provided by the study field director via private emails. Students mentioned attempting to engage with both surveys, but they found the feedback from the study field director's distributed form to be more effective.
During interactions with graduates in the on-site visit, it was revealed that information sharing also occurs through social networks such as Facebook and WhatsApp, including the exchange of screen recordings.
It appears that there is an opportunity for the BIA to enhance the role of Moodle as the primary LMS and devise a solution that aligns with a more student-oriented approach. This could involve defining specific channels for communication and information sharing within Moodle. Additionally, providing students with BIA-administered email accounts could foster independent networking, a recognized resource for students across various services, such as the option to subscribe to Adobe CC using a student account.

1.3.5.
BIA maintains its academic standards through a qualified academic staff, comprising professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers, elected to academic positions for a term of six years. The procedures for vacancy announcements, recruitment, and elections are characterised as open and democratic, with well-defined content and processes (SAR pp. 62-63).
During the site visit, while engaging with employers, experts discovered a lack of information provided to employers regarding the process of electing teaching staff.
As stated in BIA's "Regulations on Academic Positions Of The Baltic International Academy" (https://BIA.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Regulations_Academic_Positions.pdf [checked 03.03.2024]), the procedure for elections in the Art specialty aligns with the Regulations of the BIA Design School on election to academic positions (regulations point 3.5). Regulations of the BIA Design School on election to academic positions full title "REGULATIONS for election to academic positions in the BIA School of Design (Arts), Music, Visual Arts and Architecture Visual Arts, Design" (translated by experts) was added to SAR as annex "12.1. BIA DS AP ievelesanas nolikums 2023 akreditacija.doc," it was provided for experts only in Latvian on 33 pages. In the title of the regulations, information about Annex 15 is mentioned, but the document does not contain such an annex. Regulation point 6.1. states (experts' translation): "6.1. Applicants for the position of professor in the arts shall be evaluated on at least three criteria, for the position of associate professor in the arts on at least two criteria, and for the position of assistant professor in the arts on at least one criterion of artistic creativity, which, in terms of the contribution of spiritual energy to the process of creating a work of art of high aesthetic value, are comparable to publications of a research nature in internationally cited or internationally peer-reviewed journals* (see Appendix No 13)." The highlighted in description of the criterion of creativity and its contribution "of spiritual energy to the process of creating a work of art of high aesthetic value" by experts opinion allows a very subjective approach to the regulated criterion. The mentioned regulations contain 14 annexes, but during the regulation document mains text part, there is reference only to Annex 13 and Annex 14.
Experts would like to point out that regulations ask for specific data from applicants. In the regulations Annex 3 – Necessary documents to participate in elections to the lecturer position, the list of necessary documents are (experts' translation):
1. CURRICULUM VITAE (brief biographical statement);
2. a copy of the passport, original;
3. copies of educational documents;
4. evidence of teaching experience in art education;

5. 2 references-recommendations from professionals in the field;
6. a statement of the intended workload of academic staff 20...../20.....;
7. a report on the applicant's activities in the field and in the field of creativity in the last six years; the report on the applicant's activities in the field should be arranged according to the model (table), following the criteria for assessing the qualifications of applicants for the post of Associate Professor at the BIA and the Art Academy of Latvia;
8. descriptions of courses taught by the applicant;
9. visual material.
Experts would like to point out that points 5, 6, 8, and 9 are additionally requested by BIA and not regulated by law. Experts see that points 6 and 8 are very focused on already existing academic staff, making applicants from outside BIA challenging to reach these requirements. Point 9 – Visual material – is not defined in the regulation and remains very unclear.
By analysing this example from the regulation, experts aim to illustrate that the procedures for attracting qualified teaching staff from outside the BIA are complex and not transparent. The process appears too focused on the existing academic staff.
Experts recommend a thorough review of BIA's “Regulations on Academic Positions Of The Baltic International Academy” to make it more open, structured, and conducive to attracting highly competitive and interested teaching staff.

1.3.6.
The academic staff in the "Arts" study field at BIA contributes to integrating applied research and artistic creative work into the programme. The professional competence of communication designers, part of the academic staff, plays an important role in developing creative activities and engaging students in both creative and professional directions. (SAR pp. 64-67).
During the on-site visit, experts gathered insights during a meeting with the academic staff of the "Digital Visualization Design" study programme. It became evident that BIA rarely provides additional support for professors' research or creative projects. In the meetings experts were apprised that the BIA altered the work agreement form for the current year, resulting in less favourable agreements for the teaching staff.
The inclusion of Annex "2.3.6. Advancement of Qualifications Appendix ENG.docx" indicates the availability of scientific databases for BIA faculty members. However, there is a lack of information regarding the extent to which teaching staff utilises these databases. While it is commendable that teaching staff actively engage in seminars and conferences to enhance their qualifications in creative and research activities, the documentation does not distinctly convey whether BIA provides financial support for individual qualification improvements outside BIA organisations. Clarification on this matter would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the support mechanisms available to the teaching staff.

1.3.7.
The academic staff engaged in the BIA field of study "Arts" comprises qualified specialists contributing effectively to the field's objectives. There is a noticeable positive shift in the increased involvement of master's degree holders in the teaching process, particularly in recent years. Despite the positive aspects, challenges related to Erasmus+ mobility programmes exist, primarily due to high teaching staff workload and individual circumstances. (SAR pp. 67-70)
Experts aim for BIA to enhance international exposure and participation in mobility visits in both directions – incoming and outgoing – in the near future.
During the site visit, various meetings with BIA management, students, and the academic staff of the "Digital Visualization Design" programme revealed a significant and demanding workload for the study field “Art” director. This individual concurrently serves as the director of the "Digital Visualization Design" study programme and is an active professor at BIA. The extensive array of

responsibilities centralises the programme around one person, resulting in a loss of diversity.

1.3.8.
BIA prioritises the holistic development and growth of each student, fostering a supportive and diverse learning environment. The institution, comprising dedicated teaching staff, general staff, and administration, focuses on individual traits, skills, and talents, promoting both personal and academic development. Lecturers actively engage with students, offering individual consultations, additional study materials, and flexible study schedules, fostering a student-centred approach. (SAR pp. 70-71)
During the site visit, both students and graduate students express their positive experiences regarding the support received from BIA professors and administrative staff during the study period. The consensus was that all personnel were easily approachable, consistently helpful, and easily available to address any arising issues. In addition, teachers, as revealed in meetings with the academic staff, spoke favourably about their interactions with students engaged in international mobility programmes. BIA offers individual study plans for students participating in these programmes.
Experts noted a potential gap in the analysis of this function. The data presented in the SAR p.100, specifically concerning incoming mobility students (9) – with ERASMUS+ (5), without ERASMUS+ (4), did not fully allow for a comprehensive assessment of the incoming abroad student amount. To gain a deeper understanding of this aspect, further analysis is recommended.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

BIA's financial system aims for stability but lacks crucial data on student numbers in the Arts study field, lacking comprehensive analysis. The institution should invest in updating software and improving resource management processes.
While BIA boasts a well-equipped Scientific Library, discrepancies between provided information and website content raise concerns about accuracy. Outsourced reviews of library resources are needed for relevance and accuracy assurance.
Implementing Moodle as the main LMS presents challenges despite offering flexibility in study processes.
Recruitment procedures at BIA are open, but complexities exist in attracting qualified teaching staff from outside the institution.
The academic staff in the "Arts" field integrates applied research and artistic creativity into the programme, but support for professors' projects is limited.
Challenges persist in implementing Erasmus+ mobility programmes due to high staff workload and individual circumstances.
BIA prioritises a supportive learning environment, evidenced by positive feedback from students and graduates regarding approachable and supportive faculty and staff.

Strengths:
1. The study field "Arts" maintains a positive balance between incomes and expenses, covering expenses per student with corresponding income.
2. The Academy provides a conducive environment for the "Art" study field, observed during site visits.
3. BIA commitment to a well-equipped Scientific Library and the use of Moodle as a learning management system.

Weaknesses:
1. Lack of information on minimum student numbers to have the "Art" study field active. The

absence of specific data on scientific activities in the "Art" field prevents a thorough analysis
2. The current approach appears one-person-centric, with the study field director managing system enhancements and material acquisitions. There's a need for a dedicated board or group overseeing resource base improvements.
3. The use of, for example, Adobe Creative Suite CS2 is outdated and in similar situations it requires immediate updating. Investment in actual software aligning with industry standards is necessary.
4. Complex and non-transparent procedures for hiring teaching staff may hinder the attraction of competitive external candidates. The regulations need a thorough review to ensure openness, structure, and competitiveness in attracting teaching staff.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1.
At the Design School of the BIA there is only applied research and artistic creation carried out as part of the study process. There is very little scientific research carried out in the field of design and art by the members of the academic staff involved in the study field and programme. Only Nadežda Pazuhina's scientific research is within a related discipline and of considerable importance (indexed in scientific databases), while the rest of the academic staff, although involved in the study field, carry out research in other disciplines with little or no relation to art and/or design.
The applied research and artistic creation is part of the study courses. The SAR provides insight into a set of criteria that need to be taken into account before ideating and conceptualising a design product (article 2.4.1.), and define the disciplines or fields of study from which the future designers should be drawing information and knowledge. However, the methods of applied research in design that are adopted by the academic staff as the guidelines for student work are quite outdated. They provide only one of the possible approaches to design and in that sense – limit the students' understanding of the complexity of design methodology. This fact is a symptom of insufficient involvement in research by the BIA academic staff, considering that the applied design research methodology develops constantly. At the same time, it can be said the teaching staff members are strong in classical approaches to teaching art, which should not be lost if effectuating changes and updates in the programme.
In relation to the development goals of this higher education institution, there should be more emphasis on the potential career options of the students. Hence, the students should be informed about the developments in research methodology, especially with regards to the methods used for understanding the needs of the user of the design product/service.

