

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: National Defence Academy of Latvia

Study field: Military Defence

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

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The Expert Group (EG) reviewed the National Defence Academy of Latvia (NDAL), finding its study field, and its embedded programmes, well-aligned with both the Latvian armed forces' requirements and the Academy's mission to train military specialists and conduct national defence and security research. The Bachelor's programmes at NDAL prepare students (cadets) for junior leadership roles (lieutenants) in the Land, Air, and Naval Forces. Additionally, a second-level professional higher education programme offers a faster path to similar qualifications. The Master's programme supports both further academic development, and military progression.

The NDAL's programmes align with the five levels of professional military education (PME): basic, junior, intermediate, senior, and executive. The potential utilisation of NATO's 'Systems Approach to Training (NATO SAT)' and its 'Generic Officer Professional Military Education Reference Curriculum' could significantly enhance the international dimension of the Study Field. This improvement is contingent upon the flexibility and responsiveness of the NDAL's quality systems to efficiently implement the necessary changes to its programmes. The NDAL Programme Directors, coordinating with a newly formed Academy-wide Study Council, manage daily operations but face challenges due to the periodic rotation of teachers and instructors. This highlights the need for formal qualification requirements and intensive training in higher education teaching methods.

Management structures, including the Senate and senior management, are effective but still adapting to new frameworks. The dual regulatory frameworks from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education present challenges, but the flexible Latvian model allows for adopting best practices. The admissions process is efficient, but some successful applicants could benefit from improved pre-start information. NDAL should prepare for a potential future requirement for Majors to attain an MA to manage candidate influx and consider integrating the "captain's course" into the MA programme.

Assessments align with learning outcomes, competencies, skills, and knowledge acquisition through assignments, papers, presentations, and practical work. Health and safety are crucial in practical assessments like weapons training. NDAL maintains academic integrity using tools (such as Oxsico and Turnitin), with a robust system for handling plagiarism although the consequences for some forms of misconduct could be clearer. The NDAL's quality policy and plans to develop the QA system and allocate additional resources are promising. Defining the roles of teachers and students in QA processes would create a shared understanding and unity in achieving strategic goals.

Research at NDAL is primarily conducted through the Defence Technology and Innovation Centre (DTIC) and the Security and Strategic Research Centre (SSRC), focusing on applied research due to security concerns limiting publication. DTIC collaborates with defence industry partners and participates in European Defence Fund projects, while student involvement in research is encouraged through theses and annual research conferences. NDAL's cooperation with Latvian institutions and international partners is strong, particularly with the National Armed Forces and Baltic Defence College. Internationalization efforts are increasing, guided by long-term cooperation tasks and annual plans, though there is no distinct internationalization policy.

The programmes' alignment with national requirements and employer needs is a significant strength. Each programme is tailored to meet national standards and the specific demands of their respective military branches, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for their roles. This close alignment is achieved through the involvement of employers, such as the Air Forces, Naval Forces, and the Ministry of Defence, in curriculum development, which ensures that the programmes remain relevant and practical. Another common strength is the qualification and diversity of the teaching staff. The programmes benefit from a mix of military personnel and civilian experts, which provides a comprehensive educational experience. Many instructors possess advanced degrees and

significant practical experience. Additionally, the programmes ensure that students have access to necessary resources and materials, supported by sufficient funding to facilitate the study process. The integration of internships and practical experiences into the programmes aligns with future service areas, enhancing their real-world applicability. The programmes also demonstrate an ability to adapt to changes and maintain collaboration with partner institutions, which helps preserve the relevance and quality of education.

However, the programmes also share several weaknesses. A recurring issue is the need for further alignment with international standards such as the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Military Officer Profession and NATO officer training curricula. Additionally, there is a requirement for a standardised qualification package for instructors to address the rapid staff turnover and ensure consistent teaching quality. High operational costs and the lack of a set minimum number of students are also common concerns, raising questions about financial sustainability and resource allocation. Frequent staff rotations, mandated by military regulations, present another challenge, as they can disrupt continuity and stability in programme delivery. The reliance on guest lecturers and the need for formal handover systems to manage staff transitions further complicate this issue. The programmes also suffer from limited opportunities for international mobility. The absence of dedicated mobility windows restricts students' chances for broader educational experiences and knowledge exchange. Additionally, engagement in scientific and research work by academic staff varies, with some programmes needing a stronger emphasis on research activities. Finally, there is often a lack of clearly defined processes for implementing student feedback into actionable improvements. The assessment of teaching staff qualifications tends to rely heavily on student outcomes and feedback, with limited direct observation and formal evaluation. This highlights the need for more structured and comprehensive evaluation methods to ensure teaching quality and programme effectiveness.

In summary, while the programmes excel in aligning with national and employer needs, having qualified staff, providing necessary resources, and maintaining robust review processes, they face challenges in standardisation, financial planning, continuity management, research engagement, and effective feedback implementation. By addressing these challenges, the NDAL can further enhance the effectiveness and quality of its programmes.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1. The Expert Group (EG) found that the aims of the study field were clearly defined before in general terms (SER, pp. 13-14 namely 'to prepare NAF officers with strong leadership skills, high motivation and professional competence for military service in the NAF and European Union or NATO multinational units'.) and for specific programmes (e.g. SER, MLS Annex 3.2.4) and were attainable (interviews with students, teachers and graduates). Furthermore they met the requirements of both the employers (in this case the armed forces of Latvia) (as confirmed by interviews with the employers) and were consistent with the stated mission of the Academy, which is to train professionally educated command and military specialists and to organise and conduct research in the field of national defence and security.

The three Bachelor study programmes Professional Bachelor study programme "Air Forces Military Leadership" (42863), Professional Bachelor study programme "Naval Forces Military Leadership" (42863), Professional Bachelor study programme "Land Forces Military Leadership" (42863) complement each other, providing avenues to becoming a junior leader (qualification - Lieutenant) with one of the three armed forces, namely the Land Forces, the Air Forces or the Naval Forces (SER,

p. 13). The Second level professional higher education programme “Command Staff Officer” (46863) provides a ‘bridge’ for graduates to attain essentially the same qualification, but by undertaking exclusively military skill related courses and in a shorter time period (SER, p.14; interviews with teaching staff).

The Professional master study programme “Military Leadership and Security” (47863) provides students with the ability to continue both their professional and academic development (SER p. 14, pp. 88-89; interviews with employers, Programme Directors and students). The Masters programme is offered in conjunction with the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) in Tartu, Estonia.

The study programmes of the National Defence Academy of Latvia (hereinafter NDAL) are in-line with its Strategy for 2023-2032 (SER, p. 7 and ‘Annex 1.1 NDAL Main Regulatory Documents - 1.1.3 Development Strategy of the National Defence Academy of Latvia for 2023-2032’). The Strategy refers to the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Military Officer Profession (SQF-MILOF), but what is also important is that the programmes (of which there are only two academic levels) also align to the level of professional military education (PME) (of which there are five levels: basic, junior, intermediate, senior, executive). Currently (May 2024) the process of Officer reference curricula at all five levels is under review (interviews with management). These documents go beyond SQF-MILOF and provide a content framework for PME (interviews with management). Furthermore, the second level professional higher education programme “Command Staff Officer”, according to Latvian regulations should not exceed 90 credit points (CP’s), but is currently 101 CPs. Student (cadet) education at the Academy includes training elements that are an integral part of the study programme but which focus on basic soldier training, which may be below European Qualifications Framework (EQF) 6. Additionally, there are elements within the programmes, such as leadership training, that are not included as credit-awarding activities. The Expert group understands that the NDAL awards academic credit for the basic officer training at the Bachelor level and the intermediate officer training at the Master’s level, whilst the junior officer training (the “captain’s course”) is not accredited (interviews with management).

The reason that the NDAL gives for not academically accrediting the junior level is to allow greater flexibility in the programme and the ability to respond to developments in the military profession (M). This flexibility includes the practice of changing the programme content by up to 20% annually at the discretion of the lecturer or programme director. However, the concept of the 20% flexibility was not entirely clear to the Expert group, and the Expert group did not find national limitations on this practice.

To address this, the experts suggest establishing decision-making procedures that clearly define the areas of responsibility for teaching staff, programme directors, senior management, and higher collective decision-making bodies. By structuring the military’s needs and responsibilities more clearly, the self-imposed 20% limitation could be overcome, allowing accredited programmes to update their content as rapidly as needed.

One potential strategy is to implement international standards through the 'NATO Systems Approach to Training' (NATO SAT) directive. This directive outlines a five-step quality assurance cycle:

- 1) Conducting a training needs analysis and determining training requirements.
- 2) Designing the training programme.
- 3) Preparing to implement the programme courses.
- 4) Implementing the programme.
- 5) Assessing the programme and providing feedback to refine the first three phases of programme development.

The newly established Council of the NDAL was approved on January 24, 2024 (SER, p.7) could effectively serve as the decision-making body for the first phase of the NATO SAT approach, focusing on the training needs analysis.

However, it is crucial to ensure that the NDAL Constitutional Assembly and the General Assemblies do not duplicate decisions that should be made by the armed forces in phase one. The Chief of

Defence or respective force commanders should identify training requirements for graduates, which currently fall under the Strategy (SER, Annex 1.1 NDAL Main Regulatory Documents – 1.1.3 Development Strategy of the National Defense Academy of Latvia for 2023–2032; <https://www.naa.mil.lv/en/ndal-main-regulatory-documents>) and cover four areas: academic and military competencies, physical fitness, and personality traits (i.e., character development and indoctrination into officer ethos). The first two categories (academic and military competencies) can be addressed through force commander training requirements as part of the CP, while the other two categories (physical fitness and personality traits) – and possibly basic training at the beginning of cadet studies – should be included in the non-formal education content, which could be standardised for all students/cadets.

It is commendable that the NDAL Strategy includes a review procedure. It is advisable to discuss whether the structure of NDAL study programmes and student/cadet non-formal education could be aligned with the NATO Systems Approach to Training (NATO SAT) and the appropriate levels of the NATO PME generic reference curricula. In terms of the latter, this might allow for greater sharing of courses between the Bachelor's programmes. This alignment would also establish a strong foundation for a system of micro-accreditation and potentially integrate the "captain's course" as an element of MA-level education, thereby reducing dropout risks.

An additional argument for applying NATO SAT is the involvement of Canada in leading NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (NATO eFP) forces and its close collaboration with Latvia on multiple defence initiatives. Exploring the possibility of leveraging Canadian expertise for quality assurance in line with NATO SAT, for which Canada is well-regarded within NATO, could be highly beneficial.

1.1.2. There is a comprehensive SWOT analysis of the study field ('Military Defence', SER, pp. 14-16) with 11 strengths, eight threats, four opportunities and five weaknesses identified (ibid). These are discussed fully in the SER with development plans for the period 2023-2028 given as an Appendix (Annex 2.1.1 of the SER) and which adopts a 'SMART' approach. Ten major goals are listed in the development plan, each broken down into a number of tasks, deadlines, responsibility and what achievable results are expected (ibid).

The Expert Group is confident that the NDAL is fully committed to attempting to address (where possible, given that a number are out of their control) the identified threats and weaknesses (interviews with management). For example, the Expert Group heard about the Academy's plans to improve its infrastructure to meet the planned increase in student numbers, one of weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with Research Staff). Similarly the tasks listed in the Development Plan (see earlier) which were ear-marked for 2023 have been achieved (interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff, interview with Programme Directors).

The NDAL SWOT analysis highlights that the dual regulatory framework of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education and Science poses challenges for programme development (SER, pp. 14 -15). However, the Expert group argues that Latvia's model of professional higher education regulation is exceptionally flexible, offering opportunities to adopt best practices from allied nations, which other systems do not provide. As noted in the analysis sections 1.1.1 and 1.2.1, a review of this assumption could enhance the effectiveness of the study process and create a robust NDAL community, encompassing quality assurance and decision-making.

1.1.3. The management of the study field involves not only the senior management of the Academy (such as the Rector) but also a number of other decision making bodies, such the Senate (SER, p.7, interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). This appears to act relatively efficiently although the Expert Group did gain the impression that some of the newer management structures are yet to fully 'bed in' (interviews with academic teaching staff). Programme Directors appear to be key individuals for the effective management of the 'academic' side of the NDAL and

the current individuals appear to be very competent (interview with Programme Directors). However, the Expert Group did note that the number of staff devoted to maintaining the QA systems of the Academy appear small and that currently a Programme Director for one of the Study Programmes also occupies a management position (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). The Expert Group understands that the Academy has plans to increase the number of Vice-Rectors and this will go some way to addressing the current situation (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors).

The current daily management of study programmes relies heavily on Programme Directors, who oversee composite programmes incorporating various elements provided by staff from other TRADOC schools or the military. The primary consultation body for Programme Directors is the Study Council (SER, pp. 8-9; interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff). As noted in section 1.1.1. of this report, the NATO Systems Approach to Training (NATO SAT) could provide greater methodological support to both Programme Directors and academic staff/lecturers. Additionally, the quality of study management is crucial, as course directors and instructors often rotate and are not engaged in teaching full-time. While it is commendable that many teachers have completed extensive didactic training (SER, p. 40), implementing a short, intensive programme on higher education teaching methods and establishing a formal qualification requirement could ensure a minimum level of competence among teaching staff. This certification could also serve as a motivational tool, encouraging more staff to participate in training programmes.

1.1.4. It should be noted that admission to the Bachelors programmes of the Academy is also admission to the professional military service and this means that the requirements on applicants are not only academic but also link to the requirements of a military career (such as age, physical fitness, security clearance and psychological suitability) (SER, p.20). Admission to the Masters programme also (currently) requires five or more years of professional military service (SER, p.20; interviews with Programme Directors). Interviews with students, both past and present, suggested to the Expert Group that the admissions policy was enacted fairly and efficiently. However, there was some limited evidence that more information about the Bachelors' programmes could be provided to successful applicants in the period running up to starting at the Academy (interviews with current students and graduates).

Overall, numbers applying for the accreditation of prior learning are relatively small (SER, p, 21) but this is perhaps not unexpected with a specialist and professionally based Study Field such as Military Defence.

NDAL graduates currently have limited access to Master's level education. It is crucial for the Academy to adopt a proactive stance, anticipating the future development of the officer career concept, which may include a requirement for Majors to attain an MA. By preparing to meet this requirement in advance, the Academy can avoid being overwhelmed by a sudden influx of candidates.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to regulate a non-degree awarding programme, such as the "captain's course" to be recognized as part of the NDAL's MA programme as officers progress in their careers. The Expert Group also believes that the intermediate officer professional military education (PME) provided by the Baltic Defence College aligns with the requirements outlined in the NDAL strategy. Therefore, incorporating this educational component within the MA CP structure would be a prudent approach to resource management in officer education, optimising both public investment and officers' time.

1.1.5. The assessment is clearly linked with learning outcomes (interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students) which are articulated with competencies, skills and knowledge acquisition; all of which appear relevant to military training and education of this type (interview with employers, interviews with graduates). Forms of assessment are varied, including assignments, papers,

presentations and practical work (SER, p.7, section 2.1.5 p.11; interviews with students, interviews with academic teaching staff). Given the nature of some of the subject matter (e.g weapons training) due importance is given within the assessment rubric to health and safety requirements (if safety rules are not followed it automatically results in failure; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with Research Staff). Students have the right to challenge marks and the Expert Group confirmed this during interviews (SER, p. 25; interviews with students). However, it is crucial to establish a clear procedure for registering grade challenges and to more closely define the mandate of the academic arbitration court to ensure that grading reviews occur only when arguments are well-founded and objective.

All five of the programmes within the Study Field culminate in a written thesis, which also includes a viva (a verbal defence of the thesis in order to test student understanding and authenticity (SER pp. 25-26; interviews with graduates). The assessment burden on students appears evenly distributed throughout each academic year (interviews with students).

1.1.6. The Academy seeks to achieve four main objectives with its students; the gaining of knowledge and understanding; the acquisition of certain military skills, a level of physical fitness and the inculcation of values and ethics in keeping with being a member of the armed forces of Latvia (interviews with management, Programme Directors). Academic integrity and mechanisms for their observance clearly link with the latter objective, and are encapsulated within the NDAL's Code of Ethics (Annex 1.1 NDAL Main regulatory documents - 1.1.5 Code of Ethics of the National Defence Academy of Latvia). 'Anti-plagiarism' tools such as Oxsico and Turnitin are used throughout the Academy (interviews with Programme Directors, research staff, academic staff and students; SER p. 27). The former also includes an 'AI detector' (Turnitin website). There appears to be a well-developed system for dealing with alleged plagiarism, including an 'Academic Arbitration Court' which hears and decides on cases (SER, p.27; interviews with Programme Directors).

However, on occasions there appeared to be some confusion over whether a serious case of academic misdemeanor (such as cheating in examinations) would automatically result in dismissal from a programme (interviews with Programme Directors, academic teaching staff and students). Nor was it clear whether a re-submission in the case of plagiarism would mean that a student is limited to a pass mark irrespective of the mark awarded (SER p. 7 and p. 26).

The Expert Group also notes that it is important to ensure the credibility of the academic integrity system through robust reporting and statistics collection. In cases of breach of Code of Ethics, when cadets are not exmatriculated and are allowed to redo their work, additional corrective measures need to be applied, and sanctions should escalate in case of repeated misconduct.

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

Conclusions:

The Expert Group found that the aims of the NDAL study field were clearly defined, attainable, and aligned with the requirements of the Latvian armed forces and the Academy's mission to train professionally educated command and military specialists and to conduct research in national defence and security. The three Bachelor's programmes prepare cadets to become junior leaders in the Land, Air, or Naval Forces, while the second level professional higher education programme offers a quicker path to similar qualifications with a focus on military skills. The Master's study programme supports both professional and academic development.

The study programmes are in line with NDAL's 2023-2032 Strategy and the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Military Officer Profession (SQF-MILOF), and they align with the five levels of professional military education (PME): basic, junior, intermediate, senior, and executive. There is an ongoing review of the Officer reference curricula to ensure they meet these standards, and the NATO Systems Approach to Training (NATO SAT) could enhance methodological support and

management quality.

Programme Directors, supported by the Study Council, manage daily operations but face challenges due to 'rotating' teachers and instructors. There is a need for a formal qualification requirement and intensive training on higher education teaching methods. While the admissions process is efficient, there is room for improved information dissemination to successful applicants. The management structures, including the Senate and senior management, are effective but still adapting to new frameworks.

The dual regulatory frameworks from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education and Science pose challenges, but the flexible Latvian model allows for adopting best practices. The Academy should prepare for a potential future requirement for Majors to attain an MA to avoid being overwhelmed by candidates. The "captain's course" could be integrated into the MA programme for career progression, and incorporating the Baltic Defence College's intermediate officer Professional Military Education (PME) into the MA CP structure may be advisable.

Assessments align with learning outcomes, competencies, skills, and knowledge acquisition. Various forms of assessment are used, including assignments, papers, presentations, and practical work. Health and safety are critical in assessments, especially for practical subjects like weapons training. There is a need for a clear procedure for grade challenges and a well-defined mandate for the academic arbitration court. Academic integrity is upheld through tools like Oxsico and Turnitin, and a robust system for handling plagiarism is in place. Clear consequences for academic misconduct are necessary to maintain credibility.

The Expert group commends the NDAL's commitment to addressing identified threats and weaknesses, including plans to improve infrastructure to accommodate increased student numbers. The SWOT analysis and development plan outline major goals and tasks, employing a SMART approach. NDAL's flexibility in programme content adjustments should be balanced with clear decision-making procedures to ensure rapid and effective updates.

Overall, the NDAL study programmes are well-aligned with strategic goals and international standards, but there are areas for improvement in management, quality assurance, and academic integrity.

Strengths:

- 1) Clearly defined and achievable aims: The study field's aims are well-defined, attainable, and align with both employer requirements and the Academy's mission.
- 2) Comprehensive and varied programmes: The three Bachelor's programmes complement each other, offering distinct pathways into different branches of the armed forces, while the Master's programme supports ongoing professional and academic development.
- 3) Alignment with military needs: The programmes are closely aligned with the needs of the Latvian armed forces, ensuring relevant training and education.
- 4) Comprehensive SWOT Analysis and Development Plan: The Academy has conducted a thorough SWOT analysis and developed a detailed, SMART-goal-oriented plan for 2023-2028, addressing identified strengths and weaknesses.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Incomplete implementation of new management and constitutional structures: Some new management and constitutional structures are still stabilizing, which may affect overall efficiency. Given the relatively small size of the institution its collective decision bodies are somewhat large and varied, in the context where the Commandant is directly subordinate to the Chief of Defence (CHOD), the points for collective decision making need to be well calibrated in order to avoid unnecessary decision reviews and delays.
- 2) Bachelors' admissions information gap: Successful applicants for the Bachelor's programmes could benefit from more information about their studies before starting at the Academy. This

especially applies with regard to workload after the completion of the BDC career course (the thesis writing phase).

3) Unclear consequences for academic misconduct: There is some doubt regarding the automatic dismissal for serious academic misconduct and the impact of re-submissions on final grades.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1. The Quality Policy (QP) made available to the Expert Group was approved in late 2022. And the constitution document, provided to the experts, has decision-making bodies other than those in the quality policy. This necessitates the initiation of the change of the constitution to bring it in line with the Strategic and quality policy standards. Overall the quality policy is a sound document, covering all key areas of quality assurance QA (SER, Annex 1.1 NDAL Main Regulatory Documents - 1.1.4 Quality Policy of the National Defence Academy of Latvia). For an effective implementation of QP, sufficient administrative support, data collection and analysis capability is necessary. It is commendable that the management is intending to develop this capability (interviews with management). On the other hand the QP does not refer to a set of managerial standards on which it could be based. Several courses of action could be advised: focusing strictly on ESG (i.e. looking only at compliance with criteria of national accreditation), or in pursuit of better utilisation of allies' resources - to apply the principles of NATO SAT, which would offer both compliance to ESG and opportunity to modify programmes as required by the military. Another important element within the ESG is to involve not only management and collective decision making bodies, but also academic staff and students. QA works best when a culture and common understanding on what it constitutes at the level of operations is shared among the community, this is a more effective route for QA as compared to statistical monitoring (which is necessary as 'back up' to ensure that debates are data informed and decisions on resource allocation are well grounded). Therefore offering a short course to all members of the NDAL community is advisable, as well as provision of clear venues for raising QA issues (perhaps via the NDAL's Senate).

The Expert Group gained the impression that the operation of the Council is nascent (interviews with management), while the Commandant receives regular guidance from the Chief of Defence (CHOD) (interviews with management), and the SER states that NDAL has limited autonomy (SER, p. 5). Bodies such as the Council and Senate need to have clearly set boundaries (AoR's) for the scope of decisions they can make or propose to the Commandant, because one aspect of QA in an environment of limited autonomy is that the institution itself may not always have the mandate to initiate change its community may believe useful, and in order to limit risk of discreditation of bottom-up initiatives these scopes need to be made clear.

The documents: Strategy, QP, regulations of various decision-making bodies are very voluminous. Strategy and QP are documents whose primary value lies in communicating the end goals of the organisation and assuring a unity of effort and consistency of practice within that effort. Therefore, complex documents are difficult to understand or recognize one's duties within these visions at the level of individual student, teacher, or administrative specialist. A simplified version of responsibilities of various managers and collective-decision making bodies would also provide a structured venue for bottom-up communication.

Overall, the Expert Group thinks that NDAL due to its position in the armed forces and access to TRADOC resources, and top national and military decision makers, allows it to maintain a non-bureaucratic and flexible mechanism of the development of studies, which provides the necessary checks and balances.

1.2.2. The Expert Group was impressed with how closely the NDAL is integrated with the military: both with regard to attracting teaching staff, and identifying areas for programme development.

Furthermore, in many cases recent graduates become teaching staff and programme directors (interview with employers, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). Therefore, the experts agree that this criterion is mostly satisfied. However, it also sees certain risks associated with this: administrative burden regarding course scheduling, didactic competences of incoming teaching staff, gaps of subject understanding during handover of courses as teaching staff rotates, and workload of programme directors. The Expert Group also understood that the Air Forces Military Leadership (AFML) and Naval Forces Military Leadership (NFML) programmes rely heavily on outsourced tuition, based on annual procurement of services. This reliance appears to create a burden on the NDAL and does not significantly contribute to quality assurance. Although this issue may be beyond the NDAL's mandate, exploring alternative management strategies for outsourcing services might be worthwhile.

The NDAL has a feedback mechanism for students. However, the experts emphasise the need for this feedback to be structured to ensure cadets and students address their attainment of set learning outcomes. This should include closed questions for self-assessment of course objective achievement and open questions for suggestions on overcoming perceived barriers. This is an important point, staffing decisions are based on this feedback.

1.2.3. As highlighted in section 1.2.1 of this report, the core focus of QA is to unify the community towards achieving strategic goals consistently. The Expert Group reviewed documents that did not detail a mechanism for involving academic staff and students within the governance structure. However, as a small institution, the NDAL has the advantage of fostering and maintaining a mostly informal QA mechanism. This can effectively build a culture of quality that excels in ensuring study quality. Cadets at the NDAL reported that their service conditions are often comparable to, or even better than, those of other service members. Their status allows them to provide feedback through the chain of command. It is important to note that in the Second level professional higher education programme "Command Staff Officer" (46863), there are students who are professionals and could potentially serve as instructors or course assistants.

Beyond the content of the studies themselves, the Expert Group did not receive documents addressing compliance with other sensitive issues such as corruption prevention and harassment. Interviews with stakeholders (alumni/graduates; students and employers) did not suggest that these issues are currently problematic. However, given the sensitivity and potential impact on the institution's reputation if such cases were to arise, it is advisable to clearly communicate to the community and the public how these issues would be addressed. This could involve outlining processes through the armed forces' inspection or audit systems, national legal procedures, or internal NDAL processes.

1.2.4. Overall, the relatively small size of the institution allows administrative specialists to maintain a level of institutional knowledge and memory that is challenging to achieve in larger institutions. However, for effective data-informed decision-making and engagement on QA issues with students and academic staff, implementing an annual scorecard or a Commandant's report could be beneficial. Additionally, periodically comparing this data with selected international military academies and Latvian higher education institutions could provide valuable insights and benchmarks.

The SER lacked longitudinal data, which would have enabled the Expert Group to form a view on the trends of various aspects of the operation of the NDAL. For good decision making it may be important to routinize data collection and reporting (at least of Strategy's KPI's, and on the criteria for accreditation). This would provide a basis for considering various development initiatives that may come from any of the stakeholders: students, teachers, armed forces, administration).

1.2.5. The NDAL website provides access to VIIS and E-platform data and is available in both Latvian

and English at <https://www.naa.mil.lv/lv>. The homepage is well-designed and user-friendly, organizing information into distinct blocks that include comprehensive details about the NDAL itself, the study process and opportunities, courses, scientific activities, key regulatory acts, and institutional contacts (interviews with management, interviews with students).

To manage the study process, the institution uses a dedicated platform at ilias.naa.mil.lv. This platform contains all necessary information for students and lecturers, including study processes, grades, and teaching materials.

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

Conclusions:

The NDAL's integration with the military facilitates staff recruitment and programme development is a key strategic asset of the organization, which means that stakeholders in the military forces act as source of constant valid feedback that supports the development of the study process. However, this type of relationship to the military, especially reliance on visiting teachers from the armed forces and procurement of courses in the market create significant administrative burden and increase risks that teaching staff may not work to the same didactic competence level. Overall the NDAL size allows it to benefit from a mostly informal QA system and this promotes a quality-focused culture. However, a managerial standard reference would be important to sustain this culture, ensure institutional memory, and allow data-informed decision-making with regard to the implementation of the strategy. The quality policy and Academy ambitions to further develop the QA system and assign additional resources puts NDAL on the track to maintain the quality of studies and improve further. Defining the role of teachers and students in QA processes would help create a shared understanding and unity of effort towards achieving NDAL's strategic goals. The NDAL could also work towards simplifying its strategy, and setting key performance and quality compliance indicators and tracking and communicating them both to the staff and students, and to external stakeholders. Formal feedback mechanisms from students should focus on learning outcomes, and the process of reporting of issues relating to academic integrity, as well as grade review could become part of the quality compliance monitoring. However, overall the NDAL's quality policy and QA system allows achieving goals of the study field and its programme's objectives.

Strengths:

- 1) The close and seamless cooperation with various branches of the armed forces in the implementation of the Academy's QA system - for example, the evaluation of the success of internships and the collection of survey results from recent graduates of the NDAL's programmes.
- 2) The management's promotion of QA culture, facilitated and enhanced by the small size of the Academy.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The QA system is not currently articulated with external education management standards. The status of NDAL as an institution of Professional Military Education (PME) would allow it to apply external standards such as NATO SAT as a basis of QA. The number of staff dedicated to maintaining the QA systems is also small, with some staff holding multiple roles, which could impact efficiency.
- 2) The lack of a system of quantitative indicators (e.g., targets given in numerical rather than qualitative terms) means that there is no structured way to track and report progress to stakeholders annually.
- 3) Absence of a clear governance mechanism that includes the roles of students and teachers, and the lack of delineation of the areas within which the NDAL has the mandate to initiate change, results in confusion about decision-making authority.
- 4) Failure to differentiate student feedback on courses from feedback on overall service conditions

leads to a lack of focus on specific barriers to learning outcome attainment. Moreover, not aligning the conditions of service questionnaire with the statutes governing Latvian military service members results may result in confusion.

5) Complicated mechanism of course outsourcing, risks associated with course scheduling, and large administrative burden due to heavy reliance on visiting teachers.

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: Fully compliant

The internal quality management system of the Academy operates in accordance with the NDAL Quality Policy, which was approved by the Senate on 30 November 2022 and enacted by the Rector's order on 2 December 2022. The Expert Group found this system to be effectively applied and in full compliance with Latvian national regulations.

To further enhance and streamline the system, the Expert Group recommends implementing a monitoring scorecard and considering the adoption of a managerial standard such as NATO SAT. It is evident that the NDAL has made significant efforts in recent years to improve its quality assurance (QA) system. Although limited data is currently available on the operation of this newly developed system, the Expert Group has no reason to doubt the commitment of the Academy's management and staff to ensuring its success.

While the system meets the minimum QA requirements of national regulations, the Expert Group encourages the NDAL to consider adopting additional QA standards that align with its ambitions for delivering high-quality academic programmes.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The internal quality management system of the NDAL operates in accordance with the NDAL Quality Policy, which was approved by the Senate's decision No.6/2022 of 30 November 2022 and entered into force by the NDAL Rector's order No.195 of 02.12.2022 (see Annex 1.1 NDAL Main Regulatory Documents - 1.1.4 Quality Policy of the National Defence Academy of Latvia) (SER)

- 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: Fully compliant

A system of student feedback, teacher initiated course change, study Programme Director oversight and the role of Study Council, as well as regular communication between Programme Directors and senior commanders of the relevant armed forces assures that changes can be made rapidly, and necessary safeguards are in place to assure that quality of the programmes is maintained.

- 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: Fully compliant

This information is part of the quality policy of NDAL, and is published on their website:
<https://www.naa.mil.lv/en/ndal-main-regulatory-documents>

- 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: Fully compliant

NDAL works to provide didactic training to its staff, full-time staff are employed based on preset qualification requirements ('Annex 1.1'.of the NDAL main regulatory documents; and '1.1.16. Regulations on Academic Positions at the National Defence Academy of Latvia' approved with 'NDAL Senate Decision No 2', 'Minutes No 1/2022 of 21.01.2022'. In force with 'Order No 30 of the NDAL Rector of 03.02.2022'. Additional attention would be needed to assure that all outsourced teaching and visiting teachers also comply with th NDAL's internal requirements.

- 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

There is a well established and regulated policy and practice of reviewing NDAL organisational and study processes with clear support from the management. It is advisable, however, to develop a monitoring scorecard, which would include quantitative data: i) strategic goal attainment KPI's; ii) data related to quality policy compliance (e.g. cases of breach of academic integrity), disputes regarding grading.

- 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 QP and the attention of key stakeholders and top management to this aspect is commendable and meets national standards. The NDAL could consider simplifying their system by adopting a managerial standard (e.g. NATO SAT) to further enhance the quality of studies, and taking advantage of opportunities that are offered in its partnerships with other NATO country military HEI's.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1. The NDAL has defined and established a system for planning and implementing financial support for the study programmes (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, SER Section 2.3.1.). Programme Directors of programmes within the study field have the possibility to plan budgets annually and to adjust programme financial resources as the situation requires (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). Course resources are calculated on an annual basis and approved according to the actual needs, which are submitted by the responsible head of the course or lecturer before the course programme is approved and before courses as part of the programme are implemented (SER Section 2.3.1.). Scientific and applied research funding for both centers - Security and Strategic Research Centre (SSRC) and a Defence Technology and Innovation Centre (DTIC) is available and effectively used (SER Section 2.3.1., interviews with management, interviews with

research staff). The NDAL is in a unique situation, having the possibility to ask for additional financial resources from the national defence budget, since professional education of officers is at high priority (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors).

1.3.2. The infrastructure resources, material and technical support necessary for implementation of the study programmes have been identified by the Academy and are available for the students and teaching staff (SER Section 2.3.2., interviews with graduates, interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, inspection of resources). Although there are enough small classrooms and syndicators, due to the recent increase of students, the number of larger auditoriums with capacity of 40 to 60 is insufficient (interview with Programme Directors, interview with research staff, interviews with management). Management of the NDAL effectively cooperates with neighboring educational facilities to make sure shortage of classrooms is minimized (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). Classrooms are well equipped to support different types and a variety of teaching methods, and the technical equipment is in good condition (inspection of resources; SER Section 2.3.2.). Additional funding for renovation of some of the NDAL infrastructure focusing on dormitories will be made in the coming years (interviews with management; SER Section 2.3.2.). Purchasing of the material is mainly centralized through Ministry of Defence entities using a government centralised tender system (interviews with management). Some procurements for methodological and informative material are made by the NDAL (interviews with management, inspection of resources).

1.3.3. The NDAL library is relatively modern and is an accredited library registered in the library register of the Republic of Latvia. (SER Section 2.3.3., NDAL website, inspection of resources). The library provides subscriptions, reading rooms and a depository (SER Section 2.3.3.). Reading rooms are open and available for the students 24/7 (SER Section 2.3.3., interviews with students, interviews with academic teaching staff). Students can access both print and digital media as well as online databases including such databases as EBSCO, Taylor and Francis and SIPRI (SER Section 2.3.3., library website at <https://adl.naa.mil.lv/>, inspection of resources, interviews with students, interviews with academic teaching staff). Library resources and access to the databases is available for the students free of charge (SER Section 2.3.3., interviews with students). The collection was built up according to the requests of the teaching and research staff of the Academy as well as the professional experience of the library leadership in areas of interest of studies (SER Section 2.3.3., interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff). Students also have the possibility to request specific books and this is supported within the available budget (SER Section 2.3.3., interviews with management, interviews with students). However, there is no documentary evidence that the Academy has a written procedure for the improvement of the purchase of methodological and informative material (interviews with management, discussion with library personnel during inspection of resources).

1.3.4. The Academy uses two main information and communication solutions to ensure an effective teaching process. First, the ILIAS platform is used to upload learning materials, tests, assignments, as well as to communicate with students via charts and e-mail (SER Section 2.3.4., interviews with students, interviews with academic teaching staff). The ILIAS enables distance education and structured learning materials availability for students in an e-learning environment (SER Section 2.3.4., interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with students). Second, LUIS is an administrative platform that enables information sharing needed for the administration of education's process, such as information about students, lectures, study programmes and grades (SER Section 2.3.4., interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff). Both systems showed that they are effective during the period of the

COVID pandemic, where the majority of the studies continued distantly (interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with students). During the visits to NDAL and the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL), as well as a presentation about the ILIAS platform, used to disseminate learning materials, it became clear that only a login name and password is used to access the system. It was noted several times by Program Directors and teaching staff that some materials stored on the system might be of a sensitive nature. Therefore it is recommended to use two-factor authentication when logging in, to increase information security.

1.3.5. The NDAL has defined within its main regulatory documents ('Regulations on Academic Positions at the Academy'), and implemented and followed procedures for attracting qualified teaching staff (SER Section 2.3.5., interviews with management). For the implementation of study programmes, in addition to the NDAL permanent academic staff, there are external guest lecturers and military guest lecturers and instructors from the units of the military defence forces. Freelance civilian staff are from time to time invited from other Latvian universities (SER Section 2.3.5., interviews with research staff, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students). The Academy is in a privileged position to choose the best military guest lecturers available, due to special regulations allowing them to receive additional financial bonuses for academic work (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). An established system of attracting qualified teaching staff from outside, in particular from Defence forces units, creates favorable conditions to provide the best possible, updated and highly qualified content for the lectures, specifically in the military field (interviews with management, interviews with graduates, interviews with employers).

1.3.6. The NDAL evaluates the work of permanent academic staff once a year, while the work of visiting lecturers is evaluated in the interim periods and at the end of their employment contract (SER Section 2.3.6., interviews with management). The quality of the teaching work of military guest lecturers is evaluated at the end of each semester, on the basis of the internal Quality Assurance Reports of the study Programme Directors, study results and feedback from students (SER Section 2.3.6., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with students). The evaluation of the academic staff, military and non-military is made annually and the process is described in the Defence forces regulations, and the NDAL is no exception to this (SER Section 2.3.6., interviews with management). However the regulation does not focus on teaching staff academic capacity and conduct. Although seminars and other events to improve NDAL teaching staff capabilities are organized, a more systematic approach similar to Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) where all teaching staff participate in a one week-long collective development programme is recommended.

1.3.7. According to the NDAL provided data, there are 102 teaching staff in total, including guest lecturers available to cover all topics in line with study field requirements (SER Section 2.3.7.). There is a good balance between teaching staff with academic background and specialized military subject matter experts (interviews with students, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with graduates). The workload of the teaching staff is balanced, however the military part of teaching staff has very limited time and possibility to involve themselves in academic research activities (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). The workload of Vice-Rector, filling in parallel also positions of director of the study field and director of "Land Forces Military Leadership" and "Command Staff Officer", is clearly too high and needs to be reconsidered by the NDAL management. This is already recognized by the Rector and Vice-Rector and changes in the NDAL structure are underway (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors).

1.3.8. The NDAL has a system in place to ensure both ways of uninterrupted interaction and timely

identify support for the students needed (SER Section 2.3.8.). Students are able to communicate with teaching staff and up to the management level of the NDAL with help of elected representatives and regular meetings at different levels. For the foreign or exchange programme students, sponsors are provided. As well as psychological support and personal development, career and study support are provided by professionally experienced officers (SER Section 2.3.8., interviews with students, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with research staff). Established system supports all the needs of students to allow them to focus on their studies (interviews with students, interview with Programme Directors, information at NDAL website). The alumni of NDAL are in secure positions after graduation, due to the fact that they are provided with contracts with Defence forces, without exceptions (interviews with graduates, interview with employers, interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). Students who have not graduated from NDAL, still have the possibility to sign a contract with Defence forces, if decided, but job positions offered will be based on their completed part of the respective programme interviews with graduates, interview with employers, interviews with management). The NDAL has a system, which motivates students to graduate from the Academy with the best possible grade, allowing the best graduates to choose job location interviews with graduates, interview with employers, interview with Programme Directors).

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

Conclusions:

The NDAL has in place a good system for determining and distributing financial support to implement the study field and respective study programmes. Infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary is excellent. Procedure for the improvement and purchase of methodological and informative provision is in place, but rather informal. For example, the purchase of books in the library is by individual decision-making. Information and communication technology solutions are modern and support the educational processes. The NDAL has a unique system of attracting qualified teaching staff, they are open and the stakeholders involved are informed about them. The needs of professional development of the teaching staff are determined, different approaches are used, and staff are evaluated annually. The workload of the teaching staff is balanced, except for a few identified positions. The necessary support is provided for students.

Strengths:

- 1) The NDAL has the possibility to access Defence forces' resources, which puts the Academy in a strong position if additional resources need to be attracted.
- 2) There is a well-established system of attracting qualified teaching staff from outside, in particular from Defence forces units, and this creates favorable conditions to provide the best possible teaching experts.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The workload for the Vice-Rector and some military teaching staff is unbalanced, thus putting restrictions on academic and research work for them.
- 2) The procedure for the improvement and purchase of methodological and informative provision is not institutionalized.
- 3) The current information security measures protecting learning materials published on ILIAS are insufficient, as they do not include two-factor authentication for logging in. This leaves the system potentially vulnerable to unauthorised access.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1. In essence research at the NDAL occurs in two main ways: through the activities of researchers based at two centres (the Defence Technology and Innovation Centre and the Security and Strategic Research Centre, the SSRC) and through the supervision of theses produced by students, particularly at Masters level (SER, section 2.4, p.18, p.34; interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with research staff). Naturally, given the Study Field, much of this research tends towards Applied Research rather than 'Basic (or Pure)' Research (SER, p.43; interviews with research staff). It is also perhaps inevitable that much of this research will not be published, particularly given the current security situation in Eastern Europe (interviews with research staff). Despite this restriction, the Academy has seen an increase since the last assessment visit (in 2013) in both the number and quality (as measured by the citation index of journals) of publications (SER, Annex 2.4.1 'Data on research activities'; interviews with research staff). The research direction of the Academy - towards increasing the amount of research and responding to the developing security and military needs of Latvia corresponds directly with both the mission of the NDAL (SER, p.5) and its stated development goals (e.g. as given in the Development Plan, (Annex 2,1.1 of the SER).

1.4.2. The connection between scientific research and the study process at the NDAL is two-fold. Firstly it forms the basis of research-informed teaching (that is, integrating the latest research findings and methodologies into the educational practices and curriculum, ensuring that cadets are educated with the most current knowledge, strategies, and technologies relevant to military science and leadership) (SER s. 2.4.2, pp. 43-44; interviews with research staff, interviews with students). Secondly, teaching and research staff at the Academy (or within the partner Baltic Defence College) supervise students undertaking research to complete their theses (particularly at the Masters level) (interviews with research staff) and also deliver a Research Methods course (interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with research staff). Courses also utilise research conducted by Academy staff (SER, s. 2.4.2, pp. 43-44).

1.4.3. NDAL staff take part (and contribute to) international conferences on a regular and frequent basis (SER, s. 2.4.3, pp. 44-45; interviews with research staff, interviews with academic teaching staff). For example, the SER lists eight researchers who between them have attended over 80 international conferences (also submitting papers) and taken part in over 20 international research projects in the last six years (calculation based upon Annex 2.4.2 of the SER). Examples include 'Russia's strategy of outlasting and the war in Ukraine' delivered to the Royal Danish Defence College in 2023 (ibid). On average the Academy produces about five publications in popular science journals, about four national scientific publications, about six 'indexed' scientific publications, one monograph and three to four books per year (calculation based on Annex 2.4.1 of SER). In addition the Defence Technology and Innovation Centre of the National Defence Academy of Latvia (the NDAL DTIC) independently organises applied research according to the requirements of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Latvian National Armed Forces (NAF). Examples of projects undertaken by the NDAL DTIC include research into NAF logistics and other more militarily confidential subjects (ibid; interviews with research staff). The Centre also successfully collaborates with defence industry partners in Latvia (SER, p. 51, p. 57 and p. 72).

1.4.4. As the NDAL tacitly acknowledges in its SER (p. 47) , the involvement of most teaching staff (particularly those on 'rotation' from the military) in research is limited; essentially most research is carried out by staff based within the Academy's Security and Strategic Research Centre, the SSRC (interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with research staff). The SSRC staff have a smaller teaching workload than others in the Academy, concentrating instead on applied research and the supervision of students at the thesis stage of their degrees (SER, p.19, p. 44 and p. 47). The Academy also has a Department of Military Leadership Studies (DMLS) which conducts research into military history and military psychology (SER, p. 48). As noted earlier in this report, there is clear

evidence that the research carried out by NDAL research staff influences the development of the curricular in the Academy. However, engagement by all teaching staff in either 'pure' or 'applied' research appeared to be 'patchy' (SER Annex 2.3.2 CV Eng, Annex 2.4.1; interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with research staff) although it is clear that mechanisms exist to support all teacher's research ambitions, where they exist (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors).

1.4.5. Students of the study programmes of all levels are involved in scientific research and applied research. The three Bachelors programmes and the first-cycle professional higher education study programme "Command Staff Officer" at the NDAL require cadets to develop and defend a thesis or a Diploma paper (SER, p.49; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). These involve scientific research in military science, leadership, pedagogy, military psychology, political sciences, history, ethics, philosophy, military-technical sciences, and tactics (SER, p.49). The research clearly enhances cadets' analytical and critical thinking skills needed for military leadership (interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with research staff, interviews with graduates). Students, guided by NDAL SSRC researchers (see earlier), explore current security policy and defence strategy issues, NATO cooperation, the role of the OSCE in conflict resolution, and public perceptions of the NAF. Master's students research security and defence, including international security, contemporary warfare, military operations, resource management, crisis management, and strategic planning (SER, p.51). The NDAL organizes annual research conferences where students present their findings, contributing to the interdisciplinary development of military science and the improvement of military service content at NDAL and NAF (SER, p. 117; interviews with research staff, interviews with students). However, to date only one such conference has taken place and although a majority of participants felt it should continue, a significant minority (35%) disagreed (calculation based on SER, p.117; interviews with research staff, interviews with academic teaching staff).

1.4.6. The Defence Technology and Innovation Centre (DTIC) is expanding within the NDAL to enhance the development of the defence sector (SER, p. 43 and p. 48; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with research staff). DTIC representatives oversee various innovation and research programs funded by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and participate in European Defence Fund projects (SER, *ibid*). They also represent Latvia and European Union defence innovation organizations and cooperate bilaterally with similar institutions in other countries (SER, *ibid*; interviews with research staff). The DTIC organizes military innovation challenges, known as hackathons, in collaboration with Latvian research institutions, providing hands-on experience in defence technology development for NDAL staff and students (SER, p.51; interviews with research staff). These hackathons focus on areas like unmanned systems, combat equipment, cybersecurity, and information technology (SER, *ibid*). The involvement of NDAL faculty and students in these projects helps them gain practical insights and encourages them to generate innovative ideas, integrating this experience into their academic programmes (interviews with academic teaching staff). The NDAL study programmes are regularly updated to align with the needs of the National Armed Forces (SER, p.52; interviews with academic teaching staff). As the DTIC expands and takes on more projects, ensuring adequate resources (financial, human, and technological) will be essential.

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

Conclusions:

In essence, research at the NDAL is conducted primarily through the activities of researchers at two main centers: the Defence Technology and Innovation Centre (DTIC) and the Security and Strategic

Research Centre (SSRC), as well as through the supervision of student theses, particularly at the Master's level. Given the study field's focus, much of the research tends towards applied rather than basic research, and due to the current security situation in Eastern Europe, much of this research remains unpublished. However, since the last assessment in 2013, the Academy has seen an increase in both the number and quality of its publications.

The Academy's research direction aligns with its mission to increase research output and respond to Latvia's evolving security and military needs. This connection between scientific research and the study process supports research-informed teaching and the supervision of student research projects. Teaching and research staff at NDAL and the Baltic Defence College play a key role in supervising student research and delivering research methods courses, integrating their own research into the curriculum. NDAL staff actively participate in international conferences and research projects, contributing significantly to the field.

The DTIC independently organizes applied research according to the requirements of the Ministry of Defence and the Latvian National Armed Forces, collaborating successfully with defence industry partners in Latvia. Despite limited involvement of most teaching staff in research, particularly those on military rotation, the SSRC staff focus on applied research and student supervision, impacting curriculum development at NDAL. The Department of Military Leadership Studies (DMLS) also conducts research into military history and psychology, further enriching the educational content.

Students at all levels are involved in scientific and applied research, developing theses and diploma papers that enhance their analytical and critical thinking skills necessary for military leadership. The NDAL organizes annual research conferences where students present their findings, contributing to the interdisciplinary development of military science and the improvement of military service content.

The expanding DTIC within NDAL aims to enhance the development of the defense sector, overseeing innovation and research programs funded by the Ministry of Defence and participating in European Defence Fund projects. DTIC representatives also engage in bilateral cooperation with similar institutions in other countries and organize military innovation challenges, known as hackathons, providing hands-on experience in defence technology development for NDAL staff and students.

Overall, the NDAL study programmes are regularly updated to meet the needs of the National Armed Forces, and the involvement of faculty and students in research projects helps integrate practical insights into academic programmes. As the DTIC expands, ensuring adequate resources will be essential to support the growing scope of research and innovation activities.

Strengths:

1) Integration of research and teaching: The NDAL effectively integrates research findings into its teaching, ensuring cadets receive up-to-date knowledge and methodologies relevant to military science and leadership. This research-informed teaching enriches the educational experience and keeps the curriculum current.

2) Active participation in international conferences: Some Academy staff actively participate in international conferences, contributing to and staying abreast of global military research developments. This engagement enhances the Academy's visibility and reputation in the international research community.

3) Applied research focus: The focus on applied research, especially in areas directly relevant to national defence and security, aligns well with the Academy's mission and the needs of the Ministry of Defence and National Armed Forces. This ensures the research has practical and immediate applications.

4) Collaborative projects and industry partnerships: The Defence Technology and Innovation Centre (DTIC) collaborates successfully with defence industry partners and participates in European Defence Fund projects. This collaboration fosters innovation and provides practical experience for

staff and students.

5) Student involvement in research: Students at all levels are involved in scientific and applied research, which enhances their analytical and critical thinking skills. The requirement for theses or diploma papers ensures that students engage deeply with research, contributing to their overall leadership and educational development.

Weaknesses:

1) Limited research engagement by all teaching staff: The involvement of most teaching staff in research is limited, particularly those on rotation from the military. This creates an uneven distribution of research activities and might hinder the overall research output of the Academy

2) Publication and dissemination challenges: Much of the research conducted is not published due to security concerns, particularly in the current security situation in Eastern Europe. This limits the dissemination and impact of the academy's research findings.

3) Cadet engagement with peer research: While the NDAL organizes research conferences for its cadets, there has only been one to date, with a significant minority of participants (35%) feeling it should not continue. This indicates potential challenges in sustaining and expanding these proto research forums.

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: Fully compliant

The integration of scientific and applied research within the study process is logical and well-justified across all levels. These elements are incorporated into the curriculum, and international cooperation in these fields is actively pursued and developed. The institution has effective mechanisms to involve teaching staff and students in research, ensuring their active and efficient participation.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1. Based on the on-site interviews, the SER, and other documents provided by the NDAL, it is clear that the central focus of the study programmes in the study field is their exclusive role as the sole provider of military higher education in Latvia. Consequently, cooperation partners in Latvia are selected based on distinctive features of the study field and relevant study programmes. For example, cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Armed Forces, as well as other state institutions takes place in accordance with the orientation of the study programmes to achieve NDAL's military and educational goals (SER, p.52). During the on-site visit, the NDAL management representatives explained that criteria for selecting NDAL's cooperation partners in Latvia are based on the partner's field of expertise and sphere of work. They emphasized selecting partners for specific types of training areas, objectives to be achieved on both sides, as well as considering future challenges and the skills needed to address them. To identify and confront these upcoming challenges, NDAL coordinates with the National Armed Forces - NAF.

The NAF is one of the NDAL's largest and most significant partners in cooperation. As stated in the NDAL Development Strategy for 2023-2032, NDAL's main objective is to train professional officers of the NAF, thus their cooperation is naturally strong. Together, NDAL and NAF cooperate on implementing professional and specialised military study courses, as well as collective military

training. The NDAL maintains continuously close cooperation with the units of the regular forces of the NAF, which provides necessary support of military personnel, infrastructure, study resources, as well as material and technical equipment necessary to NDAL's study processes. The NDAL and NAF also coordinate student/cadet support and organise internships in accordance with NAF's internal regulations (SER, p. 53). During the on-site visit, the representatives of NDAL management accentuated their close cooperation with NAF for numerous processes and further noted NAF's contribution to the NDAL's study process, where NAF officers are invited to provide training and lectures to NDAL cadets, which, hence, allows them to assess cadets' knowledge and provide feedback to NDAL for possible improvements. NDAL's management representatives went on to add that the NAF are providing top officers, as their objective is to ensure that cadets receive the highest quality education, knowing they will eventually join NAF in the future. NDAL's management representatives supplemented their comments by adding that there is frequent communication between NDAL and NAF, with weekly meetings involving representatives of NAF and NDAL. Overall, NDAL management representatives emphasized the ease of exchanging ideas with NAF for NDAL's development, noting mutual openness to proposals and initiatives. Another significant cooperation partner of NDAL is Baltic Defence College - BALTDEFCOL, with whom NDAL cooperates in the implementation of the Military Leadership and Security Master's study programme. On the on-site visit, the representatives of BALTDEFCOL management remarked that partnership between BALTDEFCOL and NDAL is strong, and representatives of NDAL management visit BALTDEFCOL annually to introduce the study programme to new students, as well as they have various other meetings throughout the year for discussions on developments, among other aspects.

Given the specific nature of NDAL and its status as a unit within NAF, cooperation agreements with institutions in Latvia are concluded by the Ministry of Defence and the Joint Headquarters of the NAF Training and Doctrine Command (SER, Annex 2.5.1). For example, NDAL has indefinite cooperation agreements with various Latvian institutions, such as the State Police, State Border Guard, State Emergency Medical Service of Latvia, among others (ibid), with whom, in addition to the implementation of military training, cooperation is carried out to organize military exercises outside the NAF training areas (SER, p.53), as well as, cooperation is carried out with local governments, on the territory of which practical military tactics exercises are organised (SER, p.53). Additionally, several cooperation agreements have been established with Latvian higher education institutions (SER, Annex 2.5.1). For example, to fulfill the goals and objectives of the Air Forces Military Leadership and Naval Forces Military Leadership study programmes, the study processes are conducted in cooperation with other Latvian higher education institutions. These institutions annually acquire the right to provide study courses for NDAL through public procurement organized by the NAF Training and Doctrine Command, and ensure the implementation of elective B part study courses within five semesters at their institutions (SER, p.53). To facilitate the provision of restricted elective B part study courses in the Naval Forces Military Leadership study programme, the NDAL has established a cooperation agreement with Novikontas Maritime College (SER, Annex 2.5.1). This partnership has been in place since 2022 (SER, p.53) and will continue until January 31, 2027 (SER, Annex 2.5.1). Similarly, to offer restricted elective B part study courses in the Air Forces Military Leadership study programme, NDAL has a cooperation agreement with the Transport and Telecommunication Institute (SER, Annex 2.5.1). This cooperation began in 2016 (SER, p.53) and is also set to last until January 31, 2027 (SER, Annex 2.5.1). During the on-site visit, the directors of both study programmes indicated that NDAL determines the content to be offered to NDAL cadets, compiling lists of crucial courses and subjects, and transmitting these to the partner institutions. Moreover, NDAL cooperates with other Latvian higher education institutions: University of Latvia, Riga Technical University and Rīga Stradiņš University for various aspects concerning the study process (SER, Annex 2.5.1). It should be noted that the cooperation agreement with University of Latvia will expire soon, on December 31, 2024, and with Riga Technical University on February 6, 2025, with the possibility for extension currently unknown to the Expert Group.