1.4.2.
The Design School (hereinafter DS) and its teaching staff are involved in applied research and in artistic creation in the study field. According to the SAR (Scientific research and Artistic Creation, 2.4.3) among 604 activities connected to both fields, 18,4% are artistic creative projects such as exhibitions and contests by the jury. Since it is a design study programme at the BA level, the emphasis is on artistic creations, so this proportion is relatively low. From conversations with teaching staff, it is clear that DS does not financially or organizationally encourage the artistic creation of teaching staff, as it does not have the funds for these activities. It is encouraging (SAR, p. 82) that they are organising the digiviz complete exhibition project with participating partners, that was organised between 2010 and 2019. Due to the pandemic, this tradition was interrupted. They will restart this exhibition event in 2025. Digiviz complete is a final exhibition and workshop for the defence of the BIA DS diploma thesis. It is stated in the SAR (p. 82) and is evident from some of the CVs of the teaching staff that they co-organized International Scientific and Practical Conference Design, Visual Art & Creativity: Modern Trends and Technologies (2017, 2019) in which some of the

teaching staff have been participating. In on-site meetings with teaching staff and students it was mentioned that students regularly participate in symposia and conferences, occasionally also actively presenting their projects, but as stated in SAR (2.4.2) participation in conferences is mandatory for students. Experts have noted in SAR (p. 86) that during the study process students participate at least twice: once in a scientific practical conference and once in another outdoor study activity such as exhibition, competition, workshop and other relevant events. Applied research is offered to students, that in cooperation with employers can research and develop applied research that is important and useful for the industry. However, care must be taken, as the interests of industry and academia are not necessarily aligned. Depending on the content of the study programme Digital Visualization Design, due to the lack of their own exhibition space and the importance of regular artistic creation, we suggest that BIA DS organise annual digital exhibitions of their teaching staff, students, visiting international artists or lecturers. For this purpose, they should choose a digital platform on which to create their own exhibition space and promote it on their own website and FB page.

1.4.3.
In the period prior to the pandemic, as is stated in the SAR (p. 82), they cooperate informally with several international institutions: Lviv National Academy of Arts (Lviv, Ukraine), Vytautas Magnus University Education Academy (Vilnius, Lithuania), and Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (Kaunas, Lithuania). According to the document List of cooperation agreements with other institutions 2023 it is evident that they have 12 Erasmus+ agreements of which 8 (66,66%) are HEI but only 3 have not been completed but are still ongoing (Madrid School of Design/Spain, Vytautas Magnus University/Lithuania and Kaunas University of Applied Science/Lithuania), however, it is not clear from the data the way of cooperation in the field of research or artistic creation, or how BIA DS purposefully develops and ensures the development of certain international projects. In addition, they had in 2019 and 2020 three contracts outside the Erasmus+ programme: Abai Kazhakh National Pedagogical University/Kazakhstan, Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design/Ukraine and Zaporizhzhia National University/Ukraine, but again not clear what is the extent nor content of the cooperation. From the reviewed data (Annex 2.5.1. BIA DS ERASMUS Outgoing student LV_2023) on outgoing mobility of students for practice document, it is clear that they have established good cooperation with cultural institutions in Europe: Cultural Association "Rosa House in Basilicata", Cultural Association 'ART Itinerant Gallery', and Liguria Russa in Italy, Andrej Smolak Gallery in Slovakia and Skansen W Kuligowie in Poland. In 2023, the international cooperation Erasmus+ internship mobility for students was carried out with only one institution (from Italy), which represents a lack of numerical and content diversity of internationalisation. Although they have developed cooperation with cultural institutions across Europe, their number is small and agreements on cooperation on specific projects are not evident. Experts suggest that cooperation projects with institutions with which BIA DS has already established concrete and successful cooperation be concretized and binding agreements on multi-year joint project work be signed, perhaps also in connection with applications for various European tenders in the field of culture. For this purpose, they should cooperate with the project office, which should provide them with administrative and operational assistance. This indicates that at the moment the study programme does not purposefully develop relevant and meaningful international projects of artistic creation in the study field and other forms of cooperation with content and geographically diverse institutions in the study field Arts.

1.4.4.
From conversations with teaching staff, it is clear that DS does not financially or organizationally encourage the artistic creation of teaching staff, as it does not have the funds for these activities. The group of experts did not receive a document from which it would be unequivocally clear how the

teaching staff of the DS is included in the research programmes and activities relevant to the artistic creation. As is evident in SAR (p. 73) the BIA has developed a mechanism for the involvement of the DS teaching staff in scientific research, especially highlighting the possibility of their involvement in the Research Institute for Social and Humanitarian Problems. It should be noted here that the teaching staff is involved in the BA study programme, where the emphasis is more on artistic creation. The latter is not mentioned anywhere in the organisational structure of the various bodies at the BIA. It is structurally necessary to include artistic creation as one of the fundamental research activities of the study programme and DS itself. For this purpose, the scientific council should be extended to the field of artistic creation, as well as the responsibilities of the vice-chancellor, thus equalising the relevance of research projects and artistic creation. In order to ensure well-functioning and efficient system of support to teaching staff in their work outside of teaching duties, it is necessary to include a representative of the study programme, who is not the same person as the director of the study programme, as one of the members of the Commission for Research and Artistic Activity at the BIA, when established. In this way, the work of the study programme will be better integrated into the entire research and artistic structure of the BIA, and will at the same time contribute to the operational and financial support of the teaching staff of the Digital Visualization Design study programme in their artistic creation and applied research, which are necessary to ensure the quality of the study programme.

1.4.5.
Currently the experts have not been able to retrieve information that would confirm BIA DS students' involvement in scientific research. Although the SAR states that the students are required to take part in at least 2 events related to scientific research and artistic production SAR (2.4.5.) one of which is supposed to be a scientific conference, there is no evidence available of the scientific output of students. There is only a large number of student participation in such events declared in the above mentioned article, but the experts cannot ascertain the quality of these activities. Hence, it can be stated, that supposedly there is a mechanism in place, but apparently the focus is mostly in artistic output, whereas scientific research activities remain questionable in their quality. This is not an disadvantage, given that it is a BA programme applied research and artistic creation are relevant.
In terms of applied research, students carry out certain kinds of applied research during their study projects. This research, however, remains only as an integral part of the study projects and it is not considered as a value as such. From what the teaching staff has told and shown to experts during the accreditation visits and from what the experts have seen in the presented thesis projects, students are not encouraged to explore and develop new applied research methodologies or strategies, but rather – expected to strictly follow the prescribed research path (which is then documented in the theoretical parts of their graduation projects).

1.4.6.
During the accreditation visits and interviews with the academic staff, students and alumni, experts have not been able to encounter any particularly innovative solutions that would have an impact on the study process. Quite the opposite: the study field has adopted quite a traditional approach to the study methods that stems from approaches in design education in Latvia in the 1960's and 1970's. Considered as such, these approaches undoubtedly have their qualities, as they have been implemented already for decades and hence have a very clear methodology and objective. However, considering the rapid technological and societal transformations that are taking place continuously and at an ever increasing pace, it would be necessary to revise the traditional teaching and research methods, and to incorporate new insights, especially drawing from the experience and knowledge accumulated in the most progressive design schools in Europe.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

Due to the professional diversity of the BIA DS teaching staff, their references are wide ranging from scientific publications, participation in conferences to exhibitions and competitions. Given that it is a BA programme, however, their primary extracurricular activity is artistic creation. The share of the latter is relatively low among all activities recorded by DS, only 18.4%. The DS does not have the means to help the teaching staff in the realisation of their extra-pedagogical activities. Also, BIA does not provide administrative assistance in this activity. International cooperation in the field of artistic creation is modest and focused on three countries of the European Community, in which cooperation is established with only five institutions. Teaching staff covering design subjects are poorly involved in research projects at BIA. The latter have their own research specifics, so it would be necessary to include the teaching staff of design disciplines in research structures at BIA with the aim of developing design-oriented research projects.

Strengths:
1. The teaching staff pursue their creative professions with dedication, commitment and a great deal of passion, regardless of the lack of formal and financial support from the parent institution.
2. The teaching staff members are strong and experienced in classical approaches to teaching art.
3. There is a mechanism in place that encourages student participation in extracurricular activities related the with applied research and artistic creation.