In addition, the NDAL cooperates with Latvian higher education institutions by attracting visiting lecturers (SER, p.52), and, as identified during the on-site visits, there is a significant collaboration established with professionals from the field to provide guest lectures for students/cadets. The directors of study programmes confirmed that they invite members of the Latvian Air Force, Latvian Naval Forces, Latvian Land Forces, and others to deliver lectures for NDAL cadets. Also, the NDAL academic staff representatives present at the visit affirmed that they invite guest lecturers in their courses, and discussed the procedure for inviting them. They mentioned identifying and attracting individuals they believe would be the best fit for the specific course. One of them mentioned making the selection based on personal observations and potential guest lecturer's expertise in the relevant subject area, while another pointed out considering cadets' feedback and suggestions for individuals from the professional field or a specific topics. Academic staff members also elaborated on how they ensure that guest lecturers deliver high-quality lectures. One of them mentioned giving the guest lecturer the course description prior to the lecture, and attending the guest lecture itself to observe how well the guest lecturer follows it, whereas another requests and reviews the guest lecturer's presentation beforehand to ensure that the information included is relevant and the lecturer follows the NDAL standards. Also, employer representatives present on the visit noted that their representatives are delivering lectures at NDAL, and added that they personally have visited NDAL to deliver lectures, while others who have not done so yet, expressed their willingness to become guest lecturers in the future. Additionally, graduates during the on-site visit also shared that some of them were invited to participate as guest lecturers in NDAL study courses. At the on-site meeting, NDAL cadets confirmed having guest lecturers - both in meetings for the whole Academy and in their regular study courses, as well as, shared their experience of participating in various field trips as part of their study experience, and indicated a positive appreciation for these opportunities. Moreover, during the visit, several NDAL representatives, including cadets, brought up the recent introduction of a mentorship programme, within which cadets are provided with a mentor from Latvian National Armed Forces, providing them with an opportunity to have a direct connection with officers and getting early insights into Armed Forces, so that they are fully prepared when they eventually join them. Also, at the BALTDEFCOL, as observed during the on-site visit, there appears to be a substantial presence of guest lecturers. BALTDEFCOL academic staff members present on the visit provided insights into guest lecturer selection and involvement in the study process. One of them explained making the choice depending on expected learning outcomes and student feedback, as well as inviting individuals with high-ranking positions in their specific fields. Another elaborated that for his courses, the need for guest lecturers varies across the study modules, respectively, for some study courses there is no need to invite guest lecturers, while for others, he heavily relies on outside expertise, and specified the involvement of officers from NATO Headquarters, NATO Strategic Communications Centres of Excellence in Riga and Vilnius, academic staff members of NDAL, among others. BALTDEFCOL students at the on-site meeting confirmed the presence of numerous guest lecturers in their classes and had nothing but praise for them. The students expressed that having guest lecturers is one of the highlights of their education, particularly valuing the diverse expertise and latest field-specific insights they are bringing. While they were content with the current number of guest lecturers, they indicated that increasing their presence would contribute even more to their learning. Overall, the Expert Group acknowledge NDAL's and BALTDEFCOL's significant efforts in engaging professionals from the field in the study process and consider the substantial number of guest lectures, as well as organization of field trips and introduction mentorship programme as valuable additions in providing field-specific knowledge to students, suggesting continuing these practices.

Employer representatives' feedback during the on-site visit showed a general consensus regarding their communication with NDAL. Many indicated mutual communication as regular, or even constant practice, through both formal and informal channels, and with various representatives of NDAL. On the whole, during the on-site visit, employer representatives pointed out to have observed

substantial changes in NDAL's development over the past two decades, for example, NDAL cadets' knowledge and skill improvement, bridging the previous gap with units from other countries, as well as introduction of specialisation courses for cadets to explore different military fields in Ādaži military base, adding that, as a result, upon graduation from the NDAL, new lieutenants are significantly better prepared in their chosen field compared to the previous, more generalized approach. On the same note, employer representatives noted that personnel at Ādaži are focused on providing 'top-notch' education, recognizing that cadets will eventually return to join the workforce there, and aim to ensure they enter it as highly prepared as possible. One downside pointed out by employer representatives is graduates' insufficient preparedness in areas of administrative processes and organisational matters when entering the workforce, and added that cadets might benefit from additional training in these areas. Therefore, experts suggest incorporating supplementary study courses that cover administrative processes, organizational matters, and other essential skills needed upon entry into the workforce. Additionally, NDAL's cooperation with employer representatives is maintained by inviting them to participate in the work of the Bachelor's and Master's thesis committees, confirmed by Programme Directors. As an example, the Latvian Naval Forces annually suggests topics for cadets' Bachelor thesis and encourages students to conduct research that can be applied within the Latvian Naval Forces in the future. Likewise, as described during the site visit, in the BALTDEFCOL, the chairperson of the thesis committee is consistently an expert from the field. Concerning professional field representatives' involvement in curriculum development, the Programme Directors on the visit stated that experts from the field are invited to contribute opinions and advice on curriculum development, and added to have received occasional suggestions from representatives of the Latvian National Armed Forces, which are then forwarded to the NDAL Council for consideration. In addition as noted by Programme Directors, those recently graduated are asked to fill out a NDAL survey about their progress six months after graduation, based on which, the NDAL decides on enhancements of the study content. Employer representatives too added providing feedback by filling out NDAL questionnaires two times a year for the performance evaluation of both current cadets and recent graduates, and find this system effective.

1.5.2. Although international cooperation has always been one of the cornerstones at the level of the Latvian Armed Forces, the development of international cooperation at the NDAL took time (SER, p.55). Despite this, it is clear that it has now been implemented. The NDAL notes that the exchange of information on opportunities for international cooperation in military often takes place within the framework of the National Armed Forces or the level of the Ministries of Defence, and through signing agreements with collaborating countries that include cooperation plans, the NDAL undertakes international cooperation within this framework (SER, p. 55).

According to experts' assessment, NDAL has not formulated a distinct internationalization policy within its regulatory framework, but the NDAL provided further clarification regarding their methods for planning internationalization initiatives. According to the NDAL, the long-term aspects of international cooperation are incorporated into the NDAL Development Strategy for 2023-2032. As outlined in the NDAL Development Strategy, in relation to internationalization, it specifies tasks and key performance indicators, with a primary focus on cadet and academic staff engagement in mobility programs ('NDAL Development Strategy', pp. 25-26).

The Expert Group views the integration of international dimensions into the development strategy positively, yet they find its approach somewhat lacking in specificity and long-term planning. Rather than a detailed roadmap with specific actions to reach its objectives, it predominantly presents the desired results that NDAL seeks to attain. Experts argue that this is somewhat limiting because while the goals included in the Development Strategy offer guidance, lack of specific long-term strategy limits opportunities for development and proactive measures. Therefore it is recommended that the NDAL formulate specific long-term internationalisation planning guidelines with measurable

objectives. Additionally, as explained by the NDAL management representatives during the on-site visit, each year NDAL formulates an annual internationalization plan, emphasizing different priorities based on the current needs.

In addition, as further elaborated by NDAL, the annual internationalization plan is part of the annual written order of the Vice-Rector of the NDAL, part of TRADOC, issued at the end of each calendar year and is applicable for the next 12 months. The NDAL provided further details regarding internationalization at BALTDEF COL, adding that BALTDEF COL's strategic directions, along with specific key performance indicators, are defined in the BALTDEF COL Development Plan 2024-2032. While experts view the plan to be detailed and cohesive, it does not explicitly outline specific key performance indicators for internationalization. However, given BALTDEF COL's international design, they are implicitly addressed across different segments of the plan.

During the on-site visit, the NDAL management representatives elaborated that approach for deciding on NDAL's international cooperation partners matches the method of selecting partners within Latvia, and include identifying fitting partners to distinct training domains and mutual objectives, as well as being guided by the partner's area of expertise and field of operation. As discussed by the NDAL management representatives during the on-site visit, in the process of exploring partnerships with foreign HEIs, the NDAL examines the study modules offered at these institutions and assesses their compatibility with NDAL's objectives. Overall, the NDAL has established cooperation agreements with 25 foreign universities offering military education (SER, p.55), and a total of 8 not falling under the Erasmus+ framework (SER, Annex 2.5.1). While the current number of foreign partner HEIs is adequate, it could be expanded. In the course of the site visit, employer representatives highlighted additional possibilities for NDAL students to take part in international projects compared to prior years, and remarked that new officers now appear to be better equipped to work in international environments, displaying proficiency in the English language. This observation echoes the sentiment conveyed by graduates during the on-site visit that one proposal for the development of NDAL could involve integrating additional English classes into the curriculum, proposed based on their assertion that English was not frequently used during their studies, yet became essential upon entering the workforce. Hence, experts suggest including more English language study courses in the NDAL's curriculum. In terms of BALTDEF COL's international cooperation elements, the NDAL detailed that the very existence of the BALTDEF COL is the result of the international cooperation between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and the foundation of their cooperation is set forth in the memorandum of understanding. The NDAL indicated that the memorandum also suggests the involvement of Contributing Nations (US, Germany, Poland, and Italy) in BALTDEF COL activities, and addresses the involvement of Sponsored Nations through development cooperation agreements, allowing presence of students from countries like Ukraine, Georgia, or Moldova. BALTDEF COL's management representatives during the on-site visit additionally showcased several examples of their internationalization and cooperation efforts, mentioning performing joint exercises and area operations, where they engage several countries to observe how students apply their knowledge in an international setting, and discussed the organization of the annual Baltic Military History Conference and the Conference on Russia, where international experts are invited.

At the on-site visit, the NDAL management representatives stated that they strive to learn from and integrate the expertise of other countries through international cooperation. The focus on cooperation with Ukraine was strongly noted in both the interviews during the visits and the statements in the SER. For example, in 2023, the NDAL signed cooperation agreements with three Ukrainian military defence institutions (SER, p.56). During the on-site visit, representatives of NDAL accentuated their cooperation with Ukrainian representatives and further noted that learning from Ukrainian experiences, allows NDAL to gain insights, and based on them, improve the study curriculum. Additionally, the NDAL marked that Ukrainian cadets have participated in NDAL's training courses (SER, p.57) and underlined the significance of these experiences for NDAL cadets.

Also, in 2023 the NDAL hosted several visits to Ukrainian military academies, including organizing a week-long operational level course in cooperation with the Kiev Defence University for NAF personnel (SER, p.56). In addition, a member of the management team at the visit revealed that he/she had made personal visits to several Ukrainian academies to learn about their practices. During the visit, management representatives of BALTDEFCOL recognized cooperation with Ukraine as their top priority, including collaboration with Ukrainian authorities, who visit BALTDEFCOL to offer their field-related expertise to students, confirmed by students present on the visit and expressing wish for even greater cooperation with Ukrainian representatives in the future. The cooperation between NDAL, BALTDEFCOL, and Ukrainian institutions is seen by experts as highly valuable, providing practical real-life learning experiences for both students and the institutions, and demonstrating an example of successful international cooperation.

1.5.3. Since 2016, when ERASMUS Charter for Higher Education 2014-2020 was awarded to the NDAL, the Academy has been involved Erasmus+ activities, specifically through European initiative for the exchange of young officers inspired by Erasmus (EMILYO), also known as military Erasmus (SER, p.54-55). Subsequently the NDAL has also been awarded the Charter for 2021-2027 (see 'List of accredited HEIs 2021 - 2027' at <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/higher-education-institutions-holding-an-eche-2021-2027>) The NDAL representatives participate in EMILYO working groups, during which short-term and long-term learning opportunities offered by cooperation institutions and international courses offered by the NDAL are presented (SER, p.55), hence, EMILYO serves as the predominant framework for international mobility at NDAL. Outside the EMILYO platform, NDAL establishes cooperation with other institutions through cooperation agreements (SER, p.55). Specifically under the Erasmus+ framework, NDAL has signed Erasmus+ bilateral inter-institutional agreements with 17 foreign HEIs (SER, Annex 2.5.1), a number considered suitable by experts. According to Annex 2.5.1 of the SER, all agreements are listed with a duration extending 'by 2027', and, during the on-site visit, it was affirmed by the NDAL Erasmus+ coordinator that it indicates the termination date for these agreements, adding that all 17 cooperation agreements are applicable to all study programmes.

For the purpose of attracting foreign academic staff, NDAL mainly relies on the EMILYO platform, where information regarding international activities organized by NDAL are posted, complemented by direct communication with partner institutions (SER, p.56). During the on-site visit, the NDAL management representatives briefly outlined the procedure of inviting foreign academic staff, stating that the initial step involves reaching out to NDAL's international relations office, where they review the NDAL catalogue and select the most suitable candidate. NDAL management representatives also added receiving proposals from foreign HEI's requesting to deliver lectures at NDAL, which are reviewed to make a final decision. Overall, the NDAL organizes both academic staff and cadet mobilities into categories of long-term and short-term mobilities, with long-term mobilities lasting a minimum of 90 days and short-term mobilities categorized into three detailed groups based on duration: 1-7 days, 8-14 days and longer than 14 days.

In terms of short-term incoming academic staff mobility, between 2017 and 2023, a total of 306 foreign academic staff representatives visited NDAL. Most of these visits lasted 1-7 days, followed by some for 8-14 days, but there have been no visits lasting longer than 14 days during this period. It seems that the number of visits fluctuated over the years, and, for example in 2021, there were no incoming academic staff representatives, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the most significant increase was observed from 2022 to 2023, with the number of visits rising from 21 in 2022 to 160 in 2023 (SER, Annex 2.5.4). Over this period, the largest number of personnel arriving at NDAL came from Land Forces, following by Air Forces, and the Naval Forces representatives visited the NDAL the least, and their activities included engagements such as visits on military bases, different types of military trainings, participation in meetings, lectures, syndicates,

conferences, cooperation planning, meeting with cadets, Summer Field Camp, among others. In terms of long-term incoming academic staff mobilities, between 2018 and 2023, the NDAL hosted 29 foreign academic staff members, most of whom were from Land Force representatives. As an example, in 2023 the NDAL implemented an international brigade/division level course, which was delivered by international tutors, and in future up to 30 participants from Latvia, Norway, Estonia and Lithuania, Denmark and 14 other nations stationed in Latvia are planned to participate in this course (SER, p.56). Also, the NDAL organizes the Baltic Naval Intermediate Command and Staff Course, where more than 10 officers from all three Baltic States participate annually, and where lecturers from cooperation institutions in Lithuania, Austria and Norway are also involved (SER, p.56). Regarding the process for recruiting foreign academic staff at BALTDEFCOL, during the on-site visit, the BALTDEFCOL management representatives indicated that a policy, along with a special committee, is established for this purpose, and noted that at the moment BALTDEFCOL has permanent staff members from 13 different countries.

With respect to outgoing academic staff mobility, all submitted applications are analyzed and a decision is made by the NDAL on the approval or rejection of candidates for participation in a particular mobility (SER, p.55). The volume of outgoing academic staff mobilities is less than that of the incoming academic staff. Between 2017 and 2023, NDAL academic staff representatives participated in a total of 228 Erasmus+ short-term mobilities, out of which, 198 were for 1-7 days, 23 for 8-14 days, and 7 for longer than 14 days. As with the incoming academic staff mobility, the number of visits varied over the years, however, unlike incoming mobility, there were 9 outgoing academic staff mobilities in 2021 despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, while there were representatives visiting NDAL for mobility lasting longer than 14 days in 2017 and 2018, there have been no such visits from 2019 to 2023 (annex 2.5.4). Over this period, the largest number of NDAL academic staff representatives participating in the international mobilities were Land Force representatives, followed by Naval Forces, and Air Forces representatives, and included engagements such as participation in conferences, working groups, courses, symposiums, military training, seminars, as well as working on cooperation project development, training planning, among others. When it comes to long-term academic staff mobilities, from 2018 to 2023, a total of 8 academic staff members have participated. While there has been a slight upward trend, the numbers remain relatively low, with the highest participation being 3 staff members in 2023 (annex 2.5.2). Additionally, from 2018 to 2023, NDAL also has implemented 94 personnel training mobilities (SER, p.58). Unlike incoming and outgoing academic staff mobility, training mobilities have consistently increased, reaching their highest point in both 2022 and 2023 with 25 trainings each year (annex 2.5.5). At the same time, the NDAL has observed that academic staff members sometimes are reluctant to take part in mobility opportunities (SER, p.58). As noted by NDAL management representatives on visit, this is mainly due to the NDAL teaching staff often having limited English proficiency, which limits their ability to engage in such opportunities. NDAL management representatives additionally added that English courses are available for academic staff at NDAL's language center, but participation is voluntary and depends on individual willingness to attend. From the perspective of experts, it would be advisable for NDAL to develop mechanisms to encourage its academic staff members to attend English language courses. Simultaneously, part of the academic staff representatives present on the visits confirmed their participation in Erasmus+ mobilities, sharing positive feedback and describing it as a valuable experience, as well as mentioning making new contacts, observing different practices, and learning new approaches that could be applied in the NDAL's study processes.

The aspects of cadet mobility are collectively considered by the NDAL Vice-Rector, Programme Directors, heads of study courses, and methodologists to find the optimal mobility offers for cadets. Following this, a competition is announced on the NDAL website where cadets can apply for the chance to participate in a specific mobility opportunity (SER, p.55). In addition, after the mobility the cadets (and academic staff members) must complete the Erasmus+ report, as well as a separate

mission report, which is then analyzed by the NAF Ministry of Defence Policy Department and the NDAL Vice-Rector and the Rector (SER, p.56).

Regarding short-term outgoing cadet mobility, most of the possibilities are offered on the EMILYO platform, while the NDAL also receives information about international courses directly from partner institutions, in most cases from those who are not part of the Erasmus+ program (SER, p.57-58). Between 2017 and 2023, a total of 324 cadets from all study programmes participated in short-term mobilities, which included activities like specific theoretical and practical trainings, military exercises, cultural programmes, conferences and presentations, team building activities, competitions, among others, as well as studying in foreign HEI's as part of Bachelor degree studies or international semester. Among these, 313 were cadets from Air, Naval and Land Forces Military Leadership study programmes, and 13 were Command Staff Officer study programme cadets (the latter a figure, in the opinion of experts, considered low). The majority, 202 cadets, participated in mobilities lasting 1-7 days, followed by 67 cadets for 8-14 day mobilities, and 55 cadets for mobilities longer than 14 days. In terms of division between study programmes, Land Forces Military Leadership cadets used mobility opportunities the most, with 123 participants, followed by Air Forces Military Leadership cadets with 109, Naval Forces Military Leadership cadets with 79, and Command Staff Officer students with 13. From 2017 to 2019, the number of participating cadets ranged from 64 to 82 per year. This number dropped to 17 in 2020 and 6 in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but then stabilized in 2022, and returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2023 with 63 cadets participating (SER, Annex 2.5.3). In addition, during the on-site visit, the Expert Group learned from interviews that there have been 53 short-term cadet mobilities in 2024. With respect to the long-term mobilities, between 2018 and 2023, a total of 26 cadets took part in these mobilities, out of which 16 were cadets from Land Forces Military Leadership study programme and 10 from Naval Forces Military Leadership study programme. Overall it seems to be a consistent increase each year, with the peak being nine cadets in 2023 (SER, Annex 2.5.2), while in the same time, it has to be pointed out that there are no cadets from Air Forces Military Leadership study programme that have participated in the long-term mobilities, an aspect, in the view of experts, that needs to be addressed and improved. Meanwhile, the NDAL also acknowledges that long-term cadet mobility is affected by various factors, such as the offer of programmes from foreign HEI's and their compatibility with NDAL's study and training schedules, among others, thus NDAL notes that it is not always possible to use offers from foreign HEI's (SER, p.57). During the on-site visit, it was discovered that NDAL cadets demonstrate more engagement in Erasmus+ opportunities compared to BALTDEFCOL students. Most NDAL cadets present on the meeting confirmed their participation in Erasmus+ mobilities, while in contrast, only few graduates mentioned their involvement in international mobilities at the time of their studies, explaining that due to COVID-19 restrictions, they were not able to take part in opportunities offered by NDAL. The BALTDEFCOL students during the visit explained that they are not participating in the international mobility opportunities available to them due to time constraints and academic commitments, which, taking into account the specifics of studies at BALTDEFCOL, in the opinion of experts, is understandable, while in the meantime, BALTDEFCOL students mentioned participating in study field trips to NATO Headquarters and all Baltic countries.

In the case of short-term incoming cadet mobilities, the engagement also has been satisfactory, with a total of 361 cadets from abroad coming to NDAL between 2017 and 2023, and their activities at NDAL included tactical, individual and up to platoon level military training, presentations, visits on military bases, cultural programmes, conferences, participating in Summer Field Camp or traineeship, as well as developing research papers and Bachelor thesis. The majority, 205 cadets, participated in mobilities lasting 8-14 days, followed by 145 cadets for 1-7 day mobilities, and 11 cadets for mobilities longer than 14 days. Overall, the most were cadets from Land Forces, with 336 participants, followed by Air Forces cadets with 19 and Naval Forces with 6 cadets. Similarly to outgoing cadet mobility, the number of incoming cadets was relatively steady before COVID-19, but

dropped significantly due to the pandemic, resulting in no incoming students in 2021. Despite this, following the pandemic, the numbers largely returned to prior levels, achieving a notable high in 2023 with 92 cadets arriving at NDAL (SER, Annex 2.5.3). Regarding long-term mobility, between 2018 and 2023, a total of 6 cadets visited NDAL, all of them being part of the Land Force. During the recent years, for incoming cadets, the NDAL had offered several training courses, for example, in 2022 a training course was organized, where cadets from 8 partner countries were invited, as well as in 2023, NDAL organized two international training modules, where 17 cadets from 8 partner universities and 22 cadets from 11 international military higher education institutions participated. Through the years, together 59 cadets from several countries have participated in the international courses organized by the NDAL (SER, p. 58). Moreover, in parallel with the above-mentioned international training courses, since 2022 the NDAL has been admitting international cadets for internships, where they develop final papers under the supervision of the NDAL teaching staff and become acquainted with the NDAL training process (SER, p. 57). Furthermore, in 2023, 22 cadets from 10 cooperating countries, including Ukraine, participated in the International Cadet Week organized by the NDAL (SER, p.57).

Overall, the inclusion of incoming cadets in training courses and other activities organized by NDAL, is seen by experts as a very positive approach. In the course of the on-site visit, integration of incoming cadets at NDAL was mentioned by several NDAL representatives, emphasizing that incoming cadets, for instance in Summer Field Camps, are fully integrated into the study process alongside NDAL cadets without segregation. Regarding the use of English as the working language, the NDAL representative explained that the Summer Field Camp concept relies on NDAL cadets with strong English skills leading lessons, while supervisors overseeing the process, ensuring smooth communication with incoming cadets. Additionally, a graduate present at the on-site meeting shared his experience of studying together with international cadets, highlighting that they were well integrated, as well as accentuated the opportunity it provided to practice English.

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

Conclusions:

Cooperation with partners in Latvia is based on the study field's exclusive role as the sole provider of military higher education in Latvia. Experts generally note a strong collaboration between NDAL and Latvian institutions, particularly those in the professional military field. Employer engagement with NDAL is notably strong, with them expressing high regard for the NDAL and a commitment to cooperate in training of cadets, among other aspects.

Both NDAL and BALTDEFCOL have placed significant emphasis on internationalization efforts across various dimensions. NDAL's internationalization initiatives are guided by integrating long-term internationalization tasks into its Development Strategy for 2023-2032 and formulating an annual internationalization plan. However, there is currently no distinct internationalization policy formulated within NDAL's regulatory framework. Overall, NDAL's selection of international cooperation partners aligns with the specific requirements of the study field. Notably, within their internationalization framework, there is a significant emphasis on cooperation with Ukraine for both NDAL and BALTDEFCOL.

EMILYO serves as the predominant framework for international mobility at NDAL. Both incoming and outgoing academic staff and cadet mobility numbers are sufficient, yet there are small deficiencies, such as the amount of mobilities lasting longer than 14 days and over 90 day are low, there is small engagement of Command Staff Officer study programme cadets participating in mobility, as well as there is a predominance of both Land Forces academic staff members and cadets participating in mobilities, in comparison to Air Forces and Naval Forces. Nonetheless, the system of provision of mobility possibilities for NDAL cadets and academic staff appears to be very well implemented and operates smoothly, as well as international academic staff members and cadets visiting NDAL seem

to be very well integrated into NDAL study processes.

Strengths:

- 1) Strong collaboration between the NDAL and other Latvian institutions, particularly with the National Armed Forces and Baltic Defence College.
- 2) Significant involvement of field professionals in the study process, mainly through guest lectures and during military training.
- 3) Significant increase in internationalization activities, involving international projects, courses, training exercises, among others.
- 4) Overall mobility numbers for both incoming and outgoing cadets and academic staff are satisfactory.

Weaknesses:

- 1) No established internationalization strategy with specific long-term internationalization planning guidelines.
- 2) Lack of study courses in the curriculum covering administrative processes, organizational matters, and English classes.
- 3) Low participation in outgoing cadet mobility among "Command Staff Officer" study programme cadets and overall limited number of mobilities for both academic staff and cadets lasting longer than 14 and 90 days.

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: Fully compliant

Although there are minor gaps in the long-term internationalization plans within NDAL's regulatory framework and some international mobility numbers are modest, the NDAL generally has an excellent system in place for cooperation with both local and international partners.

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

Analysis

1.6.1. The accreditation of study programmes of the NDAL was last held on 12.06.2013. and the accreditation term was applied for six years. Accreditation was scheduled to end on 11.06.2019, but with amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, this period was extended until 31.12.2024. Referring to the recommendation review (SER, Appendix 2.6.1), the Academy received 14 recommendations for improvement during the previous accreditation period. Three recommendations are related to the Bachelor's study programme "Air Forces Military Leadership" (42863) and "Naval Forces Military Leadership" (42863) and eleven are related to the Bachelor's study programme "Land Forces Military Leadership" (42863), but in general, after going deeper in the documents and the course of activity of the higher educational institution, it can be concluded that some of the previously expressed recommendations are relevant for all study programmes.

The 2013 accreditation recommendations of the Bachelor's study programmes "Air Forces Military Leadership" and "Naval Forces Military Leadership":

Study programs should be aligned more with regional and European practices, offering students international exchange opportunities. During the on-site visits, the experts received confirmation

from the management of the NDAL, from the teaching staff, and from the students themselves (interviews with graduates, interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students), that there are opportunities to participate in various programmes where every student can gain international experience and undertake an exchange trip. Information is also available on the Academy's website, and described in the institution's self evaluation report (SER p.40, p.50). Recommendation is fully implemented.