Weaknesses:
1. BIA does not have a developed systematic inclusion of the specificity of the field of study in their research and artistic activities.
2. DS does not have its own exhibition space where they could regularly exhibit students' work, works of the teaching staff and alumnis work.
3. It would be necessary to increase the share of artistic creation in the share of all activities recorded by DS. Special attention should be paid to international cooperation in this area.
4. International cooperation in the field of artistic creation is weak.
5. There is very little scientific research carried out in the field of design and art by the members of the academic staff involved in the study field and programme.
6. The applied research methodology is outdated: the study field has adopted quite a traditional approach to the study and research methods that stems from approaches in design and design education in Latvia in the 1960's and 1970's.

Assessment of the requirement [2]

1 R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Mostly artistic creation is carried out, and there is a lack of substantial scientific research. International cooperation is weak and limited to the Erasmus+ mobility. Artistic creation is not systematically included in applied research or other projects, nor is it financially supported. Agreements on the intention to participate, cooperation contracts or other forms of international connections on joint art projects are extremely few and are limited to a handful of institutions with which DS has regularly cooperated for many years. The applied research methods in design though in the study field are limited and do not represent the current state of the art in the design field. They also limit students' potential involvement in the job market after graduation, especially with regard to the emerging, rapidly growing and partly established fields of design, such as service design and UX design.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1.
The successful cooperation of the BIA with Latvian, EU and international universities, employers and employers' organizations, as well as with local governments and non-governmental organizations gives the opportunity to achieve the goals of the study field/programme. The main criteria for the selection of cooperation partners are the cooperation partner's reputation, the cooperation partner's professional experience and active activity in the cultural sector, as well as compliance with the specifics of the study field. The cooperation partners of BIA vary according to the diverse choice of study fields/programmes and includes partners which relate to the Art and Design field, notably the Latvian Designers' Union (SAR, p.93)
BIA claims that BIA writes (in SAR p. 125) "The most recent reports of the European Commission emphasise the essential role of HEI as centres of regional development and innovation, which are especially important on the scale of Latvia in promoting economic development of the Latgale region. Such a situation requires urgent action for the preparation of Digital Visualization Design specialists". However, BIA has no cooperation agreements with local municipalities which would further support this statement.
According to the SAR (p.92), most programmes implemented by BIA are professional higher education study programmes, so regular cooperation at various levels with employers is of special importance.
The decision to implement the ECTS system and align with the Bologna process acts as an advantage to the internalisation of this study field/programme and contributes to the achievement of the programme's aims and learning outcomes.

The BIA is open for cooperation and is represented:
- in the Council of Rectors (participate all higher education establishments accredited in Latvia),
- in the Association of Private Universities (participate all higher education establishments founded by legal entities),
- in the Association of Colleges (participating higher education establishments founded by legal entities and state), as well as BIA maintains partnerships with associations, unions and confederations.

The team of experts believe that the above mentioned co-operations add to the educational experience of the study field/programme and contribute to the programme's aim and learning outcomes by adding opportunities for an increased international competitiveness of BIA.

1.5.2.
The strategic goal of the study field/programme is to prepare competitive professionals in digital visualisation design with skills corresponding to future needs, therefore the cooperation of academic staff and students with foreign universities - such as Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, the Jozef Goluchowski University of Applied Sciences -, employers' organisations and non-governmental organisations - such as Lagowski dom artysty, Skansen W Kuligowie, Andrej Smolak Gallery, Liguria Rosi, Cultural Association ''ART Itinerant Gallery'', Fondazione Luigi Gaeta Centro Studi Carlo Levi, UrbinoInAquarello, etc. - in the fields of applied research and artistic creativity contributes to the implementation of the priorities set for the development of the study programme and the compliance of the obtained study results for industry development and labour market needs.
Although the general framework is well established and explained in the SAR (pp. 97-99), it became evident to the team of experts during the on-site visit, that the mobility activity is mainly low among

staff and students of the study programme and mainly involved mobility training and not mobility studying. Once again, the small population of the study field/programme is the major issue for the low mobility activity.
An important role in the involvement of employers is played by the activity of the BIA in industry associations – in Latvia as well as Poland, Slovakia, and Italy.

1.5.3.
According to the SAR (pp. 99-104) BIA has in place a system with clear procedures for the attraction of faculty and students from abroad. This activity though is still quite small in terms of numbers and for the specific timeframe while this accreditation started it is quantitatively insufficient (SAR, p.100)
Students and staff of the study field/programme, who have participated in Erasmus+ mobility (the majority as practice as opposed to studying) and who were met during the experts site visit on 20 and 21 February 2024, confirmed that they have improved their professional knowledge and skills during mobility. The lecturers also highly valued the opportunity provided by Erasmus+ to be acquainted with the educational system of other countries, learn from examples of good practice and expand their circle of professional contacts. This in turn provides opportunities for further collaborations and joint projects. The BIA provides all the necessary support and assistance in the implementation of teacher mobility (SAR, pp 99-104). Academic staff of the study programme are motivated to participate in Erasmus+ mobilities with the aim of:
● Improve pedagogical competencies;
● To promote understanding of the different practices, policies and education systems of different countries;
● Increase opportunities to drive change in terms of modernization and international openness;
● Deepen understanding of societal diversity, such as social, ethnic, linguistic, gender and cultural diversity;
● Improve foreign language and digital competences;
● Increase motivation and satisfaction in your daily work.
There is always the language factor that sits as an obstacle to a greater mobility activity since the study field/programme is in Latvian and it hampers international students from attending. Additionally, since most students are in employment, the prospect for study mobility is limited. This is why most students opt for training mobility.
However, as already stated before, the small number of staff and students that reside in the study field/programme make the mobility somehow difficult and not very active.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The study field and the study programme has made great leaps in becoming more international by engaging with various EU and other international institutions and by mobilizing staff and teachers for outgoing as well as incoming purposes.
But such restrictions as: the language of study is only Latvian, as well as the employment of students do not allow free and fast development of international cooperation. Furthermore, the study field needs to expand its internationalisation profile further by inviting national as well as international scholars and practitioners to present their works and generally introduce a better creative input as well as friction towards the global contemporary art and design field. It is important to create such synergies that will elevate the professional ethos of its students as well as the academic stance of its faculty.

Strengths:
1. Many stable and long-term partners - practice and employer organisations. The BIA had initially (in the past) built a good reputation for its provision of professional design programmes.

2. The commitment to shift the study programme towards the ECTS system and the Bologna process is to add to the international profile.

Weaknesses:
1. Exposure with many other institutions/industries throughout the EU, at present time, are not well established.
2. Synergies within Latvia with other institutions which cater for Art and Design education are not enough nor are they very active, making the study programme isolated from the Latvian art and design community.
3. Lack of cooperation with regional municipalities, which could support social and economic justification of this programme.

Assessment of the requirement [3]

1 R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Good cooperation with limited types of partners in Latvia, who trust the BIA and highly value the practical skills of both students and graduates. Cooperation at the international level is rather fragmentary, which is also related to the fact that the study programme is implemented only in Latvian language, which does not give the opportunity to admit Erasmus+ exchange students.

1.6. Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures

Analysis

1.6.1. In the previous assessment procedures related to the study field and the corresponding study programmes:
Experts assess the implementation of recommendations using the document titled "2.6. Iepriekšējās novērtēšanas procedūrās saņemto rekomendāciju ieviešana_eng.docx". This document outlines the outcomes achieved in response to the recommendations provided in the study field of "Arts". Previous accreditation experts made these recommendations in 2013, consisting of six short-term and six long-term recommendations.
Short-term recommendations
Recommendation: Improve communication about the opportunities and benefits of science activities with students
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: The activation of scientific activities of the academic staff has been implemented by organising international conferences, but there is not a sufficient amount of topics focused on artistic creativity, and this recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: Increase the level of use of IT tools, modern teaching methods and Academic staff English. Invest in further academic staff development and/or attraction of young academic professionals
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: In recent years, lecturers have actively engaged in various professional education programmes. It's positive that the staff is familiar with Moodle as the primary learning management system. However, there's a noticeable gap in the focused exploration of various IT tools, including the implementation of Artificial Intelligence tools, within the study courses. The expansion of IT tools is not comprehensive enough. Based on the information provided, experts cannot adequately

evaluate the investment in further development for academic staff or the attraction of young academic professionals. This recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: Involve more business representatives and industry professionals in the study process (through lectures, local cases and study trips) to provide students with up-to-date local market-oriented knowledge
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: For workshops specifically targeting the "Arts" study field, the absence of dates makes it impossible for experts to evaluate their impact on the study process during the period. Amount of study trips for the professional study programme “Digital Visualization Design” are insufficient. This recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: Renew the BIA website with all the necessary and relevant information and improve its design and creation it is more modern and user friendly
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: Besides improvements, there is a lack of precise information representation on the web page. For example, there is a difference in Application Fee (https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/lv/studiju-maksa/papildus-maksas-pakalpojumi.html – 20 EUR, https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/lv/uznem-sana.html – 25EUR), on Admission Process page in English (https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/en/admis-sion/admission-process.html) Entrance Exam and Application Fee (for EU citizens) not represented. The "Search" field is currently malfunctioning, displaying an error message that reads "Class 'JEventDispatcher' not found." This recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: Motivate students and staff to participate in mobility programmes, giving them more information on benefits and organisational issues
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: The number of outgoing ERASMUS+ student mobilities is increasing. However, the development of ERASMUS+ mobilities for staff mobility for experience exchange or teaching is still insufficient. Additionally, there is an insufficient amount of incoming students. This recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: Develop quality standards for online materials and activities; carefully monitor the copyright of resources used online
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: Copyright problems related to online resources have not been identified during the assessment process. There are currently no established quality standards for online materials and activities. This recommendation should continue.