Focus more on scientific research and student involvement in projects. Scientific research activity is challenging, as indicated in the interviews with both current students and graduates (interviews with graduates, interviews with students), as well as with teaching staff (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with research staff), because of the extensive amount of restricted information in the military field and related industries. Nevertheless, scientific activity is included in diploma theses, and the Center for Security and Strategic Research, the Center for Defense Technology and Innovation have also been established (interviews with management, interviews with research staff). On June 2, 2023, the renewed NAA cadet research conference took place at the Academy, gathering NDAL student/cadets, permanent staff and guests; it is planned to organize a scientific conference of this format every year (interviews with management, interviews with research staff). Such a conference was also held in 2024. From 2018, the study course "Research Methodology" has been introduced in the professional Bachelor's study programmes (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with research staff) (There is no information about this study course on the website.). Recommendation is fully implemented.

Expand study programs by including more elective courses in the fields of military ethics, international relations, and civilian education. Elective study courses covering various scientific fields are reviewed and approved every academic year (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, SER p.55). The demands and needs of the industry are also taken into account in order to improve study courses for current needs, which is confirmed in the interviews by both the management and administration of the institution, as well as the representatives of the employers (interviews with management, interviews with employers). Since 2013, NAA students have been offered the following elective courses: Academic Writing, Ballroom Dancing, Fundamentals of Sailing, Air Force Integration in Land Force Operations, Influence Theory and Practice, Introduction to Operational Arts, Introduction to International Politics, Developing Communication Skills, Small States and conflicts, Unconventional Warfare Basic Course, In-depth Introduction to Fire Support, Personality Development Training, Air Defence, Public Speaking Methodology, Explosives and Munitions basic course and Stress Management. Free elective study courses covering various scientific fields are reviewed and approved every academic year (SER p.55, interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff). On the website of the organization, in the study plan section, a detailed plan of each study programme is indicated, where one can familiarize oneself with all study courses. Recommendation is fully implemented.

The 2013 accreditation recommendations of the Bachelor's study programme "Land Forces Military Leadership":

To ensure the assignment of professional servicemen who have appropriate military or professional competence to teach individual study courses or modules at the academy in accordance with MK 16.12.2014. to regulations no. 774 "Rules of operation of NAA" p. 14. MK (Cabinet of Ministers) regulations from 16.12.2014. No. 774 "Rules of operation of NAA" has lost its power, regulation isn't in force anymore. Now there is MK No. 643 from 7.11.2023. In an interview with the Academy's administration and teaching staff, the Expert Group received confirmation that in the implementation of the study process, professional servicemen with professional competences are attracted to provide individual courses, this is done by order of the National Armed Forces commander, and there is also a rotation of instructors (interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff, SER p.129). Recommendation is fully implemented.

Provide a representative of the Academy's academic staff who have not completed professional development programs on innovations in the higher education system, university didactics or educational work management 160 ac. in the amount of hours, compliance with the requirements of paragraph 8 of MK 28.10.2014 No. 662 "Regulations on education and professional qualifications necessary for pedagogues and procedures for improving the professional competence of pedagogues". The institution's report states that in 2019, 12 academic staff members attended the professional development education programme of the University of Latvia "University didactics: modern theory and practice" (160 academic hours); in 2023 a total of 17 academic staff members. During the interviews, the Expert Group confirmed that such training for both the administration of the institution and the teaching staff had occurred (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). Recommendation is fully implemented.

To improve the study program in order to ensure its full compliance with the provisions of MK 26.08.2014 No. 512 "Rules on the state standard of second-level professional higher education" 11.1. to the requirements of the subsection regarding the module for building business professional competence. MK 26.08.2014 regulations no. 512 "Rules for the second level state standard of professional higher education" lapsed on 21.06.2023. The new provisions of MK 21.06.20123 No. 305 "Regulations on the standard of state professional higher education", paragraph 50 - after completing the short cycle or the first cycle of higher educational so provides for the need to include in the mandatory content of the professional higher education study programme a study module for the formation of business professional competencies (organization and establishment of companies, management methods, basics of project development and management, record keeping and financial accounting system, knowledge of creating social dialogue in society and regulatory enactments regulating labour legal relations). A study module is created by combining study courses or their parts, which have a common goal and achievable study results, and is included in the study programme in the amount of no less than nine credit points. From the conducted interviews, as well as from the course descriptions and available information, the experts did not obtain confirmation formal compliance with this recommendation but in practice, the necessary information has been included in courses (interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff, SER p.55). Recommendation is partially implemented.

To improve the regulation of practice execution, ensuring its wider suitability and functionality and to improve the pre-diploma practice program of the study program, incl. task section, ensuring its full compliance with the goals of the internship program. According to the submitted documents, it can be concluded that in 2019 the Internship Regulations were revised and reworked, describing in detail all stages of the internship, determining the purpose, tasks, and evaluation procedure of the relevant internship. New Rules of Internship have been approved. Referring to interviews with students and graduates, there are many opportunities to complete the internship in the direction and structure desired by the student (SER p.22. (Annex 3.2.6 Internship regulation), interview with Programme Directors). Recommendation is fully implemented.

Evaluate the study course descriptions and correct them, ensuring the elimination of the deficiencies indicated in the evaluation of the 10th criterion of the opinion. Referring to the interviews with the Academy's administration and teaching staff, it can be concluded that the study course descriptions are reviewed every year before the beginning of the study year, as well as before changing the lecturer according to the current situation. According to the Regulations of the Training Council of the Latvian National Defense Academy (Order No. 46 of 13.03.2024), point 6 the Training Council has the following tasks: according to point 6.2. to examine and approve the developed study courses, examination plan, content of the final and national examination program and practice programs. It is the view of the Expert Group, that the order in which changes are made and the updating of study course descriptions is well thought out and the processes are well organized (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, SER p.63). Recommendation is

fully implemented.

Ensure the correction of the description of the study program according to the MK 23.05.2017 Regulation No. 264 "Regulations on the Classifier of Professions, Basic Tasks Corresponding to the Profession and Basic Qualification Requirements" regarding the competences and qualifications to be acquired in the study process. The experts conclude that the available description of the study programme 'Command Staff Officer' has been corrected and is appropriate for the profession classifier, as well as the information included in the self-assessment report (SER p.101). Recommendation is fully implemented.

Academy management to promote scientific activity and stimulate the publication of academic staff's works, including in international peer-reviewed publications. Regulations were drawn up - Regulations of the Science Council of the Latvian National Defense Academy (order of NDAL Rector 28.09.2023 No. 128), the purpose of the Science Council is to plan, coordinate and monitor the scientific activity of NDAL. The NDAL elected academic staff has 110 publications, including international scientific publications (both indexed and non-indexed) in international scientific databases, national level and popular scientific ones. Compilation of quantitative data on scientific and applied research activities corresponding to the field of study (APPENDIX 2.4.1 of SER, interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with research staff, interviews with academic teaching staff). Recommendation is fully implemented.

Revise the content of the study program with the aim of preventing study courses, the degree of mastery of which is determined at the level of use, from being in the model of free-choice study courses. According to the NDAL explanation, the optional study courses provide additional knowledge to the cadets and are not related to the provision of the lieutenant's basic competencies, and hence the Expert Group do not see any inconsistency in this point (SER p.55). Recommendation is fully implemented.

The Academy's management should develop and approve a uniform procedure for developing and including study courses in the study program in order to ensure the achievement of the overall study results of the study program and to include in the description of the study program an indication of compliance with the Academy's strategy, thereby ensuring the compliance of the study program's content with the requirements of regulatory acts. The Internal Study Quality Assurance Regulation of the NDAL was developed and approved, where Section 3 of the SER describes the development, review, and approval of study programme. The inclusion of new study courses in study plans takes place in accordance with the proposal of the Programme Director, who takes into account the request and guidelines of the National Armed Forces, the requirements of regulatory acts, the recommendation of the course lecturer, student surveys and other justified requirements (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). Recommendation is fully implemented.

To provide the Academy with an annual update of the creativity and scientific biographies (Curriculum vitae in Europass format) of the lecturers involved in the implementation of the study program. This recommendation is not fully implemented, an up-to-date CV is required only for invited lecturers, for elected lecturers the CV is updated only upon request. (interviews with management). Recommendation is partially implemented.

The management of the Academy, in cooperation with the management of National Armed Forces, can evaluate not only graduates, but also representatives of their employers after the study survey, which would provide effective feedback and allow timely improvement of the quality of the study program in accordance with the practical needs of the service and to take measures to make corrections to the Academy's Constitution with the aim of ensuring compliance of its content with the second part of Article 56 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. Referring to expert interviews with employers, as well as with graduates and the management of the institution, the Expert Group received confirmation that within six months, after the cadet/student has graduated from the educational institution and was based with an employer, the employer provides feedback

on the level of preparation of the new employee and which matters might need to be improved (interview with employers, interviews with graduates). Recommendation is fully implemented.

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

Conclusions:

The management of the NDAL has taken into account the recommendations received during the previous assessment procedures suggested by the experts in 2013 and implemented them, strengthening them with various internal regulatory acts and is monitoring and updating these processes. When the Expert Group participated in interviews with the institution's management, academic staff and teaching staff, it was possible to observe that the written procedures are not only formal, but that the parties involved know them and understand what benefits they provide and why they are necessary. During the interviews with current students, with graduates and with employers, these expert conclusions were confirmed.

Strengths:

- 1) A strong structure for the NDAL has been created, well thought-out decision-making and control processes, as well as defined areas of strict responsibility.
- 2) A flexible environment within the NDAL that allows it to adapt to changing conditions as quickly as possible, introduce innovations and take into account suggestions and recommendations.
- 3) Understandable and thought-out processes that are known to all involved parties - the Academy's administration, teaching staff, students and employers.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Much of the data and information required to conduct scientific and applied research is of a confidential, restricted and sensitive nature.
- 2) Within the framework of the curriculum, it is difficult to prepare students for life after active service, or civilian life.

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: Fully compliant

Most of the previously expressed recommendations have been taken into account, except for some cases that are not relevant in connection with the specifics of the profession and are justified in the report.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

- 1) Increase the amount of information about programmes to successful applicants before they start. For example, this could be through conducting orientation webinars for all incoming students. Implement the new information dissemination process in time for applicants who intend to start programmes in 2025.
- 2) Clarify and communicate the policies regarding academic misconduct, including the possibility of automatic dismissal (if this exists) and the impact of re-submissions on final grades. Revise the academic misconduct policy, ensuring it is clearly documented and communicated to all students. Complete the policy revision and communication process by the end of 2024.

- 3) Fully implement and stabilize the new management structures to improve overall efficiency. Develop a detailed action plan with milestones and assign dedicated project managers to oversee the implementation. Conduct quarterly reviews to assess the implementation progress and achieve full stabilization within one year.
- 4) Integrate students and teachers into the governance mechanism by defining their roles and clearly delineating the areas where the NDAL has the mandate to initiate changes. This should be completed by June 2025, ensuring transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes.
- 5) Develop and implement differentiated student feedback systems by September 2024. The course feedback questionnaire should focus on identifying barriers to learning outcome attainment and can be adapted from the EMILYO questionnaire. Additionally, create a conditions of service questionnaire aligned with Latvian military service statutes to assess and improve service conditions.
- 6) Establish and institutionalise a procedure for the improvement and purchase of methodological and informational resources by March 2025. This procedure should include a clear process for needs assessment, approval, and procurement, with regular reviews every six months to ensure its effectiveness and alignment with institutional goals.
- 7) Develop strategies to increase participation of Command Staff Officer study programme cadets in outgoing cadet mobility and overall academic staff and cadet mobilities lasting longer than 14 and 90 days.
- 8) Increase the number of dedicated QA staff from the current level to ensure all quality assurance tasks are handled efficiently without overburdening existing staff. Complete the appointment and training process in time for the new student intake in 2025.
- 9) Review and assess the AFML, NFML, LFML, and CSO programmes, for possible alignment with the NATO Generic Officer Professional Military Education Reference Curricula (available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_10/20151013_151013-generic-officer-eng.pdf). Ensure the NDAL's quality policies are reviewed and updated accordingly.
- 10) Increase information security measures protecting learning materials published at ILIAS, using two-factor authentication logging into ILIAS. This should be completed by the end of the calendar year 2024.

Long-term recommendations

- 1) Implement a system of QA quantitative indicators with specific, numerical targets to be tracked and reported annually to all stakeholders by December 2026. This system should include metrics such as student performance, faculty engagement, and resource allocation.
- 2) Streamline the course outsourcing mechanism by September 2026 to reduce scheduling risks and administrative burdens. This includes developing a clear scheduling framework and reducing reliance on visiting teachers by hiring more permanent staff or creating long-term contracts with regular visiting faculty.
- 3) In close cooperation with the public and representatives of various sectors, develop a list of possible research topics on issues that concern the public and for the research of which it is not necessary to use restricted access information. Creating such a list will help both students and researchers to conduct scientific research, which will also be useful for promoting public trust. Update this list regularly, at least once a year, according to the existing situation.
- 4) Evaluate the possibility, when reviewing the content of subjects taught in study courses, to include in the content information on how the knowledge gained in a specific subject can be applied after active service, in civilian life.

5) By December 2025, implement a workload management system to ensure a balanced distribution of tasks for the Vice-Rector and military teaching staff, enabling them to dedicate adequate time to both academic and research activities. This system should be reviewed and adjusted annually to maintain balance.

6) Incorporate study courses in the curriculum that encompass administrative processes, organizational matters and additional English language learning opportunities.

7) Establish a long-term internationalization strategy, dedicated specifically to long-term internationalization efforts of NDAL with added clear guidelines and key performance indicators.

II - "Air Forces Military Leadership" ASSESSMENT

II - "Air Forces Military Leadership" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. Overall the NDAL implements all its programmes in a similar fashion. This allows it to maintain a similar quality across all its programmes. The key feature of the Academy's programmes is the seamless integration with employers: the Commandant holds monthly meetings with the Chief of Defence (confirmed during interviews with management staff). The individual concerned supervises not only the NDAL, but the entire Training and Doctrine command, which allows flexibility to allocate resources as needed, and to appoint Programme Directors and teachers from the relevant forces.

The Professional Bachelor study programme "Air Forces Military Leadership" (42863) is unique to the NDAL nationally, and content-wise is fully compliant with the study field "Military services" requirements. The Expert Group was made aware of the process of professional standard review and development, where NDAL may provide important input (during interviews with management). This process could become a basis for the curriculum review. One direction of further development would be to see how the programme (and the standard) can be structured from the point of view of SQF-MILOF and the NATO Officer training reference curricula.

Programme Directors are officers appointed on a rotational basis from the Air Forces, and maintain close and continuous cooperation at the level of module implementation with Air Forces, allowing programmes to be rapidly adapted to the needs of the Air Force, so graduates are best prepared to begin their service (confirmed during meetings with Programme Directors, interviews with employers).

The programme also aims to develop competencies related to Latvia's EU/NATO participation. To enhance this aspect, the programme could be structured to facilitate regular exchanges, such as within the framework of EMILYO (semester-long mobility window). This would enhance the AFML programme's focus on EU/NATO defence knowledge.

2.1.2. Graduates of the Air Forces Military Leadership programme receive a Professional Bachelor's degree in Air Forces Military Leadership and a professional qualification as 'Lieutenant' (code: 42863). The programme aims to prepare students to become mid-level managers/commanders with strong leadership skills, high motivation, and professional competence for military service in the National Armed Forces (NAF) and EU/NATO multinational units. The programme's content is closely aligned with these objectives. The NDAL plans to review the AFML programme to introduce modules which are explicitly aligned with the SQF-MILOF standards, as noted in their self-assessment report (SER, Annex 2.1.1). However, it needs to be stressed that the review that the Academy intends to conduct by 2028 should examine the programme in its entirety, with a view to articulating fully with

the SQF-MIOF standards.

The current learning outcomes align with SQF-MILOF, but this alignment is not explicitly communicated, and the distribution of CPs in relation to different officer core competencies is unclear. The Latvian professional standard for military officers is brief and, unlike SQF-MILOF, does not detail competencies across various branches or service levels. Nevertheless, the programme offers courses that comply with the professional standard.

Admission requirements are based on those for service members in the Latvian Armed Forces, as students are considered service members during their studies. Since the professional activities of junior officers are conducted in Latvian, the AFML programme is implemented in the national language. However, students have opportunities for exchange and can earn some of their study credits in English, particularly through participation in common modules of the EMILYO initiative. Despite this, the programme does not include a dedicated mobility window or a period (such as for writing the final thesis) that allows students to undertake longer international study periods.

A widely accepted principle in study programme design is to allocate 60 ECTS for a full-time programme over 10 months. However, student/cadets, due to their status as active-duty soldiers, may face additional demands from training, especially when continuous field training is essential for competency development. The total time spent on training and studies should not exceed 48 hours per week on average over the academic year, which equates to a 20% higher workload compared to civilian studies. Additionally, an 11th study month could increase the annual workload by another 10%. In this context, a 30% more intensive full-time programme seems to represent a reasonable annual workload limit for serving soldiers. This would allow the NDAL to implement programmes of up to 80 CPs per year. However, a programme requiring 278 CPs over four years to achieve a bachelor's qualification imposes excessively steep demands on students. Under such conditions, a three-year formal education program leading to a qualification could be feasible, with additional branch training provided as non-formal or post-graduate education. Depending on Latvian national regulations, the total number of CPs per year could be adjusted, though the Expert Group observed that the CP system appears to have been adopted during the transition to this credit system.

Latvian national regulation permitting, another total number of CP's may be set per year, however the Expert Group gained the impression that the CP's were adopted during the transit to the CP system. It is advisable to consider the competences in each programme that need to be made common to all students/cadets (via SQF-MILOF), and competences specific to AF students/cadets. This may also create conditions for building a permanent staff to cover the common training requirements.

The programme is implemented in Latvian, this is reasonable and justified, because the national and service language of graduates is Latvian for the most part. Students/Cadets also have opportunities to participate in international study modules, delivered in English.

2.1.3. The study programme reviews rely heavily on the work of the Programme Directors, where the Study Council assures that potential changes are in-line with QA standards (SER, p. 9; interviews with management staff, interviews with Programme Directors). However, the NDAL has adopted an approach of only limited changes to the programme. The adoption of NATO SAT (from the perspective of the NATO curriculum) may further enhance their responsiveness by enabling them to assess whether any courses are unnecessary for the given training level. The self-evaluation report demonstrates that the programme was developed since 2013 in-line with the professional standard (SER, p. 67). However its structure and shift to ECTS means that courses vary greatly in size and complexity. This makes the role of Programme Directors even more critical. A mechanism by which a certain structure to the courses not only from the point of view of their topics, but also competence, complexity level, and sequence would be beneficial to the programme. This may also allow for common courses (a universal basic requirement) for all programmes of Military Defence field (as per SQF-MILOF), which could allow increasing the number of full time teaching staff, thus

providing uniform education quality, and support for the Programme Directors. The AFML programme's current reliance on teacher (instructors) provided by the other structures of the NAF means that significant coordination is required, which makes it challenging to assure a uniform quality of course delivery.

2.1.4. As the NDAL study programmes are unique and meet a specific requirement set by the MoD of Latvia, the justification is sound. All students immediately become professional service members of the NDAL with guaranteed employment and a life-long career perspective in the Latvian armed forces. The programme is focused solely on training officers for a single employer - the Latvian Armed Forces. The enrollment planning is based on the projections of the armed forces officer requirement, and 100 percent of graduates are expected to enter the service for a nationally established minimum period. The number of students is increasing, all students are guaranteed a job (interviews with management, SER p.85).

The programme in large part relies on outsourced education (SER, pp. 69-70). The basis of external services is an annual public procurement programme. The Expert Group notes that the number of service providers in Latvia is limited, and perhaps other cooperation arrangements can be explored, which would allow for study quality assurance to be implemented by other means.

Typically the programme enrolls between 15-20 students/cadets, with 7-13 successfully graduating. At its peak, up to 50 percent of cadets did not complete their studies. Some dropouts occur due to selection for study at the Bundeswehr Helmut Schmidt University in Germany. Since 2020, there has been an increase in dropouts, primarily driven by health issues. In many cases, cadets can resume their studies after recovery. It is important to communicate to candidates for the programme that there is a risk of being unable to continue service in case of serious injury. The programme also allows cadets who drop out to continue their service as enlisted personnel in the Latvian armed forces, with the option to return to NDAL to complete their studies.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

Conclusions:

The study programme "Air Forces Military Leadership" (42863) aligns with national requirements and complies with the study field criteria. Future programme development could benefit from aligning with SQF-MILOF and NATO officer generic training reference curriculum. The programme aims to train junior officers of the Latvian Air Forces; the learning outcomes are reviewed based on regular contacts with the Air Forces. The study programme review process is robust, guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council. Adopting NATO SAT could enhance responsiveness and efficiency. The programme's economic and social justification is solid, with a growing student body and guaranteed employment for graduates, reflecting its success in meeting MoD and armed forces requirements. Further work on reviewing the programme structure from the point of view of SQF-MILOF and search for additional possibilities to create mobility windows is recommended.

Strengths:

- 1) The study programme is necessary and justified.
- 2) The stakeholder engagement is commendable.
- 3) The study programme guarantees and requires service on, directly related to the study content.
- 4) Programme learning outcomes are aligned with the professional standard.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The programme still requires a review vis-a-vis SQF-MILOF, and other programmes in the field,

which would allow identifying common competencies for students/cadets.

2) The programme relies heavily on teachers (instructors) provided by other structures of NAF and outsourced education, which puts significant workload on the Programme Directors, and requires separate consideration within the NDA QP.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The programme meets the requirements of the NAF and in particular the Air forces. The programme is structured into three parts: A - Mandatory course, B - Limited electives, and C - Electives. Part A is managed and delivered by the NDAL, and teachers (instructors) from other NAF structures. Part B is procured externally, its content is reviewed before each new procurement (SER, p. 67). Employers are closely connected with the Academy, and put forward their needs, which are taken into account (interviews with management, interviews with employers).

The existing arrangements assure that the programme content is relevant and updated regularly, however the structure of the programme in terms of the distribution of the courses in part A in terms of their size, possibility to open mobility windows, and relation to the SQF-MILOF could be structured better - this would allow for a more consistent implementation of QP, and help guide teachers and instructors towards a common understanding on the course delivery quality and standards. As it stands now, the course delivery standardisation is fully reliant on the course director, whose workload is substantial.

Overall the programme's courses are complementary, correspond to the programme objectives, and ensure achievement of learning outcomes and meet the needs of the employers.

As mentioned in section 2.1.2, the workload planning for students/cadets may differ significantly from that of civilian institutions, and in the EG's opinion, it could be up to 30% higher (equivalent to 80 ECTS per year). However, due to the unique status of student/cadets as active-duty soldiers (including airmen and seamen), the programme is more ambitious, requiring 278 CPs over 4.5 years of training. Additionally, the programme is divided into an exceptionally large number of individual courses. Despite these challenges, the EG believes that only minor adjustments are needed for the programme to fully comply with the state education standard (No. 305). Specifically, the inclusion of at least 1 CP on environmental regulations and requirements within the courses would ensure complete alignment with the standard.

The 'A, B, C' structure of the programme enables compliance with professional standards, but the number of subjects offered exceeds those outlined in the standard. During interviews with the NDAL programme directors, the EG was informed that the Military Defence professional standard is currently under review. This review presents an opportunity to reconsider the programme's architecture, aligning it more closely with regulation No. 305. Specifically, adopting a modular approach to competencies that reflects the eight core competencies of SQF-MILOF—such as designing courses worth 4 and 8 CP, 6 and 9 CP, or 5 and 10 CP, with a lead teacher responsible for assessing the full scope of acquired competence—could simplify the scheduling of student/cadet assessments. Additionally, establishing a single formal programme aligned with SQF-MILOF that grants a Bachelor's qualification after three years, including branch-specific and professional training where applicable (e.g., for pilots in regulated professions), would ensure that basic officer education meets the highest standards across all branches.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. All military instructors receive a didactics basic course (interviews with academic teaching staff), and are able to deliver courses. However, the teachers have wide autonomy and only limited guidance with regard to employing effective teaching methods (a description of teaching methods is

largely absent from the SER). This, again, makes study directors' roles critical. A standardised qualification package may be advised to set a common minimum standard to all teachers as teaching staff in the NDAL tends to change rapidly.

As mentioned in section 2.2.1, the programme architecture seems to have retained elements from the transition to the current CP structure. Therefore, a more comprehensive review of the programme—potentially in conjunction with other Bachelor programmes—would be beneficial. From this perspective, the SQF-MILOF standard could allow for a unified Bachelor's degree to be completed in three years, followed by informal branch-specific training. This approach could also help mitigate the risks associated with outsourcing parts of the training to external providers, where NDAL may face challenges in ensuring quality assurance.

Additionally, the programme's fragmentation into small courses means that teachers and instructors may not have sufficient time to become familiar with student/cadets and assess their competencies in an integrated manner. A modular approach, where larger CP courses encompass multiple smaller topics, would help build and strengthen a core group of professional teachers within the NDAL. These teachers could assess cadets across various subjects and provide consistent didactic support, even when student/cadets are studying under the supervision of visiting instructors.

2.2.4. Students/Cadets practice in the environments where they will eventually serve, which is a key strength of the programme. As junior officers, cadets are expected to assume leadership roles immediately upon graduation. With the Latvian Air Forces primarily concentrated in one location, students gain a thorough understanding of their future duties before graduation, as confirmed by interviews with graduates. The practices are well-regulated, with active involvement from both students and employers to ensure compliance (self-assessment report).

The internship tasks are directly related to the learning outcomes and comply with regulatory requirements. The internship, which constitutes 32 credit points (CP), is divided into three modules taking place during study years 2 through 4. Students/Cadets are supervised by Programme Directors and host unit supervisors and participate in various levels of service throughout the programme. The final internship, worth 13 CP, involves provisionally assigned service positions, allowing student/cadets to learn tasks essential for their future roles.

Overall, the internship is one of the major strengths of this programme. The NDAL's integration within the armed forces uniquely positions it to deliver high-quality, practical training.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Students are encouraged to write theses on topics pertinent to the armed forces, with significant involvement and guidance from the forces in selecting these topics. Many of these topics align with potential future employment opportunities, as evidenced by interviews with both students and Programme Directors. The Programme Directors also frequently consult with NAF representatives to identify relevant topics. The Expert Group reviewed graduates' theses, which were graded appropriately. These topics met the study field requirements and adhered to regulatory standards.

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

Conclusions:

The AFML study programme structure focuses on the partial procurement of courses tailored to the technical competencies required by the Air Forces. Leadership education is provided by the NDAL, with support from instructors from other Latvian military structures. The programme development process involves close collaboration with the sole employer, including the selection of practice and thesis topics. The Programme Director plays a crucial role in quality assurance, and additional

standardisation of the programme and teaching requirements could provide better guidance for the teaching staff.

Overall, the study programme content is relevant and meets the requirements of the armed forces, integrating employer needs into the curriculum. All instructors receive training in didactics, though a standardised qualification package is recommended due to rapid staff turnover. A key strength of the programme is the internships, which are conducted in the student/cadets' future service areas. These topics align with the needs of the armed forces and are developed with close guidance from the forces.

Strengths:

1) Practice and thesis topic selection are commendable.

Weaknesses:

1) Need to review the study field and the programme vis-a-vs the SQF-MILOF standard.