Long-term recommendations
Recommendation: Utilisation of scientific and research potential the accumulated BIA, pay more attention interdisciplinary and cross-regional research involving not only teacher, but also students and graduates of the academy
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: During the study process, students do not sufficiently enhance their interdisciplinary approach through collaboration with students from other programmes of BIA. Despite graduates expressing interest in cooperation during experts' site visits, the actual collaboration is not active. This recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: Strengthen the systematic implementation of formal quality assurance procedures in practice and reduce the reliance on personalities in quality assurance
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: During experts' visits and meetings with the staff, it became apparent that the implementation of the quality assurance policy is still in the developmental stage and lacks systematic consistency across all aspects. Additionally, it was observed that the BIA quality

assurance system cannot effectively measure staff satisfaction with the academy. This recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: To improve the management of scientific activity, which includes not only fields development but actual scientific activity plans, their implementation guidelines and appropriate resources for such activities. To make the rules and procedures of scientific work are more understandable and visible to interested parties, especially academic staff
Assessment of compliance: Non-compliant
Justification: The results show that the primary scientific activities of the researchers mentioned (I.Ratanova, K.Doronina) are not associated with the study field of "Arts."
Recommendation: To further concentrate on publications in internationally recognized journals indexed in WoS / Scopus (striving for higher impact factor). To put emphasis on publication in scientific journal rather than conference proceedings
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: The financial motivation for scientific publications has been introduced. However, upon reviewing the submitted documents "2.4.2.1. BIA DS DD themes and creative lat 2023 2024 1 AB format 06 11 2 ENG.pdf" and "2.4.2.1. BIA DS DD publikacijas LZP un radošais lat 2023 2024 1 AB format 15 11 2.docx," it is challenging to understand and assess which specific publications are being referred to in the recommendation results. The statement mentions that in 2020, 10 scientific articles were published, in 2021 – 29 scientific articles, and in 2022 – 20 scientific articles (including 3 in Web of Science and 10 in SCOPUS databases). Clarity is needed to identify and evaluate the mentioned publications accurately. This recommendation should continue.
Recommendation: To replenish the library stock with the latest English books and periodicals
Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant
Justification: Students have access to not only purchased books but also online databases provided by the BIA Library or the National Library of Latvia. These resources offer students a means to obtain the necessary books for their study work.
Recommendation: In the field of international cooperation, more precisely formulate goals and conclude agreements with international partners that actually ensure cooperation in certain specific areas and activities related to studies and science activities in the field of studies
Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant
Justification: While the quantity of international agreements is adequate, the corresponding activity level is insufficient. Despite positive feedback from teaching staff and students during expert site visits regarding cooperation with an institution in Italy, this collaboration is limited in scope, and partnerships in various projects are not diversifying. The small number of incoming students poses risks for BIA, as it may not be perceived as an attractive destination for potential students. This recommendation should continue.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

According to SAR with provided annexes and information collected during the site visit, BIA has partly taken into account most of the previous assessment recommendations. Of 12 recommendations just 1 is fully compliant and 11 are partly or non-compliant but in the process to be implemented. It is necessary to fully implement the previous recommendations to improve the study field “Arts” as they are also in line with the current experts’ recommendations. Study field "Arts" still lacking significant improvement. Lack of implementation of previous recommendations can be a sign of lack of resources or different priorities set by BIA and is a serious concern for the strategic development of this field. Experts analyses recommendations written in document “2.6. Iepriekšējās novērtēšanas procedūrās saņemto rekomendāciju ieviešana_eng” section “Fulfilling the recommendations of the study direction”.

Strengths:
1. BIA responded and answered all the recommendations received in the previous evaluation procedures.
2. The partly compliant recommendations are all in process.

Weaknesses:
1. Not all recommendations are yet fully compliant.

Assessment of the requirement [4]

1 R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

It's positive to note that BIA has addressed and resolved some of the identified deficiencies from the previous assessment while actively working on implementing the remaining recommendations. The experts are hopeful that all ongoing developments will be successfully implemented.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

1. To complete and fully implement all (10) of the recommendations given from the previous assessment procedure in 2013.
2. To revise quality assurance and develop processes that are transparent, especially in student representation in formal bodies and committees that affect study quality, ethics and other aspects.
3. Develop secure ways to provide anonymous feedback
4. Develop a system in which it would be possible to measure staff satisfaction with the academy.
5. Involve DS teaching staff in more BIA management and decision-making structures.
6. BIA DS should create its own digital exhibition space, where it can regularly exhibit the works of students, teaching staff and alumni.
7. Numerically expand international cooperation with various educational institutions, evenly distribute Erasmus mobility among all teaching staff and strengthen guest teaching mobilities.
8. The QA process at the level of the study field needs to abide with formal procedures and be documented and archived so that it can develop into a robust QA policy that will act as the main tool towards the development and the sustainability of the study programme with formal action plans and proposed solutions.
9. Upgrade software to Adobe Creative Cloud for industry-standard tools like Photoshop, Illustrator, and Premiere to ensure students are equipped with essential skills aligned with contemporary industry standards.
10. Review of BIA's "Regulations on Academic Positions Of The Baltic International Academy" to enhance openness, structure, and attractiveness for recruiting competitive and interested teaching staff.
11. Make the surveying process a mandatory one, via the Moodle system for each study course

Long-term recommendations

1. Within the framework of the BIA project office, when established, it is necessary to develop projects specific to the study field Arts and submit them in consortia with European partners to various international tenders.
2. Upgrade to contemporary Macintosh systems to consider technology diversity. This activity provides students with varied technological experiences, improving their learning environment.
3. Establish a Digital Visual Design Lab equipped with cutting-edge tools like a plotter printer, die-cutter, 3D printer, and 3D scanner to enhance the study field and align it with current labour market demands. This initiative provides students with hands-on experience and ensures the programme remains attuned to contemporary job market requirements.
4. Establish cooperation with regional municipalities, which could support social and economic justification of this programme.

II - "Digital visualization design" ASSESSMENT

II - "Digital visualization design" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1.
BIA Study Field "Arts" (also known as BIA Design School) implements one study programme - professional bachelor's study programme “Computer design” (Datorzinains in Latvian). BIA plans on changing the programme's name to "Digital Visualization Design" after the evaluation, therefore the new name is used in the analysis.
As written in SAR (p. 117 - 124) study programme Digital Visualization Design is a professional first cycle study programme correspondent with EQF 6th level. Study programme is based on a professional standard PS-174 “Communication designer”. Consequently, graduates are awarded the professional qualification of Communication Designer (according to e-platform). Unfortunately, the information on BIA website (12.03.2024.) (https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/lv/bakalaura-studiju-programmas/datordizains.html) is slightly different and it says that graduates are awarded qualification of “Digital visualisation and communications designer” This information should be identical as mentioned in the e-platform.
The contents of this programme also relate to the field of Arts and include topics like composition, theory of colours, principles of design thinking, communication design and others. As mentioned in SAR: “The purpose of the study programme is to ensure development of a competitive field of study, raising the quality of studies in accordance with the needs of the Latvian state, regions and cities and labour market forecasts.”.

2.1.2.
Digital Visualization Design is a professional first cycle study programme with the code 42214. The first part of the code corresponds to the professional first cycle study programme with the length of 4 years (full time) and 4.5 years (part-time) which is implemented after secondary education. The last 3 digits of the code “214” correspond to the thematic scientific field of arts, education group of design (Cabinet of Ministers rules no. 322). The degree to be awarded will be “Professional Bachelor's degree in design / Communication designer”. Therefore, the code and the degree correspond with the title of the study programme.