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. Students on the AFML programme study aviation-related subjects at a partner university - Transport and Telecommunication Institute (TTI), and according to mutual cooperation agreement between both higher educational institutions have access to TTI technical base, such as laboratories, library, classrooms and auditoriums, which are necessary to ensure high quality study process (AFML SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates). Defence forces Air Force infrastructure, which includes aircraft repair workshops and hangars, training classrooms, and large halls are available in Lielvarde Air Force base for students during their internship (AFML SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates). NDAL library resources and access to the online databases is available for the students free of charge (AFML SER Section 3.3.1., interviews with students). AFML programme students are provided with necessary informative provision in form of reading materials and online databases, technical base at TTI, as well as access to the Air Forces infrastructure and equipment. All this contributes to the achievement of learning outcomes with highest quality standards (AFML SER Section 3.3.1., interviews with graduates, interview with employers, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students). AFML programme specific requirements are well supported financially, contributing to the achievement of specific learning outcomes and maintaining high quality. (AFML SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates).

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. Part B subjects of the AFML study programme are implemented in a partner institution, which is Transport and Telecommunication Institute (TTI). A partner institution is selected based on the procurement organized by the Defence Forces (AFML SER Section 3.3.3., interviews with

management, interview with Programme Directors). According to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 643 "Regulations of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia", the number of students is planned by the Ministry of Defence in the medium term, but determined by the Chief of Defence for each academic year, therefore, the minimum number of students is not set for the academy to ensure the profitability of the study programmes (AFML SER Section 3.3.3., interview with Programme Directors). The cost of all credit points for one student is 10,210.67 EUR (AFML Finance Annex) which is approximately three times higher than the equivalent rate for a Land Forces Military Leadership student. The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students (AFML SER Section 3.3.3.).

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

Conclusions:

Evaluating the resource, informational and material technical base, NDAL students are fully provided with everything necessary to achieve the study results. The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students and programme costs are quite high.

Strengths:

- 1) Additional resources provided by the partner higher educational institution, selected through separate procurement.
- 2) Additional resources and technical base available for students and their internship provided by the Air Force.

Weaknesses:

- 1) AFML programme costs are high in comparison to LFML programmes due to outsourcing of programme Part B.

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: Fully compliant

Due to the Air forces support and partner HEI technical and materiel base, based on existing contracts, the study programme provides all required material, technical base and financial resources to achieve programme goals and learning outcomes with high quality.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1 The AFML study programme involves both academic staff and NAF (National Armed Forces) specialists (SER, p. 79; interviews with academic teaching staff). There are 37 lecturers, including those from the ITC (Institute of Technology of the National Defence Academy of Latvia) (SER, p.79). The ITC faculty includes six doctoral degree holders and four master's degree holders. The AFML has 27 lecturers, with six holding doctoral degrees and 13 holding master's degrees (SER, *ibid*). Additionally, some lecturers have Bachelor's degrees, and course assistants are professional military personnel (SER, p. 79; interviews with academic teaching staff). In summary the AFML has a

relatively high proportion of advanced degree holders among its number, with 34% holding PhDs and 45% holding Master's degrees (SER, p. 79). This appears comparable to the other Western military academies although the exact percentages may vary (e.g. comparison with the Defence Academy of the Netherlands). Although not all subjects of PhDs and Masters were given in the provided CVs of teaching staff (Annex 2.3.2 of SER), those that were suggest these are in relevant fields such as 'Aviation Transport'.

English language capability appears more than adequate both in terms of national requirements and the demands of the programme (interviews with academic teaching staff).

However, the Expert Group notes that it is difficult to assess the engagement of AFML academic teaching staff in scientific and research work.

2.4.2. Since the previous accreditation (in 2013) significant changes have occurred for the AFML study programme, including new partner universities and modifications in the military and academic staff composition at NDAL (SER, pp. 67-68; interview with Programme Directors). Initially, from 2011 to 2015, the NDAL partnered with RTU, and since 2016, it has collaborated with ITC (SER, p. 80). This shift in partner universities has influenced the selection of study programme lecturers (SER,, p. 80). Latvian Military Service Law mandates the rotation of military posts, affecting NDAL's military teaching staff composition. This rotation is designed to maintain the high professionalism of NAF soldiers, prevent routine, and ensure continuous intellectual development through new professional knowledge and skills at each duty station (SER, p. 80; interview with Programme Directors). Specific courses are led by one lecturer and then passed on to another based on military experience (SER, p. 80). Civilian tutors, however, are not changed mid-course (ibid). The number of guest lecturers varies yearly, reflecting the inclusion of elective courses (ibid). Whilst this approach of rotation, from one lecturer to the next (after five years), is a positive aspect of teaching at the NDAL it does currently rely on individual members of academic staff taking responsibility to 'pass over' to their successor pedagogic information and teaching materials - there is no formal mechanism in place to do so (interviews with teaching staff). The Expert Group therefore recommends that the NDAL implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming staff.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. It is difficult to provide confirmation of this requirement as academic staff on the AFML are also shared with the other two Bachelor's programmes and the Master's programme. There are also a number of guest lecturers used and military rotation means that many staff change every five years. Furthermore, as already noted, there have been significant changes to the programme in recent years which have affected staffing. However, looking at the situation as of May 2024 (Annex 2.3.1 of the SER, in conjunction with Annex 2.3.2 CV ENG). The Expert Group notes that there are currently eleven lecturers exclusively devoted to the AFML programme (that is only to teach AFML students). These have either published in peer-reviewed publications (for example in the 'Transport and Telecommunication' and 'Aviation' journals) and/or have the requisite practical experience. Academic staff are also encouraged to write at least one article per year for the student newspaper (interview with Programme Directors).

2.4.5. There appears to be good cooperation between the NDAL and its partner organisation the ITC (in terms of delivery of the AFML programme). (SER, p. 70 and p. 81; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). This helps ensure the aims of the achievement of the study programme. As with the other study programmes, lecturers from the AFML also contribute to other programmes (Annex 2.3.1 of SER, interviews with academic teaching staff) at the Academy and this can only enhance the potential cooperation between the armed forces after

graduation. Academic staff are also periodically gathered together to discuss cooperation across programmes, not only formally (e.g. through the Study Council) but also more informally (interviews with academic teaching staff).

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

Conclusions:

Since the previous accreditation in 2013, the AFML study programme has seen significant changes, including new partner universities and modifications in military and academic staff composition. Initially partnering with RTU, the programme has collaborated with the ITC since 2016. The AFML study programme involves both academic staff and NAF specialists, including lecturers from the ITC. The programme has a notable number of lecturers with advanced degrees. Among the lecturers, there are several with doctoral degrees and many with master's degrees. The academic staff is shared with other Bachelor's programmes in the study field and the Master's programme, with many staff members rotating every five years. Latvian Military Service Law mandates the rotation of military posts, affecting the composition of the NDAL's military teaching staff. This rotation aims to maintain professionalism, prevent routine, and ensure continuous intellectual development. Specific courses are led by one lecturer and then passed on to another based on military experience. The number of guest lecturers varies yearly, reflecting the inclusion of elective courses. The engagement of AFML academic teaching staff in scientific and research work is difficult to fully assess but appears largely satisfactory. Academic staff periodically discuss cooperation across programmes both formally and informally. The English language capability of the academic staff meets national requirements and the programme's demand.

Strengths:

- 1) Well-qualified staff: The AFML study programme boasts a significant number of lecturers with advanced degrees, comparable to other Western military academies, ensuring high academic standards.
- 2) Integration of academic and military expertise: The programme involves both academic staff and National Armed Forces (NAF) specialists, providing a balanced approach to theoretical and practical military education.
- 3) Relevant expertise: The doctoral and master's degrees held by the faculty are mostly in relevant fields such as 'Aviation Transport', ensuring that the knowledge imparted is directly applicable to the cadets' future roles.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The military rotation system results in staff changes every five years, which can affect continuity and consistency in teaching. This also applies to guest lecturers and the varying number of elective courses offered yearly.

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: Fully compliant

There is a good mix of academic staff and NAF specialists, from ITC and AFML, including several with advanced degrees. Significant changes have occurred since 2013, including new partner universities and a rotational system for military teaching staff.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

- 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 generally fulfills the criteria outlined for the Professional Higher Education (Regulation Nr. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (AF annex 3.2.1). However, there are no dedicated courses for Environmental Protection as mandated by law to be a mandatory part. NDAL has included some aspects in the B part course "Human Factor, Safety and Labour Protection". Nonetheless, the course content, which includes topics like "Social psychology" only partially covers environmental protection. It is important that an environmental protection topic (subject) is added in the nearest future of no less than 1 CP.

- 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: Fully compliant

The study programme is compliant with the sixth level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (6. LQF) for professional qualifications, as well as is applicable with qualification to be obtained - "Lieutenant" (AF annex 3.2.2).

- 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

The study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the language in which the programme is implemented - Latvian, are also available in English, and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (AF annex 3.2.5).

- 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

Diploma sample for completing the study programme is in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents (Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers).

- 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 - 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

Attestation signed by the NDAL Rector verifies that the proficiency level in the state language of the academic staff involved in delivering the study programme meets the requirements of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of July 7, 2009 No. 733 "Rules on the amount of knowledge of the national language, the procedure for testing the national language proficiency and the state fee for the national language proficiency test" (annex 2.3.3). At the same time, it should be mentioned that the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No. 733 is no longer in force and has been replaced by Regulation Nr. 157 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language". While the requirement is fully compliant, the document must be revised in accordance with the new legal framework.

- 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

Sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement and requirements of the Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution for Obtaining Education Necessary for the Performance of Official Duties and for Reimbursement of Education Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses (Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 2.1.5)

- 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

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia as represented by the NDAL has signed a Memorandum of Intent with General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (MAL), which include provisions of MAL's capacity to provide the possibility to complete degree studies for NDAL cadets in case of termination of the study programme "Air Forces Military Leadership" by enrolling in MAL's academic Bachelor's study programmes "National security and defence",

“Defence technology management”, as well as in programmes prospectively registered in the study field of “Defence Studies”. Under these circumstances, the NDAL and the MAL will initiate an agreement between The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia and The Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, determining the status of NDAL students in Lithuania and other relevant provisions. In such a case, the MAL will offer the possibility for NDAL students to conclude a degree in MAL's study programmes in English language (annex 2.1.3).

- 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

Explanation on compensation of damage provided by NDAL states that, based on the Paragraph 12 of the Regulation No. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers “Rules of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia”, Paragraph 3 of the Regulation No. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers “Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution to Obtain Education Necessary for the Execution of Official Duties and for Covering Educational Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses”, the first paragraph of Section 48 of the Law on Military Service and the first sentence of Section 49 of the Law on Military Service, a soldier receives a soldier's remuneration during the direct performance of his military service (including during his studies at the NDAL) and is also partially dependent on the State for maintenance, rent compensation, uniform and necessary service equipment, and a soldier does not finance his/her own studies at a military educational institution (the National Armed Forces finance the tuition fees from the state budget funds allocated to the Ministry of Defence for this purpose), therefore, if a study programme is not accredited or the study programme licence is revoked due to an action (act or omission) of the higher education institution and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme, he/she shall not suffer any loss (annex 2.1.4).

- 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: Fully compliant

Generally, the study programme complies with the specific regulatory framework of the military sector, including criterions:

- 1) Number of students, recruitment of students, conclusion of student contracts (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Section 18, Paragraph 2 of the Military Service Law, Section 10 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia" and Section 6 of the Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedures by which a soldier of the professional service is sent to an educational institution for the acquisition of education necessary for the performance of official duties and training expenses covered, as well as the procedure for the reimbursement of such expenses").
- 2) Academic staff (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Sections 16 (16.3) and 17 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations

on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

3) NDAL Constitution (Section 10, Paragraph 10 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Regulation Nr. 576 of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the Approval of the Constitution of the National Defence Academy of Latvia". It should be noted, however, that this Regulation (Nr. 576) is no longer in force and the new legislation - Regulation Nr. 447 of the Cabinet of Ministers, must now be considered. Nevertheless, since it was approved on 11.06.2024, NDAL appropriately adhered to the correct legislation when applying for accreditation).

4) NDAL governing bodies (Section 12, Paragraph 3; Section 14.1. Paragraph 17 and Section 14.2. Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, and Paragraph 1, Parts 1.1. and 1.2. of of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

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: Fully compliant

While the study programme largely complies with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, it falls short in providing courses specifically designed for Environmental Protection, which the law mandates as a mandatory part. This is a mandatory requirement, and should be addressed in very short order with a topic or a course to be integrated in the program.

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

Conclusions:

The "Air Forces Military Leadership" (42863) study programme aligns with national requirements and the criteria for the study field. It aims to train junior officers of the Latvian Air Forces, with learning outcomes regularly reviewed based on active collaboration with the Air Forces. The review process, guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council, is robust but could benefit from further alignment with SQF-MILOF and the NATO officer generic training reference curriculum. Adoption of NATO SAT could also enhance the programme's responsiveness and efficiency. The programme's structure includes technical competencies required by the Air Forces, with leadership education delivered by NDAL and supported by other Latvian military structures. Development closely involves the sole employer, influencing practice and thesis topic selection. The Programme Director ensures quality assurance, but additional standardization of teaching requirements could improve guidance for teaching staff. Instructors are trained in didactics, though a standardized qualification package is recommended due to rapid staff turnover. Internships in cadets' future service areas align with armed forces needs and are a programme strength.

The NDAL students have access to all necessary resources and materials, with sufficient funding for the study process, although the programme has not set a minimum number of students and programme costs are high. Since 2013, the AFML programme has undergone significant changes, including new partner universities and modifications in staff composition. Collaboration with ITC since 2016 has influenced lecturer selection. The programme involves both academic staff and NAF specialists, including lecturers from ITC, with many holding advanced degrees.

The academic staff, shared with other Bachelor's and Master's programmes, rotates every five years as mandated by Latvian Military Service Law. Courses are led by one lecturer and passed on based on military experience. The number of guest lecturers varies yearly, reflecting elective courses. While assessing scientific and research engagement is challenging, it appears satisfactory.

Academic staff discuss cooperation across programmes formally and informally, and their English language capability meets national and programme demands.

The AFML study programme generally meets the necessary regulatory requirements, but it lacks mandatory courses in Environmental Protection.

The main strengths and weaknesses of the AFML programme are:

Strengths:

- 1) Alignment with National Requirements: The programme is well-aligned with national standards and effectively prepares junior officers for service in the Latvian Air Forces.
- 2) Advanced Qualifications: The academic staff includes a significant number of lecturers with advanced degrees, enhancing the programme's academic quality.
- 3) Employer Integration: The close involvement of the Air Forces in the programme development ensures that the curriculum meets current military needs.
- 4) Resource Availability: The NDAL provides all necessary resources and materials, ensuring that students can achieve the desired study outcomes.
- 5) Professional Development: The mandated rotation of military posts ensures continuous intellectual development and prevents professional stagnation.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Scientific Engagement: The engagement of academic staff in scientific and research work is difficult to assess and could probably be strengthened.
- 2) Standardisation of Didactics: Although instructors are trained in didactics, a standardized qualification package is recommended due to rapid staff turnover.
- 3) High Programme Costs: The programme costs are high, and there is no set minimum number of students, which could impact financial sustainability.
- 4) Lack of Mobility Windows: The programme lacks dedicated mobility windows, limiting opportunities for international study periods.

Evaluation of the study programme "Air Forces Military Leadership"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Air Forces Military Leadership"

Short-term recommendations

1) Implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming staff. Ensure all departing staff complete the mentorship documentation before rotation. Allocate one month at the end of each staff member's term for transition activities and mentorship documentation. Roll out the mentorship programme within the next academic year and review its effectiveness annually.

2) To manage AFML programme costs, a financial review should be conducted to identify and implement any possible cost-saving measures without compromising quality. This review should be completed by the end of 2024, with the goal of reducing programme costs by 10% over the next two years. By optimizing resource allocation, negotiating better terms with suppliers, and exploring alternative funding sources, the programme can ensure it remains financially sustainable and accessible to students.

3) Conduct a comprehensive analysis within the next six months to assess the appropriateness and feasibility of restructuring the programme. The analysis should also determine the competencies that should be common to all students and cadets, as defined by SQF-MILOF, and those specific to AFML students/cadets. Furthermore, the analysis should explore the potential of optimizing the current 'A, B, C' programme structure to better comply with the Military Defence professional standard, which is currently under review. The analysis should specifically consider adopting a modular approach to competencies that reflects the eight core competencies of SQF-MILOF.

4) Conduct a comprehensive audit of the current course offerings within the next six months to identify and address any gaps related to Environmental Protection content. Ensure that all course descriptions and materials are updated to meet regulatory requirements, with a minimum of one CP.

Long-term recommendations

1) Introduce 'mobility windows', dedicated periods for international study should be integrated into the curriculum. This initiative should be developed within the next two years, with student exchanges beginning soon after. The goal is to establish partnerships with at least three international military academies and enable at least 20% of students to participate in mobility programmes each year. By negotiating agreements with partner institutions and providing logistical support for participating students, the programme can enhance international collaboration and broaden students' training and educational experiences.

II - "Naval Forces Military Leadership" ASSESSMENT

II - "Naval Forces Military Leadership" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. The Professional Bachelor study programme "Naval Forces Military Leadership" (42863) is unique to the NDAL nationally, and content-wise is fully compliant to the study field requirements. The Expert Group was made aware of the process of professional standard review and development, where the NDAL may provide important input (interviews with management). This process could become a basis for the curriculum review. One direction of further development would be to see how the programme (and the standards) can be structured from the point of view of SQF-MILOF and NATO Officer training reference curricula.

Overall, NDAL implements its programmes uniformly, a key feature of NDAL program development and implementation is the integration with employers: the Commandant holds monthly meetings with the Chief of Defence, oversees the entire Training and Doctrine Command for flexible resource allocation, and appoints Programme Directors and teachers from relevant forces (interviews with management).

The EG was informed that currently the professional standard is under review (interviews with management). As the programme is further developed the NDAL should seek a proactive role in advising the standard development team to focus on aligning the programme with SQF-MILOF and NATO Officer training reference curricula.

Programme Directors are officers rotated from the Navy; their role is critical in maintaining close cooperation with the employers, ensuring the programme rapidly adapts to their needs, preparing

graduates for immediate service. The programme aims to develop competencies related to Latvia's EU/NATO participation. Structuring the programme to facilitate regularised exchanges, such as through EMILYO, could enhance students' understanding of EU/NATO defence aspects.

2.1.2. Graduates of the "Naval Forces Military Leadership" programme receive a Professional Bachelor's qualification in Military Defence (code: 42863). The programme aims to prepare students as mid-level managers/commanders with strong leadership skills, high motivation, and professional competence for military service in the NAF and EU/NATO multinational units. The NDAL plans to review the programme modules (SER, Annex 3.5.1). Currently, while the learning outcomes correlate with SQF-MILOF, they are not explicitly connected. It is also important to stress that SQF-MILOF is a document that provides a framework from programmes in their entirety, and a comprehensive approach to programme review is advised, rather than reviewing modules separately. The programme's courses adhere to the Latvian professional standard for military officers, though this standard is notably concise and lacks the detailed competency breakdown found in SQF-MILOF across different branches or service levels. While the learning outcomes do align with SQF-MILOF, this connection is not explicitly stated, and the criteria for awarding CPs in relation to various officer core competencies remain unclear.

Admission requirements are based on criteria for Latvian armed forces service members, as students are considered service members during their studies. The programme is conducted in Latvian, which is justified as junior officers perform their duties in the national language. However, students can participate in exchanges and earn credits in English, particularly through the EMILYO initiative's common modules (SER, pp. 54-56). The programme, though, currently lacks a mobility window or a designated period, such as for writing the final thesis, to accommodate longer international study periods.

A generally accepted principle of programme design is to plan 60 ECTS for a full-time study programme over 10 months. Latvian regulations may permit different CP allocations per year, but the EG notes that the CPs were likely set during the transition to the CP system. It is advisable to identify competencies common to all students/cadets (via SQF-MILOF) and those specific to Navy student/cadets, which could also facilitate the development of a permanent staff for common training requirements. Due to their status as active-duty soldiers, cadets may be subjected to additional training demands, particularly when continuous field training is essential for competency development. However, the total time spent on training and studies should not exceed an average of 48 hours per week over the academic year, even with periods of intensified training. This equates to a workload that is 20 percent higher than that of civilian studies, with the potential to add another 10 percent during the 11th study month. In this context, a full-time program that is 30 percent more intensive seems to represent an acceptable workload limit for serving soldiers, allowing the Latvian Military Academy to implement programs of up to 80 CPs per year.

However, a program requiring 273 CPs over four years to achieve a bachelor's qualification imposes demanding requirements on students. Under these circumstances, a three-year formal education program that leads to a qualification could be feasible, with additional branch-specific training provided as non-formal or post-graduate education.

2.1.3. The review of the NFML study programme relies significantly on the efforts of the Programme Directors, with the NDAL Study Council ensuring that any changes align with QA standards, as evidenced by the self-evaluation report (SER, pp. 29-30) and interviews with management staff and Programme Directors. The NDAL has strategically opted for limited changes to the programme. Implementing NATO SAT could enhance their responsiveness, allowing them to identify and remove courses that may not be necessary for the current training level.

The programme, in its current form, has been implemented since 2017 (SER, p. 106). However, its structure and shift to ECTS have led to significant variation in course size and complexity, with

courses ranging from one to 10 credit points (CPs). This variation underscores the critical role of Programme Directors. Establishing a mechanism to structure courses not only by topic but also by competency complexity and sequence would greatly benefit the programme. This approach could also facilitate the creation of common courses (a universal basic requirement) for all Military Defence field programmes, as per SQF-MILOF, enabling the development of a full-time teaching staff. This would ensure consistent education quality and provide essential support for the Programme Directors.

Currently, the programme relies on instructors from other NAF structures, necessitating extensive coordination and complicating the maintenance of course quality.

2.1.4. The NFML study programme is uniquely tailored to meet the specific requirements set by the Latvian Navy, providing a solid justification for its existence. However, the programme heavily relies on outsourced services due to the stringent facility requirements. Maintaining such facilities within the Academy would be uneconomical given the small number of cadets. The Expert Group notes that the number of service providers in Latvia is limited, suggesting that exploring other cooperation arrangements could enhance study quality assurance through alternative means.

Upon enrollment, all students immediately become professional service members with guaranteed employment and a lifelong career in the Latvian armed (naval) forces. The programme is exclusively designed to train officers for the Latvian armed forces, with enrollment planning based on projected officer needs. Consequently, 100 percent of graduates are expected to serve for a nationally mandated minimum period. The number of students is growing, and employment is guaranteed for all (interviews with management; SER, NF Annex 3.1.2.).

The programme enrolls up to 20 students/cadets, with the number of enrollments increasing in recent years (from 14 to 19) (SER; NF Annex 3.1.2). The dropout rate peaked during the COVID-19 period. In recent years, five to nine student/cadets have graduated from the programme, with the number of graduates projected to consistently increase.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

Conclusions:

The study programme aligns with national requirements and complies with the study field criteria. Future programme development could benefit from aligning with SQF-MILOF and NATO officer generic training reference curriculum. The programme review process is robust, guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council. Adopting NATO SAT could enhance responsiveness and efficiency. The programme's economic and social justification is solid, with a growing student body and guaranteed employment for graduates, reflecting its success in meeting MoD and armed forces requirements.

Overall, the programme is in-line with national requirements, however further work on the structure and course delivery standardisation could be advantageous to the Academy.

Strengths:

- 1) The programme is necessary and justified.
- 2) The stakeholder engagement is commendable.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The programme still requires a review vis-a-vis SQF-MILOF, and other programmes in the field, which would allow identifying common competencies for students/cadets.
- 2) The programme relies heavily on teachers (instructors) from other structures of NAF and

outsourced education, which leads to increased workload on the Programme Directors, and requires separate consideration within the NDAL QP.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The programme is subdivided into three parts: A, B, and C. Part A is mandatory, focusing on officer leadership, and is implemented directly by NDAL with support from teachers (instructors) from other NAF structures. Part B is procured annually, with procurement requirements under continuous review. Part C comprises electives. Employers maintain a close relationship with NDAL and contribute their needs, which are considered in programme development (interviews with management, interviews with employers).

The current arrangements ensure that the programme content remains relevant and is regularly updated. However, the programme's structure, particularly regarding course size, the possibility of mobility windows, and alignment with SQF-MILOF, could be improved. A better-structured programme would facilitate more consistent implementation of quality processes and help guide teachers and instructors towards a common understanding of course delivery quality and standards. Currently, course standardization relies heavily on the course director, who already has a substantial workload.

Overall, the programme's courses are complementary, align with the programme objectives, and ensure the achievement of learning outcomes, meeting the needs of employers.

As noted in section 2.1.2, student/cadet workload planning can differ significantly from that of civilian institutions, with the Expert Group (EG) estimating it to be up to 30 percent higher, potentially reaching 80 ECTS per year. This increased workload is due to the unique status of student/cadets as active duty soldiers (airmen, seamen). As a result, the programme is more demanding, requiring 278 CPs over 4.5 years of training. Additionally, the programme is divided into an exceptionally large number of individual courses. Despite these efforts, the EG believes that the programme only needs minor changes to fully comply with the state education standard (No. 305), particularly concerning education on environmental regulations and requirements, to introduce at least 1 CP topic in its courses to make sure of complete alignment..

While the 'A, B, C' structure of the programme satisfies professional standard requirements, it includes far more subjects than the standard specifies. The EG was informed that the Military Defence Professional Standard is currently under review. In light of this, it is important to emphasize that such a review presents an opportunity to reconsider the program's architecture. This could better align it with regulation No. 305 by: i) adopting a modular approach to competencies that reflects the eight core competencies of SQF-MILOF (e.g., creating courses worth 4 and 8 CP, or 6 and 9, or 5 and 10 CP, with a lead teacher responsible for assessing the entirety of the acquired competence), which would simplify cadet scheduling and assessment; ii) establishing a single formal programme aligned with SQF-MILOF that delivers a Bachelor's qualification after three years, including branch-specific training where the profession is regulated (e.g., pilots). This would ensure that basic officer education meets the highest standards across all branches.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. All military instructors complete a basic didactics course (as confirmed in interviews with academic teaching staff) and are capable of delivering courses. However, a standardized qualification package may be recommended to establish a common minimum standard for all teachers, given the rapid turnover of teaching staff at NDAL.

There is a lack of evidence indicating that faculty development is occurring consistently. The frequent changes in teaching staff and the absence of their direct affiliation with NDAL necessitate a

focused effort on standardizing course requirements. Providing clear guidance for teaching staff in course delivery and supporting them with didactics training, when necessary, is advisable.

As noted in section 2.2.1, the program architecture seems to have retained elements from the transition to the current CP structure, suggesting that a more comprehensive review of the programme, possibly in conjunction with other Bachelor's programmes, would be beneficial. From this perspective, the SQF-MILOF standard could support a streamlined three-year Bachelor's degree for all students/cadets, with branch-specific training occurring afterward. This approach could also help mitigate risks associated with outsourcing parts of the training to external providers, where ensuring consistent quality assurance for NDAL may be challenging.

The programme's division into numerous small courses has the drawback of limiting teachers' ability to familiarise themselves with cadets and to assess their competencies holistically. Adopting a modular approach, where larger CP courses encompass multiple smaller topics, would help develop and strengthen a dedicated professional core of teachers within the NDAL. These teachers could assess cadets across various subjects and provide didactic support when students/cadets are studying under the guidance of visiting instructors.

2.2.4. Student/Cadets gain practical experience in the locations where they will eventually serve (interviews with graduates), making this aspect of the programme its major strength. Upon graduation, students/cadets are expected to assume leadership roles as junior officers. Students during their practice serve on Navy vessels, or in other Naval units and have the possibility to develop a thorough understanding of their future duties before graduating (interviews with graduates). The internships are well-regulated, with active oversight from both students and employers to ensure compliance (SER, p. 153).

The number of CP's awarded to cadets for internships is 46, with the internship split over multiple modules at different levels of service duties. The final internship takes place in the provisional position of appointment.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Students are encouraged and do write thesis on topics relevant to the armed forces, the forces are closely engaged in this process and provide topic guidance. Most work topics are related to future jobs (interviews with students, interview with Programme Directors).

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

Conclusions:

The study programme relies on procurement of courses, which develop technical competencies required for the Naval officers, while the remainder of the programme is delivered by the NDAL, with support of teachers (instructors) from other Latvian military structures. The process of programme development closely involves the sole employer, including practice and thesis topic selection. The Programme Director plays a critical role in QA, and additional standardisation of the programme and requirements to teaching may provide better guidance to the teaching staff.

Overall, the study programme content is relevant and meets armed forces requirements, with employer needs integrated into the curriculum. All instructors are trained in didactics, though a standardised qualification package is recommended due to the fact that many of the teaching staff are not directly affiliated with the NDAL, and do not, as a matter of routine, participate in faculty development activities. Internships, conducted in the students/cadets' future service areas, are a programme strength. These topics are aligned with armed forces needs, with close guidance from the forces.

Strengths:

- 1) Multiple internships, including in the prospective positions of appointment after graduation.
- 2) Thesis topics directly related to employers' needs.
- 2) The programme aligns with the professional standard, and employee requirements.
- 3) Guaranteed and required service period after graduation.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Need to review the study field and the programme vis-a-vis the SQF-MILOF standards.
- 2) Lack of assurance concerning the minimum basic level of teaching competence of teachers within the programme.

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. Note at the outset that it is the opinion of the Expert Group that without an on-site visit to Novikontas Maritime College, as well as Navy Training Centre and training ship M-07 VISVALDIS, it is impossible to fully assess whether the technical base adequately supports the defined training objectives. Consequently, this section refers primarily to the Programme Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and interviews conducted, rather than relying on the personal experience of the Expert Group members, which includes previous work with the Armed Forces and visits to Navy installations. Experts recommend that in any future accreditation a site visit should be made to significant external specialist partners for this programme.

NFML programme students have access to an impressive range of resources in terms of infrastructure and materiel provided by the Navy, NAVY Training center and Novikontas Maritime College (NMC) (NFML SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interview with employers, interviews with graduates). Classrooms, different types of laboratories, including different types of simulators available at NJK and Navy TC (NFML SER Section 3.3.1., interviews with students, interviews with graduates). Training ship M-07 VISVALDIS provides trainees with the opportunity to learn the equipment, technical means, layout of rooms and living conditions on board the Imanta-class ships in the Navy (SER NFML SER Section 3.3.1., interview with employers, interview with Programme Directors). The NDAL library and other resources are available and coordinated by management between study programmes (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). Excellent technical and material base at Navy installations and partner higher educational institution NMC, providing best in-country possibilities to ensure high-quality study process and achieve learning outcomes. Financial provision complies with the specific requirements of the programme and supports achieving learning outcomes (interview with Programme Directors, interviews with graduates).

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. Part B subjects of the NFML study programme are implemented in a civilian maritime institution of higher education, which complies best with the requirements of the NDAL and wins the

procurement organized by the NAF (NFML SER Section 3.3.3.). According to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 643 "Regulations of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia", the number of students is planned by the Ministry of Defence in the medium term, but determined by the Chief of Defence for each academic year, therefore, the minimum number of students is not set for the Academy to ensure the profitability of the study programmes. (NFML SER Section 3.3.3., interview with Programme Directors). The cost of all credit points for one student is EUR 12,252.07 EUR (NFML SER Financial Annex). The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students (NFML SER Section 3.3.3.).

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

Conclusions:

NFML students are fully provided with information, technical and material bases necessary to achieve the study results. The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students and programme costs are quite high.

Strengths:

- 1) Additional resources provided by the partner higher educational institution, selected through separate procurement.
- 2) Additional resources and technical base available for students and their internship provided by the Navy and Navy Training centre.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The NFML programme costs are high in comparison to the Land Forces Military leadership programme.

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: Fully compliant

Due to the Latvian Navy support and partner HEI technical and materiel base, based on existing contracts, the study programme provides all required material, technical base and financial resources to achieve programme goals and learning outcomes.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. The teaching staff for the NFML study programme align with the positions designated by the NDAL according to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (SER, p. 159). There is significant cooperation between the NDAL and the Novikontas Maritime College in the teaching of the NFML (SER, p. 41). To enhance qualifications, the NDAL facilitates participation in various professional development activities both locally and internationally (SER, p.160; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). Faculty members are encouraged to engage in lifelong learning through additional courses at the University of Latvia (SER, pp. 161-162; interviews with academic teaching staff). However, the adequacy of teaching staff qualifications seems to be

evaluated largely through assessing the students' acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies, with feedback from students and employer surveys reviewed by programme directors, rather than in more direct ways (such as classroom observation) (SER, pp. 159-160; interviews with academic teaching staff). The Study Department of NDAL analyzes these surveys and learning outcome achievements (SER, p. 160). While student feedback and employer surveys are collected and reviewed, the process for how this feedback translates into actionable improvements isn't detailed. The NFML programme involves 45 staff members for the 'Vessel Driving' specialisation and 47 for the 'Ship Mechanics' specialisation. The former staff includes eight lecturers, 23 guest lecturers, nine tutors, four senior researchers, and one researcher (with six lecturers and seven researchers appointed by NDA) (SER, p. 160). The later specialisation staff includes eight lecturers, 23 guest lecturers, 11 tutors, four senior researchers, and one researcher (with six lecturers and seven researchers appointed by NDAL). While the programme includes a significant number of lecturers, guest lecturers, and researchers, there appears to be a potential over-reliance on guest lecturers. The NDAL claims in its SER that it adjusts teaching staff as needed, emphasising the involvement of professionals with master's degrees. Most teaching staff also work in national defence, vessel driving, or ship mechanics, ensuring that students receive both theoretical and practical knowledge (SER, interviews with academic teaching staff).

2.4.2. There have been significant changes since the last assessment of the study programme (in 2013). Firstly the total number of staff dedicated to the 'Ships Mechanics' specialisation has grown significantly (c. 25%) whereas the number dedicated to 'Vessel Driving' has remained roughly the same (calculation based on data in SER, p. 160). Secondly the number of staff who hold a Masters level qualification has grown by approximately 50% (ibid). The NFML programme involves NDAL lecturers, visiting lecturers, as well as partner maritime organisations (such as the Latvian Maritime Medical Centre, the JSMC). As with the two other Bachelor's study programmes, changes in the teaching staff are significantly influenced by NAF regulations, which mandate a change of position for professional service soldiers every five years to prevent stagnation and promote new skill acquisition (SER, p. 80; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). Additionally, cooperation with maritime educational institutions impacts lecturer changes, as many teaching staff are highly qualified specialists who continue their professional careers in maritime transport alongside their scientific work (SER, p. 161). Whilst this approach of rotation, from one lecturer to the next (after five years), is a positive aspect of teaching at the NDAL it does currently rely on individual members of academic staff taking responsibility to 'pass over' to their successor pedagogic information and teaching materials - there is no formal mechanism in place to do so (interviews with teaching staff). The Expert Group therefore recommends that the NDAL implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming staff.

2.4.4. It is difficult to provide confirmation of this requirement as academic staff on the NFML are also shared with the other two Bachelor's programmes and the Master's programme. There are also a number of guest lecturers used and military rotation means that many staff change every five years. Furthermore, as already noted, there have been significant changes to the programme in recent years which have affected staffing. However, looking at the situation as of May 2024 (Annex 2.3.1 of the SER, in conjunction with Annex 2.3.2 CV ENG) experts note that there are currently 20 lecturers exclusively devoted to the NFML programme (that is only teach NFML students). Most have either published in peer-reviewed publications and/or have the requisite practical experience. However, a significant minority (four) do not appear (on examination of their CVs) to meet either of these criteria.

2.4.5. The NFML study programme involves academic staff from NDAL, NAF military experts,

specialists from the maritime industry and guest lecturers from other universities (SER, pp. 160-161; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). The NDAL organizes annual study planning seminars to review and synchronize study programmes in the overall "Military Defence" field, of which the NFML is part (interview with Programme Directors). Teaching staff attend various professional development events both locally and internationally to stay updated on trends in higher and military education, including NAF NF specialization (interviews with academic teaching staff).

There is strong collaboration between NDAL instructors and NAF Regular Forces professionals, enhancing NF industry study courses and internships (interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with employers). Maritime industry courses are provided by cooperative institutions with experienced shipmasters or mechanics. Cadets gain practical seafaring skills on NAF Naval Forces ships (SER, p.162; interviews with employers).

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

Conclusions:

The NFML study programme benefits from collaboration between the NDAL and Novikontas Maritime College, supported by a diverse group of lecturers, guest lecturers, and maritime industry experts. The teaching staff participate in local and international professional development activities, enhancing their qualifications and ensuring a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge. This cooperation and continuous learning foster a strong educational and training environment for the students.

Despite the advantages, the programme faces challenges such as a potential over-reliance on guest lecturers and frequent staff rotations mandated by NAF regulations. The assessment of teaching staff qualifications relies heavily on student outcomes and feedback, with limited use of direct observation. While feedback is collected, the process for implementing it into actionable improvements is not clearly defined.

Overall, teaching on the NFML programme has adapted well to changes, including increased collaboration with partner institutions and growth in qualified staff. The programme ensures that students receive comprehensive training, combining academic knowledge with practical skills, preparing them effectively for careers in the maritime industry and national maritime defence.

Strengths:

- 1) Lifelong learning encouragement: NFML teaching staff are encouraged to engage in lifelong learning through additional courses at the University of Latvia, promoting continuous professional growth.
- 2) Increase in qualified staff: Since the last assessment, there has been a significant increase in the number of staff who hold a Master's level qualification, reflecting an improvement in academic standards.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Evaluation methods: The adequacy of teaching staff qualifications is evaluated largely through assessing students' acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies, with feedback from students and employer surveys. There is a lack of more direct evaluation methods, such as classroom observation.
- 2) Over-reliance on guest lecturers: There appears to be a potential over-reliance on guest lecturers, which could affect the consistency and quality of the teaching.
- 3) Insufficient direct evidence of qualifications: A significant minority of lecturers do not appear to meet the criteria of having published in peer-reviewed publications or having the requisite practical experience, based on their CVs.

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: Fully compliant

Four members of the teaching staff assigned to the NFML programme do not appear to meet the requirement of having published in peer-reviewed journals, including international editions, within the past six years, or of having five years of practical experience, outside of their involvement in the implementation of the study programme (SER, Annex 2.3.2 CV ENG). However, the Expert Group does not consider this a critical issue and concludes that it does not negatively affect the overall delivery of the programme. As such, it can be concluded that the requirement R7 is met.

Nevertheless, this situation highlights the importance of ensuring that teaching appointments at the NDAL are filled by officers who fully comply with national requirements. If needed, appropriate training should be provided at the start of their teaching deployment, and this should become a standard aspect of the Academy's quality assurance processes. For those officers who currently do not meet the qualification requirements, additional training should be arranged as a matter of priority.

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 generally fulfills the criteria outlined for the Professional Higher Education (Regulation Nr. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (NF annex 3.2.1). However, there are no dedicated courses for Environmental Protection as mandated by law to be a mandatory part. NDAL has included some aspects in the B part course "Protection of Marine Environment". However, the course content primarily focuses on maritime-specific topics, lacking a broader focus on overall environmental protection. It is important that an environmental protection topic (subject) is added in the near future of no less than 1 CP.

- 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: Fully compliant

The study programme is compliant with the sixth level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (6. LQF) for professional qualifications, as well as is applicable with qualification to be obtained - "Lieutenant" (NF annex 3.2.2).

- 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

The study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the language in which the programme is implemented - Latvian, are also available in English, and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (NF annex 3.2.5).

- 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

Diploma sample for completing the study programme is in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents (Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers).

- 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

Attestation signed by the NDAL Rector verifies that the proficiency level in the state language of the academic staff involved in delivering the study programme meets the requirements of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of July 7, 2009 No. 733 "Rules on the amount of knowledge of the national language, the procedure for testing the national language proficiency and the state fee for the national language proficiency test" (annex 2.3.3). At the same time, it should be mentioned that the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No. 733 is no longer in force and has been replaced by Regulation Nr. 157 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language". While the requirement is fully compliant, the document must be revised in accordance with the new legal framework.

- 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

Sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement and requirements of the Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution for Obtaining Education Necessary for the Performance of Official Duties and for Reimbursement of Education Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses (Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 2.1.5).

- 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

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia as represented by the NDAL has signed a Memorandum of Intent with General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (MAL), which include provisions of MAL's capacity to provide the possibility to complete degree studies for NDAL cadets in case of termination of the study programme "Naval Forces Military Leadership" by enrolling in MAL's academic Bachelor's study programmes "National security and defence", "Defence technology management", as well as in programmes prospectively registered in the study field of "Defence Studies". Under these circumstances, the NDAL and the MAL will initiate an agreement between The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia and The Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, determining the status of NDAL students in Lithuania and other relevant provisions. In such a case, the MAL will offer the possibility for NDAL students to conclude a degree in MAL's study programmes in English language (SER, Annex 2.1.3).

- 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

Explanation on compensation of damage provided by NDAL states that, based on the Paragraph 12 of the Regulation No. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Rules of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia", Paragraph 3 of the Regulation No. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution to Obtain Education Necessary for the Execution of Official Duties and for Covering Educational Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses", the first paragraph of Section 48 of the Law on Military Service and the first sentence of Section 49 of the Law on Military Service, a soldier receives a soldier's remuneration during the direct performance of his military service (including during his studies at the NDAL) and is also partially dependent on the State for maintenance, rent compensation, uniform and necessary service equipment, and a soldier does not finance his/her own studies at a military educational institution (the National Armed Forces finance the tuition fees from the state budget funds allocated to the Ministry of Defence for this purpose), therefore, if a study programme is not accredited or the study programme licence is revoked due to an action (act or omission) of the higher education institution and the student

does not wish to continue studies in another study programme, he/she shall not suffer any loss (SER, Annex 2.1.4).

- 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: Fully compliant

Generally, the study programme complies with the specific regulatory framework of the military sector, including criteria:

- 1) Number of students, recruitment of students, conclusion of student contracts (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Section 18, Paragraph 2 of the Military Service Law, Section 10 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia" and Section 6 of the Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedures by which a soldier of the professional service is sent to an educational institution for the acquisition of education necessary for the performance of official duties and training expenses covered, as well as the procedure for the reimbursement of such expenses").
- 2) Academic staff (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Sections 16 (16.3) and 17 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").
- 3) The NDAL Constitution (Section 10, Paragraph 10 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Regulation Nr. 576 of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the Approval of the Constitution of the National Defence Academy of Latvia". It should be noted, however, that this Regulation (Nr. 576) is no longer in force and the new legislation - Regulation Nr. 447 of the Cabinet of Ministers, must now be considered. Nevertheless, since it was approved on 11.06.2024, NDAL appropriately adhered to the correct legislation when applying for accreditation).
- 4) The NDAL governing bodies (Section 12, Paragraph 3; Section 14.1. Paragraph 17 and Section 14.2. Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, and Paragraph 1, Parts 1.1. and 1.2. of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

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: Fully compliant

While the study programme largely complies with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, it falls short in providing courses specifically designed for Environmental Protection, which the law mandates as a mandatory part. This issue should be addressed immediately.

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

Conclusions:

The "Naval Forces Military Leadership" (42863) (NFML) study programme aligns with national requirements and meets the criteria for its study field. The programme's strong economic and social

justification is evident in its growing student body and guaranteed employment for graduates, meeting the needs of the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces. The programme structure involves procuring courses to develop technical competencies required for naval officers, while the remainder is delivered by the NDAL with support from instructors in other Latvian military structures. Close involvement of the sole employer in practice and thesis topic selection ensures that the curriculum meets employer needs. The NFML programme has a robust review process, guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council, but adopting NATO SAT could enhance its responsiveness and efficiency.

Future development could benefit from aligning with SQF-MILOF and the NATO officer generic training reference curriculum.

While all instructors are trained in didactics, standardising the qualification package is recommended, especially for teaching staff not directly affiliated with the Academy. Internships in student/cadets' future service areas are a significant strength, aligning closely with armed forces needs and guided by the forces. Students are well-provided with the necessary information, technical, and material resources, although the programme has high costs and no set minimum number of students.

The NFML study programme benefits from collaboration between the NDAL and Novikontas Maritime College, supported by a diverse group of lecturers, guest lecturers, and maritime industry experts. Teaching staff participate in local and international professional development activities, enhancing their qualifications and ensuring a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge. This cooperation and continuous learning foster a strong educational and training environment.

Despite its strengths, the programme faces challenges such as potential over-reliance on guest lecturers and frequent staff rotations mandated by NAF regulations. The assessment of teaching staff qualifications relies heavily on student outcomes and feedback, with limited direct observation. Although feedback is collected, the process for implementing actionable improvements is not clearly defined.

Overall, the programme has adapted well to changes, increasing collaboration with partner institutions and growing its qualified staff. It ensures that students receive comprehensive training, combining academic knowledge with practical skills, effectively preparing them for careers in the maritime industry and national defence.

The NFML study programme generally meets the necessary regulatory requirements, but it lacks mandatory courses in Environmental Protection.

Strengths:

- 1) Alignment with national requirements and study field criteria.
- 2) Robust review process guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council.
- 3) Close involvement of the sole employer in programme development, ensuring the curriculum meets employer needs.
- 4) Comprehensive training that combines academic knowledge with practical skills.
Internships aligned with armed forces needs, providing valuable real-world experience.
- 5) Collaboration between the NDAL and Novikontas Maritime College, supported by a diverse group of lecturers, guest lecturers, and maritime industry experts.
- 6) Effective adaptation to changes, increasing collaboration with partner institutions and growing qualified staff.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Need for further alignment with SQF-MILOF and NATO officer generic training reference curriculum.
- 2) Potential over-reliance on guest lecturers.
- 3) Frequent staff rotations mandated by NAF regulations, which can disrupt continuity.

- 4) Assessment of teaching staff qualifications relies heavily on student outcomes and feedback, with limited direct observation of teaching.
- 5) Lack of a clearly defined process for implementing feedback into actionable improvements.
- 5) High programme costs and absence of a set minimum number of students.
- 6) Standardization of the qualification package for instructors is needed, especially for those not directly affiliated with NDAL.
- 7) Limited engagement of academic teaching staff in scientific and research work.
- 8) Absence of dedicated mobility windows for international study periods.

Evaluation of the study programme "Naval Forces Military Leadership"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Naval Forces Military Leadership"

Short-term recommendations

1) Conduct a thorough review of all CVs of those contributing significantly to the NFML programme to ensure they meet publication and practical experience criteria, and provide opportunities for those who do not, to improve their qualifications. Offer support for 'NFML teaching staff' members to publish research and gain additional practical experience through professional development programmes. Complete the initial review within three months and provide ongoing support to achieve the target within two years.

2) Conduct a comprehensive analysis within the next six months to assess the appropriateness and feasibility of restructuring the programme. The analysis should also determine the competencies that should be common to all students and cadets, as defined by SQF-MILOF, and those specific to Naval Forces Military Leadership students/cadets. This differentiation could support the development of a permanent staff dedicated to covering common training requirements. Furthermore, the analysis should explore the potential of optimizing the current 'A, B, C' programme structure to better comply with the Military Defence professional standard, which is currently under review.. The analysis should specifically consider adopting a modular approach to competencies that reflects the eight core competencies of SQF-MILOF. The final recommendation from this analysis should include whether to establish a single formal structure aligned with SQF-MILOF that grants a Bachelor's qualification after three years, incorporating branch-specific and professional training as necessary. The goal is to ensure that the basic officer education meets the highest standards across all military branches, with the entire process of analysis and possible plan of implementation to be completed within 18 months.

3) Implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming staff. Ensure all departing staff complete the mentorship documentation before rotation. Allocate one month at the end of each staff member's term for transition activities and mentorship documentation. Roll out the mentorship programme within the next academic year and review its effectiveness annually.

4) Integrating a formal evaluation and feedback process for guest lecturers will maintain high teaching quality and align guest lectures with programme goals. This process should involve collecting and analyzing feedback for all guest lecturers and incorporating specific metrics for their evaluation. Implementing this evaluation process within the next 12 to 24 months and reviewing guest lecturer performance annually thereafter will ensure that guest lecturers meet the programme's standards and contribute effectively to its objectives.

5) Conduct a comprehensive audit of the current course offerings within the next six months to identify and address any gaps related to Environmental Protection content. Ensure that all course descriptions and materials are updated to meet regulatory requirements, and achieve at least one CP.

Long-term recommendations

1) There is a need to standardise and enhance the teaching competence of all teachers/instructors. Developing and implementing a standardised qualification package will ensure a minimum basic level of teaching competence across the board. Utilising existing resources and training programmes to create this qualification package, all teachers/instructors should complete the standardized training and certification process within the next two to three years.. This approach will improve the quality and consistency of teaching throughout the programme.

2) Introduce 'mobility windows', dedicated periods for international study should be integrated into the curriculum. This initiative should be developed within the next two years, with student exchanges beginning soon after. The goal is to establish partnerships with at least three international military academies and enable at least 20% of students to participate in mobility programmes each year. By negotiating agreements with partner institutions and providing logistical support for participating students, the programme can enhance international collaboration and broaden students' training and educational experiences.

II - "Land Forces Military Leadership" ASSESSMENT

II - "Land Forces Military Leadership" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. The programme's design and structure reflect the strengths of the NDAL's governance. The NDAL Commandant, who is also the chief of the NAF Training and Doctrine Command, holds regular meetings with the Latvian Chief of Defence. This dual role facilitates the allocation of necessary resources and competences for the development and implementation of the programme and helps set training requirements directly aligned with the needs of the NAF. The programme is unique to NDAL at the national level and is fully compliant with study field requirements.

The Expert Group is aware that a professional standard review process is underway. Currently, lieutenants' competences are not differentiated by branch and do not explicitly relate to the SQF-MILOF or the NATO Basic Officer Training Reference Curriculum. The Expert Group encourages NDAL, as the sole provider, to collaborate with the appropriate part of the NAF (the sole employer of graduates) in aligning the national standard with international documents.

2.1.2. Graduates of the Land Forces Military Leadership programme (42863) (the 'LFML') earn a Bachelor's degree and the professional qualification of 'Lieutenant'. The programme is conducted in Latvian, aligning with the professional requirement that military activities are carried out in the national language. However, students/cadets also have the opportunity to participate in international modules where instruction is in English, facilitating broader engagement and learning. The programme's aims, objectives, and learning outcomes adhere to professional standards, as evidenced by comprehensive engagement with the armed forces command in developing

programme content. This collaboration is substantiated by interviews with employers and management staff, ensuring the curriculum meets the demands of military leadership roles.

While the programme currently lacks a dedicated mobility window for student/cadets, there are ongoing considerations to revise the programme structure to align with the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Military Officer Profession (SQF-MILOF). Such revisions could introduce mobility opportunities, thereby enhancing cadets' understanding of defence issues within the context of the EU and NATO.

The Expert Group (EG) evaluating the study field and its programmes recommends that the NDAL implement a unified leadership education component across all Bachelor and first-cycle studies. This unified approach should be followed by differentiation based on the specific needs of various military branches, ensuring targeted and effective leadership training. (Please see Recommendation 9 in section 1.7 of this report).

2.1.3. The key figure in the programme development is the Programme Director, who coordinates programme changes with stakeholders and applies for approval from the Academy Study Council. Currently the Director for the programme is also a Vice-Rector of the NDAL. Undertaking both of these functions simultaneously produces a significantly bigger workload than normal (interviews with the management staff, interviews with the programme directors). Introducing additional QA personnel and a separate position for the Programme Director would create grounds for a more nuanced and comprehensive programme development process.

The programme in its current form is being implemented since 2017 and corrections are of incremental nature, and courses rely heavily on teachers (instructors) from other defence structures, this requires significant coordination and standardisation of teaching requirements to ensure a uniform level and quality of course delivery.

2.1.4. The NDAL programmes are developed in close cooperation with the NAF; all cadets/students are professional NAF service members. All necessary resources to that end are planned and allocated in the Latvian national defence budget. All graduates are expected to sign a junior officers' service contract upon graduation. From this point of view the NDAL programmes are in-line with the requirements of the labour market. In recent years the LFML programme has seen a continuous increase in applicants and students (SER, NF Annex 3.1.2, Statistics on Students) socially justified.

The programme sees significant drop rates, which peaked during COVID, but were replaced by causes of academic failure. This is part of the programme design, as cadets have status of professional service members, and in case of study failure continue their service as enlisted personnel with the option of returning to complete their studies later on. This is a peculiarity of the programme, and should be clearly communicated to the candidates.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

Conclusions:

The study programme aligns with national requirements and complies with the study field criteria. However, future programme development could benefit from aligning with the SQF-MILOF and NATO officer generic training reference curriculum. The programme review process is robust, guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council. The programme's economic and social justification is solid, with a growing student body and guaranteed employment for graduates, reflecting its success in meeting MoD and armed forces requirements.

Appointing a Programme Director as a main position and additional QA support would be important in ensuring a uniform quality of course delivery, as NDAL relies in large part on the delivery of

courses from teachers (instructors) from other structures of NAF. Mobility window development could also be considered for greater opportunity to develop knowledge on EU/NATO aspects of defence.

Strengths:

- 1) The programme is necessary and justified.
- 2) The stakeholder engagement is commendable.
- 3) Internships are focused directly on tasks that will need to be done immediately after graduation.
- 4) Graduates are guaranteed and required to serve in positions directly related to the program contents.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The programme still requires a review vis-a-vis SQF-MILOF standards, and other programmes in the field, which would allow identifying common competencies for students/cadets.
- 2) The programme relies heavily on visiting teachers and outsourced education, which puts a significant workload on the Programme Directors, and which requires separate consideration within the NDA QP.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. Cadets/students of the programme are active duty service members. Their studies are focused on them taking up junior officer leadership positions after graduation. The NAF is closely engaged with the NDAL in discussing the programme content, and have been closely involved with the incremental development of the programme since 2017 e.g. SER p. 148, p. 155; interviews with employees).

The programme relies heavily on teachers (instructors) from other structures of NAF, and the study director has to coordinate the teaching staff rotations constantly, this creates a large workload, as well as risks that course delivery quality may vary significantly. Standardisation and training support for teaching staff based on data collected by an enhanced QA staff could aid in ensuring that these aspects of programme delivery do not become an issue.

The programme's courses align with the Latvian professional standard for military officers, though this standard is quite concise and does not provide the detailed competency breakdown found in SQF-MILOF for different branches or service levels. While the learning outcomes do correspond with SQF-MILOF, this connection is not explicitly stated, and the criteria for awarding CPs in relation to various officer core competencies remain unclear.