The study programme “Digital Visualisation Design” volume is 240 ECTS of which 30 ECTS are compulsory part covering the general education field, 54 ECTS cover basic theoretical courses and information technology courses in this field, 90 ECTS are the field specific professional specialisation courses of which 10ECTS for the free elective part, 30 ECTS for internships and 20 ECTS for Bachelor’s thesis.
This programme is more developed for the local industry therefore it is implemented only in Latvian. The duration of 4 years is the standard length for the professional study programme. Study programme is implemented in full time and part time studies. As written in the SAR p. 128: “In the reporting period from 2013/2014 until beginning of 2022/2023 academic year, the number of students in the programme decreased in total - from 266 to 109 students, a decrease of 59%”, but in the previous 5 years it can be observed that the students join part time studies more and more (e.g. 2018/2019 there were 75 full time students and 34 part-time students vs 2022/2023 65 full time students and 44 part-time students). During the visit it was confirmed that students are able to work in parallel while studying indicating the forthcoming from BIA and the possibility to prepare a flexible schedule.
Graduates will receive the professional qualification of communication designer which is in line with the title of the programme. The content itself does not fully cover the requirements in professional standard, but this will be analysed in chapter 2.2. Admission requirements are based on secondary education centralised examinations. And students need to pass two entrance exams, however this information is not mentioned in BIA webpage (https://BIA.edu.lv/index.php/lv/bakalaura-studiju-programmas/datordizains.html), nor e-platform. Nevertheless, it is written in “Admission requirements for the academic year 2024/2025”, a document, which can be found on the website.
Since the admission requirements ask for entrance exams, a decision from the Higher Education council is required.

2.1.3.
Over the reported period small corrections were made and preparations for upcoming changes has been prepared. For example, the name of the study programme will be changed. This change is related to the recommendations of experts in the content analysis of the Study Direction Council. The name change of the study programme is also supported from the experts standpoint as it would fit better with current tendencies. Also, the professional qualification to be obtained will be changed from "Computer designer" to "Communication designer", this change is supported by renewed professional standards.
Study programme will no longer be implemented in part time extramural studies, most likely, due to decrease in students.
Other changes include places of implementation of the programme. Due to the decrease of students BIA has stopped implementing the programme at other branches and the only place of implementation remains at Riga. Nevertheless, both changes can be supported due to creating a better image of the programme and consolidating resources so they would be used more sustainably.

2.1.4.
As described in the SAR during the evaluation period dynamics of the number of students has decreased by a half (59% according to SAR p. 128). Therefore, also the number of graduates has drastically decreased over the years (from annex 3.1.4. statistics of students). For example, in the year 2013/2014 there were 61 graduates of this programme. In the last 3 years (2020/2021, 2021/2022, 2023/2023) there have been 8, 6 and 8 graduates respectively. However, from the graduate survey it can be observed that a significant amount of graduates’ work in the field (125/163 or ~76%). And while the graduate amount has significantly decreased, the employers met

during the expert visit mentioned that the average graduate has sufficient knowledge for the field.
As for economic and social justification BIA writes (in SAR p. 125) “The most recent reports of the European Commission emphasise the essential role of HEI as centres of regional development and innovation, which are especially important on the scale of Latvia in promoting economic development of the Latgale region. Such a situation requires urgent action for the preparation of Digital Visualization Design specialists”. However, currently Daugavpils branch of BIA does not offer this programme due to the critical reduction in the number of students and there is a lack of statistical data of graduate employment regions to further support this statement.
Nevertheless, it is clear that graduates of this field are necessary as they contribute to the national economy by communicating and identifying employers’/individuals’ needs in digital visualisation and communication.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The BIA Design School offers the professional bachelor's study programme "Digital Visualization Design," aligned with EQF 6th level standards and focusing on communication design. Despite a decline in student enrollment, it aims to meet the needs of the Latvian state and labour market. The programme emphasizes arts-related subjects and spans 4 years for full time students. Programme is implemented only in Latvian language. The programme will undergo name change after the accreditation and has had implementation changes (in BIA branches) to enhance its appeal and efficiency. The evaluation period has seen a notable decrease in both student enrollment and graduation rates, prompting concerns about the programme's long-term sustainability. However, feedback from employers indicates that graduates possess adequate skills for employment in the field, suggesting that the programme continues to deliver quality education despite reduced numbers. Iit is evident that while the programme holds significance in meeting industry needs and contributing to economic growth, ongoing efforts are required to address enrollment challenges and ensure programme sustainability. By implementing targeted recruitment strategies, maintaining programme relevance through curriculum updates, and fostering partnerships with industry stakeholders, BIA can further enhance the programme's impact.

Strengths
1. Study programme is appropriate for this field and has mostly interrelated name, degree, aims and objectives and learning outcomes.
2. Graduates of the study programme are well respected and highly appreciated by employers.

Weaknesses
1. Lack of cooperation with regional municipalities, which could support social and economic justification of this programme.
2. Decrease of students by 50% over the reporting period.
3. Admission requirements are not coordinated with the Higher Education Council.
4. The study programme which initially kicked off as a niche in Latvian art and design education, it is currently somehow sterile and outdated.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1.
During the meeting with employers, it was acknowledged that graduates exhibit good skills in

design, backed by real-life experience, and a strong overall preparedness for the industry. However, certain areas for improvement were identified. During the site visit meeting, employers noted that graduates lack essential skills in information structuring, researcher capabilities, the process of User Interface development, technical drawing proficiency, and effective iteration skills. Employers expressed a desire to review graduates' final works as part of their evaluation process. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the perceived deficiency in argumentation skills and a lack of knowledge in materials science among the graduates. Addressing these specific areas will contribute to a more comprehensive skill set and better align graduates with industry expectations. The achieved learning outcomes partially align with the demands of the labour market.
The "Digital Visualization Design" study programme demonstrates a partial compliance with the professional standard "KOMUNIKĀCIJAS DIZAINERA PROFESIJAS STANDARTS (PS-174)" (https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-174.pdf [checked 08.03.2024]). The curriculum successfully encompasses skills and knowledge in fields such as Psychology, Design, Semiotics, Colour Theory, and Principles of Typography. However, notable gaps exist in several essential areas.
These gaps encompass crucial aspects, including the absence of Design Thinking Principles, Creative Thinking, Information Structuring, Types of Audiovisual Art, Fundamentals of Creative Writing, and Creative Thinking. Furthermore, essential topics such as Methods of Argumentation, Public Speech, Fundamentals of Camerawork, Current Trends in Communication Design, Types of Audiovisual Material Processing, and Technological Innovations in Communication Design are not adequately covered.
To enhance the curriculum's comprehensiveness and relevance, it is recommended to introduce modules or coursework that cover these critical aspects. Regular updates and alignment with industry standards will ensure that the "Digital Visualization Design" programme remains robust and effectively prepares students for the dynamic challenges of the communication design profession.
The study programme consists of a number of courses per semester ranging from 1ECTS to 3ECTS. According to the data analysed from the additionally received BSA DS COURSES TABLE 2024 document, they show that they have an average of 13 courses per semester (seven semesters, the last one being preparation for the diploma thesis), which is too many. The standard is 5-6 courses per semester. A large number of subjects results from a small scope of a single subject. In seven semesters, the average ECTS volume of courses is 1.98. Therefore, it would be reasonable to reduce the number of courses per semester to 5-6.
Study programme fully complies with State Professional Higher Education Standard (Cabinet of Ministers rule no. 305); in the programme there are included 3 ECTS course of Civil defence and environmental protection, total volume amounts up to 240 ECTS of which the contents (study programme parts) and traineeship and bachelor work correspond with the requirements mentioned in clause 22 of the standard.

2.2.2.
Not applicable

2.2.3. The study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are considered.
The study programme "Digital Visualization Design" exhibits a traditional approach to teaching, with lecturers selecting study methods aligned with the specific goals, characteristics, and intended outcomes of each course. The integration of active learning methods, such as stimulating discussions, small group activities, and independent work presentations within lectures, contributes to a dynamic and engaging educational environment. The programme includes technologies, including audio-visual tools, multimedia resources, and platforms like Moodle, Skype, and Zoom,

enhancing flexibility and fostering students' cognitive interest and creative participation. (SAR pp. 142-144)
During the site visit, in meetings with both current students and graduates, experts received confirmation that the study programme effectively embodies a student-centred approach. The consensus was that the programme considers the diverse and individual needs of students, providing flexible study options to accommodate varying learning styles and preferences.
Experts during the on-site visit and meetings noted that the feedback mechanisms for the study process at the BIA encompass both formal and informal channels. The BIA facilitates official feedback queries in Moodle, while the programme director independently organises a questionnaire through email each semester. However, it was observed that the current method for providing anonymous answers in the director's questionnaire is complex.
According to student feedback during the meeting, the evaluation of assignments is perceived as fair, results are communicated, and arguing is not necessary. This positive response indicates a level of satisfaction with the transparency and fairness of the assessment process.
Nevertheless, experts would like to pay attention to a specific area of improvement. Experts highlight a gap in the process related to semester work presentation. During site meetings students point to a lack of necessity for students to present or defend their semester work. Professors predominantly evaluate the work and provide feedback without incorporating individual or group presentations into the assessment process.
(In case of a joint study programme, or in case the study programme is implemented in a foreign language or in the form of distance-learning, analyze in detail the methods used for the implementation of such a study programme).