Important to note, that the EG considers a larger workload than 60 CP's/year acceptable, given that students/cadets are considered active duty soldiers, indeed, up to 80 CP's/year, this programme is better aligned to the study requirements generally present in academic institutions. This further points out the need for the NDAL to look into their programme curricula from the point of view of workload vis-a-vis the requirements that both SQF-MILOF and the national professional standard requires.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. All military instructors undergo a basic didactics course, as confirmed in interviews with academic teaching staff, which equips them to deliver courses effectively. However, the frequent rotation of teaching staff and the lack of direct affiliation with NDAL for many instructors indicate that standardizing teaching requirements and providing consistent training could be beneficial. This would ensure uniformity in course delivery. The programme employs diverse study methods,

including intensive hands-on field training at the NAF's training grounds. This training involves applying command procedures and using current equipment and weaponry employed by the land forces, which graduates will eventually oversee.

The programme's division into numerous small courses limits teachers' ability to get to know cadets and assess how their competencies interact. Adopting a modular approach, where larger CP courses encompass multiple smaller topics, would help develop and reinforce a dedicated core of professional teachers within the NDAL. These teachers could assess students/cadets across various subjects and provide didactic support when cadets are studying under the guidance of visiting instructors.

This programme was designed to be fully implemented within the NDAL, without parts of it being outsourced. Overall the 'new' setup appears to have been successful in creating a more coherent education for cadets as compared to the previous setup, similar to the one continued in other branch programs. In the context of the study field of Military Defense EG considers that the interplay of the Land Forces Military Leadership Bachelor programme, the short cycle (CSO) programme, and finally the other branch programme could allow developing two common core programmes (short cycle and three-year Bachelors) with additional procured education after receiving the qualification of lieutenant.

2.2.4. Internships, along with basic and field training, ensure that students/cadets are well-integrated into the NAF before graduation, providing them with a solid understanding of their professional service prior to their first rotation as lieutenants. The NDAL's status as part of the NAF makes these internships (five in total) a significant strength of the programme. The total amount of internship training is 32 CP's with all of the training focusing on specific competences of a platoon leader, (the role assumed by graduates of the programme, immediately after graduation).

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Students are encouraged to write theses on topics relevant to the armed forces, and the forces are closely engaged in this process and provide topic guidance. The support in topic provision by the NAF, and also the initiation of the cadet conference in 2023 are important developments in developing student/cadet academic skills. Topics chosen are related to future positions within land forces (interviews with students, interview with Programme Directors). The Expert Group was given the opportunity to look into final theses, and these were graded appropriately, and in all other respects compliant with national regulations.

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

Conclusions:

The programme content is relevant and meets NAF requirements, with employer needs integrated into the curriculum. All instructors are trained in didactics, though a standardised qualification package is recommended due to rapid staff turnover. Internships, conducted in the student/cadets' future service areas, are a particular strength of the programme. These topics are aligned with armed forces needs, with close guidance from the forces. Criteria for master's, doctoral programs, and foreign language implementation are not applicable.

Overall the programme is compliant with all requirements, however additional attention to the standardisation of course delivery requirements, structure and sequence of course could be paid, especially from the point of view of ongoing review of the professional standard, SQF-MILOF, and NATO generic basic officer training curriculum.

Strengths:

1) Practice and thesis topic selection are commendable.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Need to review the study field and the programme vis-a-vis the SQF-MILOF standards.
- 2) A need to ensure the minimum basic level of teaching competence of teachers within the programme.

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 The LFML study programme has the largest number of students from Bachelor level programmes ongoing at the NDAL (SER Appendices Annex 3.1.2, Statistics on Students; interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). The LFML students fully rely on the resources provided at the NDAL and military specific training conducted at Ādaži military training area in close coordination with Land Forces (LFML SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates). There are a sufficient number of classrooms, library and welfare facilities available for students to make sure learning outcomes are achieved and quality of study ensured (interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates, interviews with Research Staff). Material and technical base located at Ādaži military training area, where execution of the main learning process related to practical training is done, supporting achievement of specific military training learning outcomes with high quality (interview with Programme Directors, interview with Teaching staff and interview with students). Financial resources are sufficient to achieve learning outcomes and ensure high quality of study process (interview with Programme Directors, interview with graduates).

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The study programme is implemented from the funds of the Defence Forces, providing all the necessary resources for the provision of quality studies (LFML SER Section 3.3.3.). According to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 643 Regulations of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia, the number of students is planned by the Ministry of Defence in the medium term, but determined by the Chief of Defence for each academic year, therefore, the minimum number of students is not set for the Academy to ensure the profitability of the study programmes (LFML SER Section 3.3.3, interview with Programme Directors). The cost of all credit points for one student is 3,200.45 EUR (LFML SER Finance Annex). The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students and no finance resources included to further develop the LFML programme (LFML SER Section 3.3.3.).

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

Conclusions:

LFML students are fully provided with everything necessary to achieve the study results. The funding

to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students.

Strengths:

1) Additional resources and technical base, including Ādaži Military Training area, available for students and their internship provided by the Land Forces.

Weaknesses:

1) The LFML programme costs are not covering development of the study programme.

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: Fully compliant

Due to the Land forces support with technical and materiel base, the study programme provides all required material, technical base and financial resources to achieve programme goals and learning outcomes.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. The LFML study programme is supported by 44 teaching staff members (SER, p. 119). Among them, ten (23%) hold doctoral degrees, with three serving as lead researchers at NDA (ibid). Two faculty members are retired military personnel appointed as assistant professors based on the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations (ibid). One faculty member is from the NDAL Sports Center, responsible for the 'General Physical Preparation' course. Eleven lecturers are invited from other universities (University of Latvia, Riga Technical University, RISEBA University of Applied Sciences), with four holding doctoral degrees. Additionally, a number of lecturers with doctoral degrees from the NAF TRADOC Language School teach 'Professional English' (SER, p. 120). Nine faculty members are military personnel stationed at NDAL, while fourteen are military personnel assigned by the NAF commander to teach specific courses (ibid, interviews with academic teaching staff). It was clear from interviews and examination of assessed work (interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with graduates, interviews with students, interviews with employers) that the inclusion of specialists from combat units enhances the programme's quality by providing students with extensive and current knowledge, assisting in the achievement of the aims and outcomes for the programme.

2.4.2. Between 2017 and 2023, the composition of the teaching staff changed by 58% for the LFML programme (SER, p. 120; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). This change was primarily due to the rotation of military personnel, who make up 56% of the staff and frequently move between units or participate in missions and exercises (SER, ibid). Whilst this approach of rotation, from one lecturer to the next (after five years), is a positive aspect of teaching at the NDAL it does currently rely on individual members of academic staff taking responsibility to 'pass over' to their successor pedagogic information and teaching materials - there is no formal mechanism in place to do so (interviews with teaching staff). The Expert Group therefore recommend that the NDAL implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming

staff.

Some changes in teaching personnel were evidently driven by low student evaluations, leading to the replacement of lecturers (SER, *ibid*). For instance, a lecturer for one particular course was replaced in 2020 after student feedback highlighted poor teaching methods and communication skills (SER, Annex 2.2, 'Analysis of survey results'). Additionally, a tutor involved in mathematical teaching was replaced due to low student ratings, possibly linked to the students' inadequate prior knowledge (SER, *ibid*; interviews with academic teaching staff). Apparently, a new tutor with experience in secondary education was hired to address this issue (SER, p.120). The Expert Group assume that this tutor was also able to teach at the academic level consistent with a professional Bachelors. Other changes have occurred due to the termination of employment. Overall, the NDAL claims that these changes have not negatively impacted the quality of studies (SER, p.121).

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. It is difficult to provide confirmation of this requirement as academic staff on the LFML are also shared with the other two Bachelor's programmes and the Master's programme. There are also a number of guest lecturers used and military rotation means that many staff change every five years. Furthermore, as already noted, there have been significant changes to the programme in recent years which have affected staffing. However, looking at the situation as of May 2024 (Annex 2.3.1 of the SER, in conjunction with Annex 2.3.2 CV ENG) experts note that there are currently 14 lecturers exclusively devoted to the LFML programme (that is only teach LFML students). The vast majority have either published in peer-reviewed publications and/or have the requisite practical experience (one tutor has 3.5 years experience and no publications listed in his CV).

2.4.5. A Planning Workshop is held annually in the second semester to encourage faculty collaboration and cooperation, and this includes staff delivering the LFML programme (SER, p. 121; interviews with academic teaching staff).when the previous academic year's schedule is reviewed, and adjustments are made for the upcoming year. The seminar includes information on regulatory changes and facilitates the exchange of experiences among teaching staff (interviews with academic teaching staff). Study Plans are used to ensure that course content aligns with the study programme's objectives and outcomes, and these appear to be regularly updated (SER, p.30; interviews with Programme Directors). The Department of Military Leadership Studies also regularly holds general meetings to discuss academic issues, such as course content synchronisation, study quality, student performance, scientific advancements, and student research supervision (SER, p. 121).

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

Conclusions:

The LFML study programme is supported by a diverse and qualified teaching staff, which includes military personnel, specialists from other universities, and retired military professionals. This composition ensures that students receive a well-rounded education that combines theoretical knowledge with practical expertise from current and former military personnel. The involvement of lecturers from combat units significantly enhances the programme's quality by providing students with up-to-date and extensive knowledge.

The composition of the LFML teaching staff has seen significant changes due to the rotation of military personnel, which is a common practice to ensure continuous professional development and operational readiness. Some changes have also been driven by student feedback, leading to the replacement of lecturers with low evaluations to maintain high teaching standards. Despite these rotations and replacements, the NDAL claims that the quality of the programme has not been

negatively impacted.

Annual planning workshops and regular departmental meetings are held to encourage collaboration among faculty members and to ensure that the course content aligns with the programme's objectives. These meetings facilitate the exchange of experiences, updates on regulatory changes, and discussions on academic issues, ensuring that the LFML programme remains relevant and effective in preparing students for their future roles. The programme's reliance on both permanent and guest lecturers, coupled with the military's rotation policy, presents challenges but also ensures a dynamic and current learning environment.

Strengths:

- 1) Excellent professional and academic cooperation. The programme benefits from lecturers from local universities with four holding doctoral degrees, bringing diverse academic perspectives. The inclusion of specialists from combat units and military personnel enhances the practical relevance of the programme, aligning with the aims and outcomes of the LFML programme.
- 2) Regular Faculty Collaboration: Annual planning workshops and regular departmental meetings facilitate collaboration among faculty members, ensuring course content is aligned with the program's objectives and stays current with regulatory changes and academic standards.
- 3) Response to Student Feedback: The programme actively responds to student evaluations, making changes to teaching personnel based on feedback, which demonstrates a commitment to maintaining high teaching standards and addressing student concerns.

Weaknesses:

- 1) High Staff Turnover: A 58% change in teaching staff between 2017 and 2023, largely due to the rotation of military personnel, poses a challenge for continuity and consistency in teaching. This turnover can disrupt the learning experience if not managed properly.
- 2) Lack of Formal Knowledge Transfer: The absence of a formal mechanism for outgoing staff to pass on pedagogic information and teaching materials to their successors can lead to gaps in knowledge transfer and inconsistency in course delivery.
- 3) Insufficient Prior Knowledge: Issues with student preparedness, particularly in subjects like mathematics, indicate a possible misalignment between the programme's entry requirements and the actual academic level needed for success.

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: Fully compliant

The LFML study programme is supported by a diverse and qualified teaching staff, which includes military personnel, specialists from other universities, and retired military professionals. This composition ensures that students receive a well-rounded education that combines theoretical knowledge with practical expertise from current and former military personnel. The involvement of lecturers from combat units significantly enhances the programme's quality by providing students with up-to-date and extensive knowledge.

The composition of the LFML teaching staff has seen significant changes due to the rotation of military personnel, which is a common practice to ensure continuous professional development and operational readiness. Some changes have also been driven by student feedback, leading to the replacement of lecturers with low evaluations to maintain high teaching standards. Despite

these rotations and replacements, the NDAL claims that the quality of the programme has not been negatively impacted.

Annual planning workshops and regular departmental meetings are held to encourage collaboration among faculty members and to ensure that the course content aligns with the programme's objectives. These meetings facilitate the exchange of experiences, updates on regulatory changes, and discussions on academic issues, ensuring that the LFML programme remains relevant and effective in preparing students for their future roles. The programme's reliance on both permanent and guest lecturers, coupled with the military's rotation policy, presents challenges but also ensures a dynamic and current learning environment.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

- 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 generally fulfills the criteria outlined for the Professional Higher Education (Regulation Nr. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (LF annex 3.2.1).

- 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: Fully compliant

The study programme is compliant with the sixth level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (6. LQF) for professional qualifications, as well as is applicable with qualification to be obtained - "Lieutenant" (LF annex 3.2.2).

- 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

The study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the language in which the programme is implemented - Latvian, are also available in English, and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (LF annex 3.2.5).

- 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

Diploma sample for completing the study programme is in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents (Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers).

- 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

Attestation signed by the NDAL Rector verifies that the proficiency level in the state language of the academic staff involved in delivering the study programme meets the requirements of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of July 7, 2009 No. 733 "Rules on the amount of knowledge of the national language, the procedure for testing the national language proficiency and the state fee for the national language proficiency test" (annex 2.3.3). At the same time, it should be mentioned that the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No. 733 is no longer in force and has been replaced by Regulation Nr. 157 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language". While the requirement is fully compliant, the document must be revised in accordance with the new legal framework.

- 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

Sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement and requirements of the Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution for Obtaining Education Necessary for the Performance of Official Duties and for Reimbursement of Education Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses (Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 2.1.5).

- 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

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia as represented by the NDAL has signed a Memorandum of Intent with General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (MAL), which include provisions of MAL's capacity to provide the possibility to complete degree studies for NDAL cadets in case of termination of the study programme "Land Forces Military Leadership" by enrolling in MAL's academic Bachelor's study programmes "National security and defence", "Defence technology management", as well as in programmes prospectively registered in the study field of "Defence Studies". Under these circumstances, the NDAL and the MAL will initiate an agreement between The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia and The Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, determining the status of NDAL students in Lithuania and other relevant provisions. In such a case, the MAL will offer the possibility for NDAL students to conclude a degree in MAL's study programmes in English language (annex 2.1.3).

- 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

Explanation on compensation of damage provided by NDAL states that, based on the Paragraph 12 of the Regulation No. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Rules of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia", Paragraph 3 of the Regulation No. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution to Obtain Education Necessary for the Execution of Official Duties and for Covering Educational Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses", the first paragraph of Section 48 of the Law on Military Service and the first sentence of Section 49 of the Law on Military Service, a soldier receives a soldier's remuneration during the direct performance of his military service (including during his studies at the NDAL) and is also partially dependent on the State for maintenance, rent compensation, uniform and necessary service equipment, and a soldier does not finance his/her own studies at a military educational institution (the National Armed Forces finance the tuition fees from the state budget funds allocated to the Ministry of Defence for this purpose), therefore, if a study programme is not accredited or the study programme licence is revoked due to an action (act or omission) of the higher education institution and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme, he/she shall not suffer any loss (annex 2.1.4).

- 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: Fully compliant

Generally, the study programme complies with the specific regulatory framework of the military sector, including criterions:

1) Number of students, recruitment of students, conclusion of student contracts (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Section 18, Paragraph 2 of the Military Service Law, Section 10 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia" and Section 6 of the Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedures by which a soldier of the professional

service is sent to an educational institution for the acquisition of education necessary for the performance of official duties and training expenses covered, as well as the procedure for the reimbursement of such expenses").

2) Academic staff (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Sections 16 (16.3) and 17 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

3) NDAL Constitution (Section 10, Paragraph 10 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Regulation Nr. 576 of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the Approval of the Constitution of the National Defence Academy of Latvia". It should be noted, however, that this Regulation (Nr. 576) is no longer in force and the new legislation - Regulation Nr. 447 of the Cabinet of Ministers, must now be considered. Nevertheless, since it was approved on 11.06.2024, NDAL appropriately adhered to the correct legislation when applying for accreditation).

4) NDAL governing bodies (Section 12, Paragraph 3; Section 14.1. Paragraph 17 and Section 14.2. Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, and Paragraph 1, Parts 1.1. and 1.2. of of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

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: Fully compliant

The study programme fully complies with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments.

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

Conclusions:

The LFML study programme aligns with national requirements and complies with the study field criteria, with robust guidance from Programme Directors and the Study Council. The programme's economic and social justification is strong, demonstrated by a growing student body and guaranteed employment for graduates, fulfilling the needs of the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces.

Future development could benefit from alignment with SQF-MILOF and NATO officer generic training reference curriculum. Ensuring a uniform quality of course delivery is important, particularly given the reliance on instructors from other NAF structures. Appointing a new Programme Director as a sole position and additional QA support would aid in this. Mobility window development could enhance knowledge on EU/NATO defence aspects.

The programme content is relevant, meeting NAF requirements and integrating employer needs into the curriculum. All instructors are trained in didactics, but a standardised qualification package is recommended due to rapid staff turnover. Internships in students/cadets' future service areas and theses aligned with armed forces needs are strengths.

The programme is compliant with all requirements, though further attention to standardizing course delivery and aligning with professional standards, SQF-MILOF, and NATO curricula is advised. LFML students are fully provided for, with sufficient funding available, though the programme lacks a set minimum number of students.

The teaching staff is diverse and qualified, including military personnel, specialists from other universities, and retired professionals, ensuring a well-rounded education. Lecturers from combat units enhance the programme's quality with up-to-date knowledge. Annual planning workshops and regular departmental meetings promote faculty collaboration, keeping the course content aligned

with programme objectives. This ensures the LFML programme remains relevant and effective in preparing students for their future roles. The reliance on both permanent and guest lecturers, along with military rotations, presents challenges but also ensures a dynamic and current learning environment.

Strengths:

- 1) Robust Review Process: The programme review process is guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council.
- 2) Relevant Curriculum: The programme content meets NAF requirements and integrates employer needs.
- 3) Qualified Teaching Staff: The teaching staff includes military personnel, specialists from other universities, and retired military professionals, ensuring a well-rounded education.
- 4) Practical Experience: Internships are conducted in student/ cadets' future service areas, and these topics are aligned with armed forces needs.
- 5) Dynamic Learning Environment: The involvement of lecturers from combat units and the rotation of military personnel ensure a current and dynamic learning environment.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Need for Further Alignment: The programme could benefit from further alignment with SQF-MILOF and NATO officer generic training reference curriculum.
- 2) Reliance on Guest Lecturers: There is a significant reliance on guest lecturers, which can affect consistency.
- 3) Staff Rotations: Frequent staff rotations mandated by NAF regulations can disrupt continuity.
- 4) Assessment of Teaching Staff: The assessment of teaching staff qualifications relies heavily on student outcomes and feedback, with limited direct observation of teaching.
- 5) Feedback Implementation: There is a lack of a clearly defined process for implementing feedback into actionable improvements.
- 6) Standardization of Instructor Qualifications: A standardized qualification package for instructors is needed, especially for those not directly affiliated with NDAL.
- 7) Absence of Mobility Windows: There are no dedicated mobility windows for international study periods, limiting opportunities for broader knowledge development.

Evaluation of the study programme "Land Forces Military Leadership"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Land Forces Military Leadership"

Short-term recommendations

1) Conduct a comprehensive analysis within the next six months to assess the appropriateness and feasibility of restructuring the programme. The analysis should also determine the competencies that should be common to all students and cadets, as defined by SQF-MILOF, and those specific to LFNL students/cadets. This differentiation could support the development of a permanent staff dedicated to covering common training requirements. Furthermore, the analysis should explore the potential of optimizing the current 'A, B, C' programme structure to better comply with the Military Defence professional standard, which is currently under review. The goal is to ensure that the basic officer education meets the highest standards across all military branches, with the entire process of analysis and possible plan for implementation to be completed within 18 months.

2) Implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming staff. Ensure all departing staff complete the mentorship documentation before rotation. Allocate one month at the end of each staff member's term for transition activities and mentorship documentation. Roll out the mentorship programme within the next academic year and review its effectiveness annually.

3) Integrating a formal evaluation and feedback process for guest lecturers will maintain high teaching quality and align guest lectures with programme goals. This process should involve collecting and analyzing feedback for all guest lecturers and incorporating specific metrics for their evaluation. Implementing this evaluation process within the next 12 to 24 months and reviewing guest lecturer performance annually thereafter will ensure that guest lecturers meet the programme's standards and contribute effectively to its objectives.

Long-term recommendations

1) There is a need to standardise and enhance the teaching competence of all teachers/instructors. Developing and implementing a standardised qualification package will ensure a minimum basic level of teaching competence across the board. Utilising existing resources and training programmes to create this qualification package, all teachers/instructors should complete the standardized training and certification process within the next two to three years. This approach will improve the quality and consistency of teaching throughout the programme.

2) Introduce 'mobility windows', dedicated periods for international study should be integrated into the curriculum. This initiative should be developed within the next two years, with student exchanges beginning soon after. The goal is to establish partnerships with at least three international military academies and enable at least 20% of students to participate in mobility programmes each year. By negotiating agreements with partner institutions and providing logistical support for participating students, the programme can enhance international collaboration and broaden students' training and educational experiences.

II - "Command Staff Officer" ASSESSMENT

II - "Command Staff Officer" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. Upon completing the programme, graduates earn the professional qualification of 'lieutenant'.

This programme, unique to NDAL at the national level, fully complies with the study field requirements. The governance of NDAL ensures that its various programmes are implemented consistently, maintaining similar strengths. Notably, the NDAL Commandant also serves as the Chief of the Latvian Armed Forces Training and Doctrine Command and holds monthly meetings with the Latvian Chief of Defence, in addition to regular meetings with NAF branch chiefs. This structure provides exceptional leadership support and facilitates resource allocation necessary for the education of future Latvian officer corps. The Expert Group (EG) was informed about the process of professional standard review and development, where NDAL may offer significant input (based on interviews with management). This process could serve as a foundation for curriculum review. A potential direction for further development would be to align the programme (and the standards) with the SQF-MILOF and NATO Officer Training reference curricula. This programme specifically focuses on delivering professional competencies, as candidates are required to have already obtained a BA with academic competencies. Therefore, careful consideration of the included content is essential.

2.1.2. Graduates of the "Command Staff Officer" program (code: 46863) complete a first-cycle study programme and receive the professional qualification of lieutenant. The Expert Group (EG) considers the programme's 101 Credit Points (CP) to be quite extensive for a first-cycle programme. Typically, a full-time study programme is designed with no more than 60 ECTS per academic year. The EG observed that the CPs were likely adopted during the transition to the CP system. It is recommended to standardise the competencies across all programmes to ensure commonality for all students/cadets, potentially through frameworks such as SQF-MILOF.

Overall, the programme content aligns closely with professional standards. The programme is conducted in the national language, which is appropriate given that Latvian is the service language for graduates.

2.1.3. The programme, implemented since 2013, has undergone largely incremental changes. Programme reviews depend significantly on the Programme Director's efforts, with the Study Council ensuring that potential modifications align with QA standards. The NDAL has taken a cautious approach, making only limited changes to the programme. Implementing NATO SAT could enhance their responsiveness and help determine if any courses are redundant for the training level. Notably, this programme is unique in its field, as it is centered entirely on articulating with professional standards. One possibility for further change could be that the programme would serve as a basis of a unified mandatory subjects to BA programme, with technical and academic requirements differentiated based on the service branches of the students/ cadets.

Overall, the changes to the programme are in-line with the professional standards, and given the status of the NDAL as part of NAF, and the practice of close cooperation between the NDAL and the NAF (interviews with employers) the EG considers the approach to programme development appropriate.

2.1.4. The programme is a means for the NAF to attract citizens to the professional military officer who have already obtained higher education with sound economic grounds, meanwhile ensuring sufficient competences for graduates to take up junior officer leadership positions and to implement their duties effectively.

The NDAL programmes are unique and meet a specific requirement set by the MoD of Latvia, the justification is sound. The number of newly enrolled students in the past three years grew from 13 to 24, all students are guaranteed a job (interviews with management; SER, Annex 3.1.2). Four-fifths or more students successfully graduate the programme (SER, p. 130).

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

Conclusions:

The study programme aligns with national requirements and complies with the study field criteria. Future programme development could benefit from aligning with SQF-MILOF and NATO officer generic training reference curriculum (see section 1.7 earlier). The programme review process is robust, guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council. Adopting NATO SAT could enhance responsiveness and efficiency. The programme's economic and social justification is solid, with a growing student body and guaranteed employment for graduates, reflecting its success in meeting MoD and armed forces requirements.

The first cycle programme is focused directly on attaining competences set in the professional standard. Improvements to the programme could be explored to see if the current amount of CP's is necessary, because the number of programme credits is rather large for its goals.

Strengths:

- 1) The programme is necessary and justified.
- 2) The stakeholder engagement is commendable.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The programme still requires a review vis-a-vis SQF-MILOF, and other programmes in the field, which would allow identifying common competencies for students/cadets.
- 2) The programme relies heavily on visiting teachers and outsourced education, which puts a major workload on the Programme Directors, and requires separate consideration within the NDA QP.
- 3) The size of the programme is rather large for a first-cycle study programme, delivering 101 CP's, instead of 90 or less.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. Following a review of the SER and interviews with employers, the Expert Group is confident that the study programmes' content meets the requirements of the armed forces. Employers, who maintain a close relationship with NDAL, actively communicate their needs, which are duly considered (based on interviews with management and employers).

The EG was informed that graduates of this programme primarily join the land forces (interviews with programme directors). Given that many attendees already hold higher education degrees, the NDAL must carefully ensure that SQF-MILOF competencies—particularly those related to critical thinking and research—are not unnecessarily duplicated. The programme's architecture is clearly focused on land forces branch training, and the EG recognizes the need for the NDAL to carefully consider the specific competencies it aims to deliver within this programme, especially given the narrower scope compared to Bachelor programmes for officer cadets.

The programme currently comprises over 100 CPs and lacks language training, despite it being required by the professional standard. This highlights a significant challenge. The NDAL could consider reviewing the programme, possibly extending its workload to 120 CPs over 1.5 years. It's important to note that programme attendees often receive limited exposure to topics covered in the professional standard. While this may suffice for junior officers, a thorough review of the subject proportions is needed to determine which competencies are critical for the roles graduates will assume.

This programme could also serve as a benchmark for reviewing other programmes, such as Bachelor programmes for officer cadets, to identify core requirements for all junior officers and specific branch requirements. By using this programme as a foundation for the common core of the Bachelor

programme and land forces branch training, the NDAL could better align its training across different programmes. Given that graduates of the short-cycle programme serve in similar positions as those from Bachelor programmes, it is reasonable to consider adjusting the requirements for a Bachelor's qualification (e.g., 240 CPs over three years) and setting higher requirements for this programme (e.g., 120 CPs), thereby reducing the disparity in professional training workloads.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. All military instructors undergo a basic course in didactics (as confirmed by interviews with academic teaching staff). Similar to other NDAL programmes, this programme relies heavily on instructors from various NAF structures, which introduces the risk of significant variability in course delivery quality. To mitigate this, QA specialist support, standardisation of course delivery requirements, and staff training should be guided by data monitoring of teaching staff. Implementing a standardised qualification package is recommended to establish a common minimum standard for all instructors, especially given the rapid turnover of teaching staff at NDAL. Student/cadets, as active-duty soldiers, may face additional training demands, particularly when continuous field training is essential for competency development. However, the total time spent on training and studies should not exceed an average of 48 hours per week over the academic year, which represents a 20% higher workload compared to civilian studies. An additional 11th study month could further increase the annual workload by 10%. Given these considerations, a full-time programme that is 30% more intensive than typical civilian programs seems to be an acceptable annual workload limit for serving soldiers. This approach would allow the Academy to implement programmes totaling 80 CPs per year. Consequently, a 1.5-year programme could comprise 120 CPs.