2.2.4.
The BIA provides advice on the possible internship places, however during the interviews, students and alumni reported to the experts that they mostly get into the professional communication networks at very early stages of their studies. That means that by the time they have to do an internship, they often either already work part time within their professional field, or know places where they could and would like to do an internship and work later. Often the alumni of the BIA provide internship opportunities to the students, which is a good sign meaning that they appreciate the education provided by this higher education institution. The opportunity of doing an internship and even part time work in the field of design has been mentioned by the alumni during the interviews with experts as one of the reasons for choosing to study at the BIA. The option of combining work with studies is even further made convenient by the disponibility of Part time studies and Part time extramural studies in the Digital Visualisation Design programme. That allows people even to work full time during the week and attend classes on the weekends.
According to the information provided to experts by the director of the programme during the interviews, upon completion of the internship the employer is required to give detailed feedback on the intern's skills, capacities and quality of the service provided by filling in a predefined reporting form. This feedback is then, reportedly, taken into consideration by the staff in order to improve the content of the study courses.
However, during the interview with the internship providers (meeting with employers) experts were told that the lack of one specific disciplinary focus (as the programme combines a bit from three different fields of design: advertising, interior design and product design) creates specialists that know something on everything, but none of the design fields taught as part of the programme is sufficiently covered as to provide expertise necessary on the labour market. Nevertheless, according to the experts, this can not be considered a significant issue, as the industry is very diverse and it is expected that the employer will provide the necessary training required for the employee to comply with the requirements of the specific enterprise.

If the study programme is implemented in a foreign language, provide an assessment of the provision of internship in a foreign language, including for foreign students.
Not applicable

2.2.5.
Not applicable

2.2.6.
From the thesis projects presented to the experts by the programme director during the accreditation visits the experts have been able to conclude that the topics of students' final thesis are basically the same for all the students, and they involve development of corporate identity visualisation. The only variation is the company for which the identity is designed and visualised, chosen by the student. As part of the thesis, according to the information provided by the teaching staff, the students need to develop a project that would contain components of all three design fields considered within the study programme: advertisement, interior design and product design. However, they are free to choose one on which they put emphasis. Nonetheless, this inclination is not reflected in the title of the thesis, and also the actual thesis projects that the experts were able to consult during the accreditation visits demonstrated any significant diversity. Although it corresponds to the study programme's goals, according to the experts, this approach seems too monotonous. It probably makes it easier for the teaching staff to assess the quality of work and to make the works more comparable. However, according to the experts, the burden of assessment and explanation of it to students should not be considered as something exceeding the teaching staff's professional capabilities. Instead, the students should be encouraged to define their own research path, to decide their own thesis topics, and above all - to experiment and explore alternatives. After all - being inventive and innovative are some of the most valuable qualities in a designer.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

While graduates exhibit good design skills and real-life experience, there are identified shortcomings in crucial areas such as information structuring, researcher capabilities, and technical drawing proficiency. The study programme's alignment with the professional standard is recognized, but notable gaps exist in essential areas like Design Thinking, Creative Thinking, and Audiovisual Art. While the study programme demonstrates a traditional approach, incorporating active learning methods contributes to a dynamic educational environment. The programme effectively considers diverse student needs and offers flexibility. However, attention is needed in enhancing work presentation opportunities and simplifying the feedback process. The internship aspect is a strong point, with students often entering professional networks early. However, a lack of disciplinary focus in the programme might delay specialisation, and the similarity in final thesis topics may limit creativity.

Strengths:
1. Graduates are acknowledged for their strong skills in design and practical experience, indicating that the programme effectively gives hands-on experience.
2. The study programme is recognized for embodying a student-centred approach, considering diverse individual needs and offering flexible study options to accommodate different learning styles and preferences.
3. The BIA provides advice on the possible internship places, many of which are the creative practices of the university's alumni.

4. The academy provides the option of combining work with studies by offering Part time studies in the Digital Visualisation Design programme.

Weaknesses:
1. The programme exhibits notable gaps in crucial areas like Design Thinking, Creative Thinking, Information Structuring, Types of Audiovisual Art, Creative Writing, Methods of Argumentation, and Technological Innovations in Communication Design.
2. Experts identified a gap in the process related to work presentation. The absence of opportunities for students to present or defend their semester or coursework indicates a potential area for improvement in the assessment process.
3. Lack of one specific disciplinary focus as the programme combines a bit from three different fields of design: advertising, interior design and product design.
4. A very monotonous and uniform approach to the graduation thesis - all the students have conceptually exactly the same topic and proceed both in the part of research and artistic creation along a pre-described path that doesn't seem to encourage any experimentation and innovation.

Assessment of the requirement [5] (applicable only to master's or doctoral study programmes)

1 R5 - The study programme for obtaining a master's or doctoral degree is based on the achievements and findings of the respective field of science or field of artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1.
BIA provides a specialised study environment with resources for design education, including studios and workshops. Study fees are the primary funding source. The use of Moodle since 2015 facilitates efficient organisation of study materials and communication. The library, integrating electronic databases, plays an important role. (SAR pp. 151-154)
Experts positively evaluate BIA for its supportive study environment but highlight the inadequacy of software provision, for example, outdated tools like Adobe CS2 and outdated iMac computers. The on site visits and overall in the SAR revealed a notable lack of attention from the BIA regarding the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into the studies as part of the teaching process. AI tools in the design field are indeed spreading rapidly, and BIA should pay attention to this trend.
High reliance on personal computer experts is seen as a weakness that could hinder a cohesive learning experience. To address this, experts recommend updating software and ensuring a diverse range of workstations, aligning with the evolving needs of design education.
The established prerequisites for achieving the learning outcomes currently appear average. During the meeting with employers, it was acknowledged that graduates lack essential skills in information structuring, researcher capabilities, the process of User Interface development, technical drawing proficiency, and effective iteration skills. The average achievement of learning outcomes may be linked to the absence of subjects such as Design Thinking Principles, Information Structuring, Methods of Argumentation, Current Trends in Communication Design, and Technological Innovations in Communication Design. These subjects are mentioned in the professional standard "KOMUNIKĀCIJAS DIZAINERA PROFESIJAS STANDARTS (PS-174)."

2.3.2.

Not applicable

2.3.3.
As written on SAR pp.154-156, BIA operates as a private institution with financial backing from its founders, who play a crucial role in providing resources and overseeing their utilisation. The BIA maintains a unified budget, approved by the founders, reflecting its commitment to institutional development and resource allocation. Despite variations in tuition fees for full-time and part-time students, the study field maintains a positive balance between income and expenses, ensuring that expenses per student (EUR 1066) are fully covered by the income per student.
The current funding for the study process only partially meets the requirements of the study programme. Information gathered from the programme director during the site visit indicates that students must spend additional expenses beyond study fees. These expenses include materials (averaging 200 EUR per semester per person for exam works), private computers, and software. The lack of a plotter printer at BIA leads to additional financial expenses for students.
During the site visit (at a meeting with the BIA management and meeting with the study field director and director of the study programme “Digital Visualization Design”) experts could not get information about minimum student numbers in the study field to run it sufficiently.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

BIA offers a specialised study environment for design education, supported by resources such as studios and workshops. Study fees are the primary funding source. However, experts noted shortcomings in software provision, with outdated tools and computers. There is a notable lack of attention to incorporating AI into the curriculum, despite its rapid growth in the design field. Financially, while there are tuition fees, additional costs needed for materials, private computers, and software. Information on minimum student numbers for the programme's profitability was lacking during the site visit.

Strengths:
1. BIA financial strategy and positive balance between income and expenses highlight a stable financial position.
2. BIA provides tailored resources, including studios and laboratories, fostering an optimal learning atmosphere for design students.

Weaknesses:
1. Outdated tools like Adobe CS2 and old iMac computers reveal a weakness in the technological infrastructure.
2. The high dependence on personal computers poses a risk to a cohesive learning experience.

Assessment of the requirement [6]

1 R6 - Compliance of the study provision, science provision (if applicable), informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

BIA maintains a stable financial situation and a positive income-outcome balance through the operation of the study programme "Digital Visualization Design" . Nevertheless, the insufficiency of proper software and workstations, coupled with a significant reliance on students' private computers and software, represents an unsustainable approach for the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1.

There are currently 18 teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme, of which 13 are elected in academic positions and the rest are visiting. 7 members of the elected teaching staff hold a Master degree and 6 have a PhD degree. Formally, the teaching staff members' qualification complies with the requirements – they all have the necessary habilitation, and regularly take part in events where they present their scientific and artistic output. From the additionally obtained document BSA DS Staff Table 2024, different information is given than that stated in the SAR. There is a discrepancy in the number of the teaching staff involved. In the new document, 23 teaching staff are involved in the implementation of the programme (previously 18). However, the teaching staff that is involved in teaching design and art related courses mostly focuses on artistic creation (and their scientific work is of much lesser value), while most of the scientific research merits can be ascribed to the teaching staff whose domain of expertise is not related to design and art. That is considered a weakness by the experts as it impedes academy from achieving excellence in the field of design and art education, because the teaching staff's knowledge on the recent developments in the field is considerably limited.

The teaching staff members with a professional background in design and arts actively participate in various events, such as exhibitions, symposia, workshops, conferences, plain-airs and similar. However it needs to be noted that this output is not of the highest standard, even considering only the productions within Latvian art and design scene. Also for the rest, the geography of these creative activities speaks for itself, as most of them have taken place either in Latvia and Eastern Europe or even Russia (with the exception of Italy, see attachment of SAR 2.4.2.1. BSA DS DD publikacijas LZP un radošais lat 2023 2024 1 AB format eng). That is definitely not the most challenging region of the world for a creative professional, so in the future the staff should consider setting the benchmark higher and targeting Western art and design scene.

2.4.2.

The composition of the teaching staff complies with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Chapter IV, sections 27-38). From the on-site meeting with the teaching staff of the study programme “Digital visualisation design” and from the additional document that the experts received (annex Teaching staff and courses), it is clear that the structure of the holders of the core design subjects has been the same for many years. It should be noted that also no changes in the composition of the teaching staff in the long run can affect the quality of the implementation of the curriculum, especially if this is also supported by insufficient outgoing and incoming teaching mobility which contribute, among other, to the acquisition of new modern knowledge and the deepening of professional pedagogical competencies. In the period between 2016 and 2023, only 26 outgoing Erasmus+ mobilities were carried out; the head of the study course and study programme has 9 mobilities (39.13%), one pedagogue as many as 11 mobilities (42.3%, of which 2 for teaching composition/colour composition, everything else is training mobility), another member of the teaching staff has 4 mobilities (15.4%) and two more pedagogues, each with one educational mobility (document Incoming stuff subject). In order to avoid the possibility of changes in the teaching staff affecting the quality of the implementation of the study programme, the BIA DS should take specific action in the case of one pedagogue who is the holder of as many as 15 subjects (since in the long term it can represent a potential risk in the change in the composition of the teaching staff), which could have a negative impact on the quality of the implementation of the study programme. The criticality of such a situation is also indicated by the fact that the current total number of teaching staff is 18, but it has decreased since 2018 by 21.74%. Of the 10 lecturers holding courses with core design content, 2 are guest lecturers, 4 are elected at the LMA (Art

Academy of Latvia) and 4 are elected at the BIA. For 14 of the lecturers the primary affiliation is Baltic International Academy School of Design (BIA DS). According to SAR (Study programme, Teaching Staff, 3.4.2.) the number of the elected members of teaching staff has dropped in the past six years by 29,42%, which represents a relative risk that the study programme becomes dependent on external lecturers. The unchanged structure of lecturers can be seen from the BIA website. Of the seven teachers of the BIA DS, who also created it, 6 are still teaching. They represent 60% of all 10 teachers for design content courses. The long-term unchanged composition of the teaching staff ensures the stability of the programme's implementation, but it should be noted that, given the modern content of the study programme, it may also mean the risk of stagnation in the implementation of the programme and, consequently, its quality, especially with very little use of the Erasmus mobility programme. It is clear from the on-site interviews with the teaching staff of study programme “Digital visualisation design” and meeting with the director of study programme “Digital visualisation design” that in 2023 only two pedagogues took advantage of the mobility, and not for teaching mobility, but for training. In the current composition of the teaching staff, it is clear from the reviewed CVs, that one of them has only completed a BA degree, which is not in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Chapter IV, sections 27-38), as lecturers must have completed MA degrees, but is included as an external guest lecturer. The risk for the quality of the implementation of the study programme represents the share of individual habilitation rankings. According to SAR (Study programme, 3.4.2. Teaching Staff) in academic year 2018/2019 the share of assistant professors, associated professors and assistant professors in relation to all teaching staff 56,52%. That share fell in 2023/2024 to 50%, where it should be noted that the share of docents (assistant professor) fell even by 42,68%. This is important and represents a risk in the long term due to the formation of a stable structure of teaching staff, which cannot be quickly formed in an academic manner. Currently, they have three docents in the field of design among the academic staff, who are habilitated at the BIA, which should become a long-term practice.

2.4.3.
Not applicable

2.4.4.
According to the SAR (annex 2.4.2.1.) all of the academic staff members who are involved in the study field and programme have either published their scientific research in peer-reviewed journals and monographs or worked in the design field and had some artistic output. The experts, however, could observe that the scientific output mostly belongs to the staff that doesn't represent the discipline of design or art (with exception of Nadežda Pazuhina who teaches several design related subjects and is herself also actively involved in scientific research). Whereas the staff members who represent the design and art field are all actively involved in artistic and design practice. The results of this practice are exhibited and presented on a regular basis in various local and international events, such as XI International biennial Art-Bridge-Watercolor, International Scientific and Practical Conference DESIGN, VISUAL ART & CREATIVITY, International Conference "Modern Trends and Technologies in the Development of Design Education within the Bologna Process" among others.

2.4.5.
A mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme has been established, it ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and the interconnection of study courses within the study programme.
From the interviews with the teaching staff of the study programme “Digital visualisation design”, it is clear that there is a council for the study programme, but the involvement of the teaching staff, who hold basic design subjects, is reduced to only the head of the programme and field. During the

interviews, the participants of an meeting with the academic staff of study programme “Digital visualisation design” emphasised that they have informal meetings on a daily basis and regular meetings at the beginning and end of the semester. It can be seen from the interviews that the courses and lecturers are not connected systematically. One Erasmus teaching and training mobility to Italy in 2023, carried out by one teaching staff, was mentioned. It is clear from the reviewed CVs that only one person from the teaching staff who are holders of design courses benefited from Erasmus mobility. Another member of the teaching staff benefited from Erasmus mobility for non-teaching staff (administrative staff) between 2017 and 2023, which is incorrect given that she is an associate professor and does not have any administrative position (she holds 6 study courses). Teaching staff are also not involved in the operation and management of BIA. The programme does not have departments for the professional areas listed on the website: design of the environment, interior or their components and advertising design and communication. The establishment of these two departments would certainly systematically regulate the involvement of all pedagogues and develop constant and ongoing development, both of the teaching staff and of the study programme, helping to establish a closer mutual cooperation between the teaching staff. The poor mutual cooperation between the teaching staff is certainly also influenced by the large fragmentation of content, or subjects that have between 1 and 3 ECTS, as it is difficult to expect interconnection of study courses in joint projects within the framework of such a small number of hours available in each course. However, it is clear from the SAR (Study programme, Teaching Staff, 3.4.5.) that they are aware of the importance of cooperation between the teaching staff and have designed various forms of cooperation for this purpose: mutual attendance of teaching staff at different courses, annual report on academic and scientific activities, promotional of international exchange, analysis and evaluation of the content of the study programme, control and analysis of study process and teaching quality and use of external experts. The problem in the small share of mutual cooperation of the teaching staff also stems from the highly centralised and rigid structure of the management of the study programme. Currently, the management is in one person, which inhibits the academic development of the study programme and prevents networking between the teaching staff. With the greater involvement of all colleagues of the teaching staff in the management structures of the study programme, their involvement in the search for projects that will be based on mutual cooperation will also increase.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by indicating strengths and weaknesses

The teaching staff, tied to narrow design areas, shows a strong informal interconnection and commitment to the quality of the study programme and its development, but does not demonstrate a recorded connection of the study contents with each other through the implemented projects. At the same time, there is a noticeable lack of development of younger teaching staff who could ensure the further development and stability of the study programme in the long run. The teaching staff is insufficiently involved in the management structures of DS. The possibility of Erasmus mobility and the associated underdevelopment of international networking are poorly utilised. BIA DS should work more on encouraging and raising awareness of the relevance of the implementation of mobility among teaching staff, and provide them with greater support in its implementation. Due to the large division of the programme into courses in the range of 1-3 ECTS, there are few opportunities for interconnections between courses.
Due to the large division of the programme into courses in the range of 1-3 ECTS, there are few opportunities for interconnections between courses, which can have a negative impact on achieving the aims of the study programme.

Strengths
1. The teaching staff shows mutual respect for their professional knowledge and genuine personal

ties, which is evident in the positive evaluation of the students, especially regarding the head of the study programme.
2. The teaching staff members with a professional background in design and arts actively participate in various events, such as exhibitions, symposia, workshops, conferences, plain-airs and similar.

Weaknesses:
1. In order to strengthen the structure of the teaching staff and create a stimulating transparent working environment for their professional development, it is necessary to establish two departments that are professionally related to the subfields covered by the study programme.
2. Improve the distribution of academic ranks among all levels with the aim of developing their own younger academic teaching staff, who will take care of the long-term development of the study programme.
3. The teaching staff that is involved in teaching design and art related courses has an extremely limited scientific research output.
4. The artistic creation activities can not be considered prestigious nor locally, nor internationally.

Assessment of the requirement [7]

1 R7 - Compliance of the qualification of the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

When conducting the study programme, DS includes very few guest lecturers, regardless of their habilitation title. The possibility of Erasmus mobility of visiting teaching staff is poorly used. The qualifications and academic positions of the teaching staff comply with the standards of national legislation and higher education recommendations, but do not demonstrate outstanding achievements beyond the basic requirements.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

1 1 - The study programme complies with the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme complies with the Professional Higher Education Standard.
Compliance with the study programme with the Professional Higher Education Standard and Cabinet Regulation No.305 is described in Annex No 3.2.1. Study programme includes 3 ECTS courses of Civil defence and environmental protection.

2 2 - The study programme complies with a valid professional standard or the requirements for the professional qualification (if there is no professional standard required for the relevant occupation) provided if the completion of the study programme leads to a professional qualification (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The study programme partially complies with a recently renewed valid professional standard PS-174 (See at https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-174.pdf in Latvian) and partially provides the required knowledge for carrying out basic tasks for the profession.

For more detailed assessment, please view 2.2.1.

3 3 - The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Since the study programme is implemented only in Latvian language, the materials comply with the requirements set in the Law of Higher Education Institutions.
A lot of study course descriptions are highly detailed with evaluation criteria. All courses have necessary foreground knowledge defined.
Sometimes there is no distinction between independent work and assignments for students - independent work must be done outside of contact hours and lectures and study course descriptions don't accurately always represent that.
Most courses (e.g. ADD007,A1DD013, A1DD022) should update the obligatory and additional literature with newer sources; it is understandable that some classics remain the same, but a lot of the materials are from the 2000 - 2010.

4 4 - The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The diploma issued complies with the state legislature and "Procedures by which documents certifying higher Education recognised by the State shall be issued" (Cabinet of Ministers No. 202). The provided copy of the diploma contains a correctly formatted diploma and an accurate diploma supplement.

5 5 - The academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

6 6 - Academic study programmes provided for less than 250 full-time students may be implemented and less than five professors and associated professors of the higher education institution may be involved in the implementation of the mandatory and limited elective part of these study programmes provided that the relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education has been received in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

7 7 - At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme, at least three of which are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of a professional doctoral study programme in arts (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

8 8 - The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The teaching staff has sufficient Latvian language knowledge for implementing study courses, which is confirmed by the BIA acting-rector signed attestation.

9 9 - The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

10 10 - The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Study agreements include most necessary parts set in legislation such as rights and obligations of the parties. It is advised to include information about guarantees of compensation losses (11. and 12. criteria), so that this information is easier for the students to acknowledge already from the beginning.

11 11 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution or college (agreement with another accredited higher education institution or college) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Academy has a record declaration and cooperation agreement with Rēzekne Academy of Technology as confirmation that in case the implementation of this study programme is terminated students will be able to continue studies in RTA professional bachelor study programme “Interior design”. Unfortunately, as of evaluation date, it seems that this programme has not undergone study field evaluation or will no longer be implemented. (Based on the publicly available information in e-platforma.aika.lv).
Nevertheless, BIA has also signed an agreement with EKA University of Applied Sciences and the students have the opportunity to continue studies in professional bachelor study programme “Interior design”.
Additionally, BIA has an agreement with University of Daugavpils, which also offers a professional bachelor study programme “Design”.
While the contents of those programmes slightly differ, they are considered a relevant option for the Arts studies.

12 12 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme’s license is revoked due to the actions (actions or omissions) of the higher education institution or college and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

BIA has an attestation signed by the acting rector that states that BIA will provide compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or loses licence due to actions or omissions of the academy and the student does not wish to continue studies in another programme. (See annex 2.1.4. On fulfilment of obligations DD.edoc)

13 13 - The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 55.(1), Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

14 14 - Compliance with the requirements specified in other regulatory enactments that apply to the study programme being assessed (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

1 R8 - Compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

There is no opinion from Higher Education Council (AIP atzinums) about admission criteria and the two additional exams.
Compliance with most of regulatory enactments is observed, nevertheless there should be a better connection with professional standard requirements.
Furthermore, BIA compliance with Law on Higher Education Institutions (article 53 (section 3.1) should be further investigated to determine if ethics committee does not contradict the requirements for necessity of student representatives.

General conclusions about the study programme, indicating the most important strengths and weaknesses of the study programme

The BIA Design School offers the "Digital Visualization Design" programme, partially aligning with profession standard PS-174 and awarding graduates the title of Communication Designer. Programme falls under the study field “Arts” which is appropriate and has corresponding classification code, title and degree to be awarded. Programme is implemented in Latvian language at BIA Riga branch. The Student-Centric Focus ensures that the programme is tailored to meet their needs, providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge in the evolving landscape of digital visualization design.
The study programme came across as an ‘aging’ programme in need of further development, and an opportunity for growth and transformation. This process can act as a catalyst for renewal, striving to exceed standards and to revitalize the programme to meet the demands of the dynamic field of digital visualization design by reinforcing it as well as updating it in both human and physical resources; including faculty involved with new digital media and new resources of the latest high technologies.
Although this is a Bachelor study programme which tends to mainly provide professionals for the creative industry, as an academic programme in tertiary education, it needs to also provide an experience which can be somehow more scientific/academic. Therefore the teaching team throughout its various disciplines and specializations need to adapt and benchmark a further literal approach towards their teaching and learning activity and engage more with scientific/academic research.
The formalization and rigorous implementation of the Quality Assurance process both at study field and study programme level - in line with the institutional process - will advocate for policies that prioritize the value of digital visualization design education and provide a breath of a new life into the programme.
Cooperation with local design councils could benefit to the social and economic justification of the programme. Forge partnerships with industry stakeholders can ensure that the curriculum is aligned with current and emerging industry needs. This collaboration will guarantee that graduates are well-prepared to enter the workforce and make significant contributions to the field of digital visualization

design.

Strengths:
1. There is a strong commitment towards supporting and sustaining this study programme by the BIA management.

Weaknesses:
1. Lack of faculty with expertise in new technologies.
2. Resources are quite old and outdated.
3. Internationalization is somehow marginilized and not very active.
4. Lack of cooperation with regional municipalities.
5. Programme is not covering all bases mentioned in the professional standard.

Evaluation of the study programme "Digital visualization design"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Digital visualization design"

Short-term recommendations

1. To add to the study field a portfolio of additional academics from diverse design backgrounds who are involved with new technologies such as digital processes, 3D printing, laser cutting etc.
2. To reinforce the prospect of the Erasmus+ scheme but also investigate the inclusion for the instruction of the English Language which will bring to both staff and students an opening of new doors for networking
3. To expand the internationalization profile of the study field/programme further by inviting national as well as international scholars and practitioners to present their works and generally introduce a better creative input as well as friction towards the global contemporary art and design field
4. To acquire a Higher Education Council opinion regarding admission requirements.
5. To update the webpage of the study programme with the correct qualification to be awarded.
6. To have short presentations of the teaching staff on the web site, with descriptions of courses that are teaching.
7. Add modern assessment methods like in-class discussions, group work on short tasks, surveys, considering blind grading, short reflection writing assignments, and encouraging teacher and peer dialogue around learning
8. BIA should prioritise the integration of AI tools into the design curriculum to ensure students are equipped with the latest skills and techniques relevant to the evolving industry landscape
9. Incorporate missing topics to complete professional standard PS-174, topics like Design Thinking Principles, Creative Thinking, Creative Writing Fundamentals, Methods of Argumentation, Public Speech, Camerawork Fundamentals, Current Trends in Communication Design and Technological Innovations in Communication Design into the curriculum.

Long-term recommendations

1. To invest by updating and upkeeping as well as making the premises sustainable, all-inclusive and accessible, especially for people with disabilities.
2. To create cooperation agreements with other regional organisations and municipalities in order to create a stronger impact on regional development (as mentioned in BIA strategic documents).
3. To establish two departments related to the professional areas of the study programme with the aim of developing teaching staff and individual study courses.
4. Reduce the number of courses per semester from 5-6 and increase the ECTS volume of each new course, in line with this change.

III - Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

III - Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:	Partially compliant	A quality assurance system has been established and is being implemented at the academy, but for the specific study field/programme it does not take place in a systematic and formalized way, and some of its elements are not fully implemented (for example, formalized student surveys and formalized recording and feedback from employers).

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Partially compliant	Mostly artistic creation is carried out, and there is a lack of substantial scientific research. International cooperation is weak and limited to the Erasmus+ mobility. Artistic creation is not systematically included in applied research or other projects, nor is it financially supported. Agreements on the intention to participate, cooperation contracts or other forms of international connections on joint art projects are extremely few and are limited to a handful of institutions with which DS has regularly cooperated for many years. The applied research methods in design though in the study field are limited and do not represent the current state of the art in the design field. They also limit students' potential involvement in the job market after graduation, especially with regard to the emerging, rapidly growing and partly established fields of design, such as service design and UX design.
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Partially compliant	Good cooperation with limited types of partners in Latvia, who trust the BIA and highly value the practical skills of both students and graduates. Cooperation at the international level is rather fragmentary, which is also related to the fact that the study programme is implemented only in Latvian language, which does not give the opportunity to admit Erasmus+ exchange students.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.	Partially compliant	It's positive to note that BIA has addressed and resolved some of the identified deficiencies from the previous assessment while actively working on implementing the remaining recommendations. The experts are hopeful that all ongoing developments will be successfully implemented.

Assessment of the Requirements for the Relevant Study Programmes of the Study Field

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Digital visualization design (42214)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Average

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

none