2.2.4. The programme has multiple internships. The fact that students are active duty service members means that their time in the Academy and field training also act to induct them into the NAF. Student/cadets practice where they will subsequently serve, and this is an area of strength of the programme.

It is commendable that the programme provides extensive on-the-job training. However, as noted in section 2.2.1, this approach allows individuals with prior higher education to achieve lieutenant qualifications more quickly than those without such a background. Bridging the gap in training time for the common core between this programme and, in particular, the Land Forces Bachelor programme is crucial, as graduates of both programmes will serve in identical positions. The goal should be to establish this programme as the common core for junior officer training and land forces branch training, with the Bachelor programmes expanded to include the additional academic competencies necessary to align officer cadet qualifications with those of the attendees of this programme.

Discussions with staff, students, and employers, as well as course descriptions, reveal that the internships are specifically tailored to meet the needs of future service. In many cases, these internships take place in units where the cadets are likely to be deployed, providing them with valuable opportunities to become familiar with both the nature of their future roles and their prospective colleagues.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Students are encouraged and do write theses on topics pertinent to the armed forces, with the forces actively engaged in this process by providing topic guidance. These topics are primarily related to the students' future job roles (based on interviews with students and Programme Directors).

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

Conclusions:

The programme content is relevant and meets armed forces requirements, with employer needs integrated into the curriculum. All instructors are trained in didactics, though a standardised qualification package is recommended due to rapid staff turnover. Internships, conducted in the student/cadets' future service areas, are a programme strength. These topics are aligned with armed forces needs, with close guidance from the forces.

Strengths:

- 1) The internships constitute 40 percent of the programme, are directly focused on developing skills that are necessary for service duties immediately after graduation.
- 2) The programme is in line with the professional standard.

Weaknesses:

- 1) There is a need to review the study field and the programme vis-a-vis SQF-MILOF.
- 2) Greater assurance regarding the minimum basic level of teaching competence of teachers within the programme is required.

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. CSO study programme students fully rely on the resources provided at NDAL and military specific training conducted at the Ādaži military training area in close coordination with Land Forces (CSO SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates). Part of the study process is conducted in the Infantry school and Non-commissioned Officer school, both military educational institutions which are under command of Training and Doctrine commander (the NDAL Rector), thus enabling good control of the study process and resources available to achieve learning outcomes (CSO SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students). There are sufficient numbers of classrooms, library and welfare facilities available for students to ensure quality of study (interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates, interviews with Research Staff). All above mentioned resources availability with sufficient financial provision are supporting a high-quality learning process and achieving learning outcomes of the CSO study programme (interview with Programme Directors, interviews with students, interviews with graduates).

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The study programme is implemented from the funds of the Defence Forces, providing all the necessary resources for the provision of quality studies (CSO SER Section 3.3.3.). According to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 643 Regulations of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia, the number of students is planned by the Ministry of Defence in the medium term, but determined by the Chief of Defence for each academic year, therefore, the minimum number of

students is not set for the Academy to ensure the profitability of the study programmes (CSO SER Section 3.3.3., interview with Programme Directors). The cost of all credit points for one student is 2,577.56 EUR (CSO SER Finance Annex). The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students (CSO SER Section 3.3.3.). The further development of the CSO programme is made by Programme Director and teaching staff annually, however there is no funding foreseen in programme budget (interview with Programme Directors).

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

Conclusions:

CSO students are fully provided with everything necessary to achieve the study results. The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students.

Strengths:

1) Additional resources and technical base, including Military Training area, available for students and their internship provided by the Training and Doctrine Command units.

Weaknesses:

1) CSO programme costs are not covering development of the study programme.

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: Fully compliant

Land forces support and Training and Doctrine Command subordinate schools resources and support providing all required material, technical base and financial resources to achieve programme goals and learning outcomes.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. The CSO study programme is supported by 22 teaching staff members, of which 73% are either active or retired military personnel (SER, p. 137). Four staff members (18%) hold Doctoral degrees (SER, p. 137). Two visiting lecturers (one a Professor) from the University of Latvia teach two courses (ibid). Five staff members (23%) are based within the NDAL, and eight (36%) are military personnel assigned by the NAF Commander to deliver specific courses (ibid). This balance (and interviews with academic teaching staff, graduates and employers) would suggest that the CSO programme has teaching staff with the appropriate qualifications and experience that align with the programme's goals and objectives, ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes.

2.4.2. As noted in 2.4.1 earlier, 73% of the teaching staff for the CSO programme are professional military service members (SER, p. 137) who rotate frequently and participate in missions and exercises (interviews with academic teaching staff), and hence the composition of teaching staff resources has significantly changed since the last accreditation in 2013. Whilst this approach of rotation, from one lecturer to the next (after five years), is a positive aspect of teaching at the NDAL

it does currently rely on individual members of academic staff taking responsibility to 'pass over' to their successor pedagogic information and teaching materials - there is no formal mechanism in place to do so (interviews with teaching staff). The Expert Group therefore recommend that the NDAL implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming staff.

Only 26% of the 2013 cohort remain (SER, p. 137). Despite these changes, the NDAL claims that the quality of studies has not declined because competent and well-trained specialists continue to be used and course descriptions are regularly updated to meet higher education standards (SER, p. 138). However, as with the three Bachelor's programmes, there does not appear to be a formal 'handover' system in place whereby a 'rotating' military member of the teaching staff (that is, one who is returning to active duty) assists a new member of teaching staff to assume responsibility for the course (interviews with academic teaching staff).

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. It is difficult to provide confirmation of this requirement as academic staff on the CSO programme are also shared with three Bachelor's programmes. There are also a number of guest lecturers used and military rotation means that many staff change every five years. Furthermore, as already noted, there have been significant changes to the programme in recent years which have affected staffing. However, looking at the situation as of May 2024 (Annex 2.3.1 of the SER, in conjunction with Annex 2.3.2 CV ENG) experts note that there is currently just one lecturer exclusively devoted to the CSO programme (that is, teach only the CSO students) - in this case a specialist in physical training. The individual concerned has no publications listed on his/her CV but does have five or more years of practical experience.

2.4.5. The SER document explains that, in order to ensure the synchronisation of study courses in the CSO study programme with NDAL Quality Policy and Internal Study Quality Assurance Regulation, various meetings and seminars are held (SER, p.198). These include Study Council meetings, general staff meetings, and management group seminars (SER, *ibid*; interviews with academic teaching staff). Emphasis is also placed on aligning professional course content with employer needs through cooperation between the NDAL's academic staff and visiting lecturers from the NAF (interviews with employers).

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

Conclusions:

The CSO study programme is supported by 22 teaching staff members, most of whom are active or retired military personnel. All bar one member of staff also contribute to other programmes. A minority of the staff hold Doctoral degrees, and some courses are taught by visiting lecturers from the University of Latvia. Despite frequent rotations and significant changes in staff composition since the last accreditation in 2013, the programme maintains quality through the use of competent specialists and regular course updates. However, there is no formal handover system for rotating military teaching staff, and staffing changes have impacted the programme. Efforts to align course content with employer needs are facilitated through various meetings and cooperation with visiting lecturers from the NAF.

Strengths:

1) Qualified and Experienced Teaching Staff: The vast majority of the teaching staff are active or retired military personnel, ensuring that the programme benefits from practical, up-to-date military experience; a significant hold Doctoral degrees, adding a strong academic foundation to the

programme and this is assisted through the inclusion of visiting lecturers from the University of Latvia.

2) Professional course content is aligned with employer needs through cooperation between NDAL's academic staff and visiting lecturers from the NAF.

Weaknesses:

1) There is no formal mechanism for outgoing staff to pass on pedagogic information and teaching materials to their successors, leading to potential gaps in knowledge transfer. The reliance on individual staff members to document and pass on teaching materials is insufficient without a formal handover system.

2) There appears to be currently only one lecturer exclusively devoted to the CSO programme, potentially limiting the depth and breadth of specialized instruction.

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: Fully compliant

The number, balance and qualification of the academic staff and other teaching staff on the CSO programme meet the conditions necessary for its successful implementation and adheres to the requirements specified in the respective regulatory enactments (where applicable).

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 generally fulfills the criteria outlined for the Professional Higher Education (Regulation Nr. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (CSO annex 3.2.1). The programme fulfills the formal requirements of the regulation, and it is advised that its prospective review is done with particular attention to the SQF-MILOF, while it could serve as a basis of common core for the Bachelor programmes in the Military Defence field of study.

- 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: Fully compliant

The study programme is compliant with the sixth level of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (6. LQF) for professional qualifications, as well as is applicable with qualification to be obtained - "Lieutenant" (CSO annex 3.2.2). However, there is no study course included for one of the official NATO languages (such as English), which is a standard inclusion in other Bachelor's study programmes. The NDAL explains this absence by stating that a foreign language is studied at a previous higher education institution, and English must be passed for the rank of lieutenant. Nevertheless, as various participants emphasized during the on-site interviews, English

proficiency is essential when entering the workspace. Thus, considering the on-site feedback and to fully comply with professional standards, remedial action should be taken. The program should be reviewed to include English language training (or other NATO language) if proficiency in English is present as soon as possible.

- 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

The study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the language in which the programme is implemented - Latvian, are also available in English, and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (CSO annex 3.2.5).

- 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: Partially compliant

The Diploma sample for completing the study programme is in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents (Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (CSO annex 3.1.1). However, there appears to be a discrepancy in language usage: on page 2 of Diploma, the version NDAL uses is "PROFESIONĀLĀ BAKALĀURA DIPLOMS", whereas the Regulation specifies "PROFESIONĀLĀS AUGSTĀKĀS IZGLĪTĪBAS DIPLOMS" (CSO annex 3.1.1).

- 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 Attestation signed by the NDAL Rector verifies that the proficiency level in the State language of the academic staff involved in delivering the study programme meets the requirements of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of July 7, 2009 No. 733 "Rules on the amount of knowledge of the national language, the procedure for testing the national language proficiency and the state fee for the national language proficiency test" (Annex 2.3.3). At the same time, it should be noted that the Cabinet of Ministers regulation No. 733 is no longer in force and has been replaced by Regulation No. 157 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language". While the requirement is fully compliant, the document must be revised in accordance with the new legal framework.

- 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

A sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement and requirements of the 'Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution for Obtaining Education Necessary for the Performance of Official Duties and for Reimbursement of Education Expenses', as well as the 'Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses (Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (annex 2.1.5)'.

- 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

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia as represented by the NDAL has signed a Memorandum of Intent with General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (MAL), which include provisions of MAL's capacity to provide the possibility to complete degree studies for NDAL students/cadets in case of termination of the study programme "Command Staff Officer" by enrolling in MAL's academic master's study programmes "Defence studies", "Defence resource management", as well as in programmes prospectively registered in the study field of "Defence Studies". Under these circumstances, the NDAL and the MAL will initiate an agreement between The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia and The Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, determining the status of NDAL students in Lithuania and other relevant provisions. In such a case, the MAL will offer the possibility for NDAL students to conclude a degree in MAL's study programmes in English language (annex 2.1.3).

- 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

Explanation on compensation of damage provided by NDAL states that, based on the Paragraph

12 of the Regulation No. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Rules of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia", Paragraph 3 of the Regulation No. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution to Obtain Education Necessary for the Execution of Official Duties and for Covering Educational Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses", the first paragraph of Section 48 of the Law on Military Service and the first sentence of Section 49 of the Law on Military Service, a soldier receives a soldier's remuneration during the direct performance of his military service (including during his studies at the NDAL) and is also partially dependent on the State for maintenance, rent compensation, uniform and necessary service equipment, and a soldier does not finance his/her own studies at a military educational institution (the National Armed Forces finance the tuition fees from the state budget funds allocated to the Ministry of Defence for this purpose), therefore, if a study programme is not accredited or the study programme licence is revoked due to an action (act or omission) of the higher education institution and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme, he/she shall not suffer any loss (annex 2.1.4).

- 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: Fully compliant

Generally, the study programme complies with the specific regulatory framework of the military sector, including criterions:

1) Number of students, recruitment of students, conclusion of student contracts (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Section 18, Paragraph 2 of the Military Service Law, Section 10 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia" and Section 6 of the Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedures by which a soldier of the professional service is sent to an educational institution for the acquisition of education necessary for the performance of official duties and training expenses covered, as well as the procedure for the reimbursement of such expenses").

2) Academic staff (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Sections 16 (16.3) and 17 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

3) The NDAL Constitution (Section 10, Paragraph 10 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Regulation Nr. 576 of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the Approval of the Constitution of the National Defence Academy of Latvia". It should be noted, however, that this Regulation (Nr. 576) is no longer in force and the new legislation - Regulation Nr. 447 of the Cabinet of Ministers, must now be considered. Nevertheless, since it was approved on 11.06.2024, NDAL appropriately adhered to the correct legislation when applying for accreditation).

4) The NDAL governing bodies (Section 12, Paragraph 3; Section 14.1. Paragraph 17 and Section 14.2. Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, and Paragraph 1, Parts 1.1. and 1.2. of of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

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

While the study programme largely complies with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, it falls short in providing study course for one of the official NATO languages (such as English), as well as there seems to be an issue with the language used, specifically on page 2 of the Diploma.

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

Conclusions:

The CSO study programme aligns with national requirements and complies with study field criteria, with a strong economic and social justification reflected in its growing student body and guaranteed employment for graduates. The programme is effectively guided by Programme Directors and the Study Council, ensuring its robustness. Future developments could benefit from aligning with SQF-MILOF and the NATO officer training curriculum, and adopting NATO SAT for increased responsiveness and efficiency. The programme content is relevant and meets armed forces requirements, integrating employer needs into the curriculum. Internships in future service areas and student theses aligned with armed forces needs are significant strengths. While teachers/instructors are trained in didactics, a standardised qualification package is recommended due to rapid staff turnover. The programme is supported by 22 teaching staff, mainly active or retired military personnel, though a minority hold Doctoral degrees. Frequent staff rotations have been managed by using competent specialists and regular course updates, despite the lack of a formal handover system.

However, the programme's 101 Credit Points (CPs) are extensive for a first-cycle programme. Typically, a full-time study programme is designed with no more than 60 ECTS per academic year. The 101 CPs likely resulted from the transition to the CP system. To address this, it is recommended to adjust the CPs whilst aligning the programme's structure with recognized frameworks such as SQF-MILOF. This will ensure that the competencies are standardized, making them comparable and consistent across all military education programmes.

As noted in requirement 8 earlier, the CSO curriculum lacks a course for one of the official NATO languages, such as English, which is typically included in other Bachelor's programmes. The NDAL attributes this omission to the expectation that foreign language studies occur at a prior institution and that English proficiency is required for the rank of lieutenant. However, feedback from participants highlights the importance of English proficiency upon entering the workforce, suggesting that remedial action is necessary to meet professional standards. Additionally, there are minor discrepancies between the wording in the NDAL's diploma sample and the prescribed format for state-recognized higher education documents.

Strengths:

- 1) Internships and Thesis Alignment: Internships in future service areas and theses topics closely aligned with armed forces needs are major strengths.
- 2) Employer Integration: The curriculum integrates employer needs through regular meetings and cooperation with visiting lecturers from the NAF.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Credit Points: The current amount of programme credits is rather large for its goals, indicating a need for review.

- 2) Staff Turnover: Rapid turnover of military teaching staff and the absence of a formal handover system affect programme continuity and stability.
- 3) Standardised Qualification Package: There is a need for a standardised qualification package for instructors due to the frequent staff changes.
- 4) Minority of Doctoral Degrees: Only a minority of the staff hold Doctoral degrees, which may impact the academic depth of the programme.
- 5) Dependency on Visiting Lecturers: Reliance on visiting lecturers from the University of Latvia for certain courses suggests a potential gap in permanent faculty expertise.
- 6) Discrepancy between the wording in NDAL's diploma sample and the prescribed format for state-recognized higher education documents.

Evaluation of the study programme "Command Staff Officer"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Command Staff Officer"

Short-term recommendations

- 1) Conduct a comprehensive analysis within the next six months to assess the appropriateness and feasibility of restructuring the programme; in terms of course composition, the overall number of CPs awarded to the programme and the possibility of the CSO programme forming a core of the three Bachelor's programmes (which lead to qualification as lieutenant) offered by the NDAL. The analysis should also determine the competencies that should be common to all students and cadets, as defined by SQF-MILOF, and those specific to CSO students. The goal is to ensure that the basic officer education meets the highest standards across all military branches, with the entire process of analysis and possible implementation to be completed within 18 months.
- 2) Implement a mentorship programme where outgoing staff members document their teaching methods and key course content to be shared with incoming staff. Ensure all departing staff complete the mentorship documentation before rotation. Allocate one month at the end of each staff member's term for transition activities and mentorship documentation. Roll out the mentorship programme within the next academic year and review its effectiveness annually.
- 3) Integrating a formal evaluation and feedback process for guest lecturers will maintain high teaching quality and align guest lectures with programme goals. This process should involve collecting and analyzing feedback for all guest lecturers and incorporating specific metrics for their evaluation. Implementing this evaluation process within the next 12 to 24 months and reviewing guest lecturer performance annually thereafter will ensure that guest lecturers meet the programme's standards and contribute effectively to its objectives.
- 4) Conduct a comprehensive audit of the English language capabilities of new recruits to the CSO programme at the start of the next intake. Where recruits do not meet the required English language standards, remedial actions, including additional teaching and support, should be implemented immediately. This initiative should aim to achieve 100% compliance with the English proficiency requirements within the next 12 months, ensuring that all recruits meet the professional standards necessary for their roles. Progress should be monitored and reported quarterly to ensure continuous improvement and effectiveness.

5) Ensure the language on the diploma sample is revised to align with regulatory requirements. Specifically, correct the term to match the official terminology as specified in the relevant regulations. This amendment should be completed within the next three months to ensure compliance.

Long-term recommendations

1) There is a need to standardise and enhance the teaching competence of all teachers/instructors. Developing and implementing a standardised qualification package will ensure a minimum basic level of teaching competence across the board. Utilising existing resources and training programmes to create this qualification package, all teachers/instructors should complete the standardized training and certification process within the next two to three years.. This approach will improve the quality and consistency of teaching throughout the programme.

II - "Military Leadership and Security" ASSESSMENT

II - "Military Leadership and Security" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. This is a unique programme which is a composite of operational level education, as per the professional military education concept, agreed upon by the three Baltic States, and the MA level education regulated by Latvia. The NDAL relies for the majority of the content on Baltic Defence College, of which Latvia is a framework nation. The NDAL's MA in Military Leadership and Security programme comprises the Joint Command and General Staff Course (JCGSC) at the Baltic Defence College for the first two semesters, which the NDAL accredits. This is followed by a final, third semester, during which students complete a Master's Thesis (SER, Annex 3.2.1).(SER, Annex 3.2.1). The EG, however, was unsure whether the current "captain's course" should remain as a non-degree awarding study course, but instead integrated in an officer's career progression towards an accredited Master's degree.

2.1.2. Graduates of the programme "Military Leadership and Security" (code: 47863) receive the qualification of Professional Master's in Military Leadership and Security. Nearly two-thirds of the programme's content aligns with the operational level career course for OF-3 officers, making them eligible for promotion to OF-4 upon completion. The programme is supervised by the three framework nations, which annually review its performance and educational content.

The resources available at the Baltic Defence College (BaltDefCol), particularly those required for its NATO accreditation, ensure a high-quality study process that is essential for the future careers and duties of Latvian officers. The education provided by BaltDefCol establishes a solid foundation for students to produce high-quality Master's theses.

Given that officers at this level serve and command in multinational staffs and units, their education in English is both necessary and beneficial to the National Armed Forces (NAF).

2.1.3. The programme content has been developed in collaboration with the Baltic Defence College (BDC). Interviews with BDC management reveal that Latvia, as the framework nation, plays a significant role in shaping the programme and has a staff member seconded to the BDC. This involvement reassures the EG that the BDC values and supports the NDAL and the needs of the

Latvian armed forces.. Overall, the programme content is stable, and importantly, the BDC is a NATO-accredited institution. The MA-level education focuses on joint operations, which are international in nature within NATO.

2.1.4. Aligning the programme with the operational-level career course conserves resources by leveraging the high-quality education provided by the Baltic Defence College (BaltDefCol). This approach offers a solid foundation for writing a Master's thesis and saves active duty officers time. Since graduates are required to continue their service at more senior officer ranks, and the programme is exclusively open to those eligible for promotion, with positions planned and funded by the Latvian Ministry of Defence, the justification for the programme is sound.

However, it would be beneficial to explore potential changes to the programme to reduce dropout rates. Annex 3.2.1 of the SER suggests that the drop-out rate is often in excess of 50% and in 2022/23 there were only five graduates from a cohort of 19, of which 14 dropped out.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

Conclusions:

The Masters programme is distinctive and is exclusively available to a select number of active-duty officers, who are assigned to study at BDC under the professional military education concept. The courses offered within the programme are of high quality, featuring unique content directly relevant to the future duties and career paths of Latvian officers. The BDC's NATO accreditation ensures quality assurance and enables the institution to attract top-tier speakers from NATO, the EU, and other organizations.

Strengths:

- 1) Level and quality of teaching staff.
- 2) Individual attention to students.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The NDAL is unable to directly affect the content of the BaltDefCol Joint Command and General Staff course (the JCGSC) (See <https://www.baltdefcol.org/education/joint-command-and-general-staff-course>) curriculum development, so its management needs to maintain a line with the national MoD to be able to formally communicate its requirements to BDC.
- 2) Relatively high student dropout rates from the programme, particularly after students have returned to the workplace but not yet completed their thesis.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The BDC works closely with the framework countries at the level of MoD's to ensure rapid curriculum content development as necessary for officers duties after the completion of the programme. Employers are closely related to NDAL and put forward their needs, which are taken into account (interviews with management, interviews with employers).

The fact that the operation career course is a prerequisite for promotion to OF-4 and the engagement of MoD's of three nations in the curriculum development oversight ensures that programme content relevance is maintained, is regularly updated and supported by the necessary resources.

For this programme, the concept of professional military education, as agreed upon by the three Baltic states and closely aligned with NATO standards, is paramount. The EG was informed that NDAL is actively involved in an ongoing review of the professional standard for military officers, which will include Master's level requirements that are currently absent. Despite this, the EG considers the current setup and structure of the programme to be highly successful and advanced. The programme is designed to cover cutting-edge military-academic topics relevant to the students' professional fields, and BDC has successfully attracted world-class speakers and experts. The fact that English is the working language at BDC, combined with its accreditation by NATO as a professional military education institution, positions BDC as one of NATO's leading institutions for professional military education.

2.2.2. Students must write a thesis that meets stringent academic performance requirements. To aid in this process, they receive additional courses designed to ensure their success. These students, who are senior officers, benefit from academic guidance provided by professors from both the NDAL and BDC. This support enables them to conduct research into specialist and specific defence topics directly relevant to NATO and national military operations and policy.

2.2.3. The content of the NDAL/BDC courses is of international quality, and students receive knowledge from leading professionals in their field. Every course is managed by an employed (deployed) teacher, which provides for individual attention to students. The studies at BaltDefCol are based on the small group work, and are supported by course supervisors, who are focused on attracting subject matter experts from the academician and NATO/EU structures (interviews with management staff, interviews with teaching staff).

The BDC has the resources to implement the syndicate approach, where small, teamwork-based groups continuously reflect on and discuss the educational process. This method not only reinforces the knowledge gained but also facilitates the transfer of extensive professional experience among students. Each module is led by a convener who is responsible for teaching, assessing, and designing the module, incorporating various activities, including guest lectures from top international speakers, such as senior NATO officials and commanders. The study approach mirrors the operations of NATO and member state headquarters, allowing students to assume different roles throughout their studies. Syndicate work is complemented by face-to-face sessions with research supervisors, ensuring a balanced blend of professional and academic training. Overall, this programme design effectively utilizes available time to provide well-rounded professional-academic education.

2.2.4. During the Military Leadership and Security Professional Master's programme, students engage in internships following the guidelines and requirements stipulated by the NDAL, as detailed in MLS Annex 3.2.5 (Internship Regulations). These internships occur during the third semester, subsequent to the students' completion of the first two semesters at BALTDEFCOL, and their subsequent appointment and employment.

Internships are conducted both within Latvia and internationally, accommodating both Latvian and foreign students according to the location of their next assignments. Upon conclusion of the internship, students are required to submit a comprehensive report. This report includes the number of Credit Points (CPs) earned and a detailed account of the activities undertaken during the internship.

The report also highlights the applicability of the theoretical knowledge and learning outcomes acquired during the programme to the students' practical work requirements. This facilitates an evaluation of how well the internship tasks align with the programme's learning outcomes. The internship supervisor then assesses and grades the performance of the students based on their internship reports.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. The topics are relevant to the field and closely correspond to the career paths of military officers. However, the programme suffers from large dropout proportion, because students need to write their theses after being appointed to responsible management positions in their respective militaries, NATO staffs, international military and diplomatic missions (interviews with students). Exploring a mechanism of allowing students the option to stay at BDC for some additional period of time (e.g. one month to write the draft of their thesis) may be one way of attempting to address the issue of high drop out rates.

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

Conclusions:

The programme's content is up-to-date, interconnected, and meets armed forces requirements. The BDC collaborates with framework countries' MoDs to rapidly update the curriculum based on employer needs. Master's students must write theses, supported by additional courses. The international quality of BDC courses, managed by dedicated teachers, ensures personalised attention. These topics align with military careers, though high dropout rates suggest a need for mechanisms like extended stays to complete drafts. Internship and doctoral criteria are not applicable.

Strengths:

- 1) Relevance of thesis topics.
- 2) Programme oversight at the level of national MoD's of three countries, supported by the BaltDefCol senior management.
- 3) International nature of the programme (both teachers and students).

Weaknesses:

- 1) Limited availability (only to Majors, who are sent to the intermediate officer career course).

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: Fully compliant

The programme requires the completion of a master's thesis, with clear academic guidance. Supervisors from NDAL and BALTDEF COL, with appropriate academic qualifications, provide advice and guidance throughout the research and writing process. To earn the degree, students must successfully complete all courses and defend their thesis, which combines theoretical and empirical literature using qualitative and quantitative methods. The programme emphasises robust analytical skills, theoretical knowledge, and the development of new policy recommendations. The involvement of academic, military, and industry experts enhances the supervision and quality of the thesis development.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. MLS study programme and the initial phase of the development of the Master's thesis is provided in cooperation with BALTDEF COL, using BALTDEF COL's infrastructure, library and library

resources (MLS SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with Research Staff). Necessary for the research literature students can access at NDAL and the BALTDEF COL libraries, as well as the international databases free of charge (MLS SER Section 3.3.1., interview with Programme Directors, interviews with Research Staff, inspection of resources). Missing subject specific books of other literature not available online, students have the possibility to order at the library and there are financial resources available for this at both institutions (interview with students, interview with Programme Directors). Financial provision at BALTDEF COL is sufficient to ensure a high-quality study process and achieve learning outcomes (interview with Programme Directors, interviews with Research Staff, interviews with students and graduates).

2.3.2. Not applicable.

2.3.3. The study programme is implemented from the funds of the Defence Forces, providing all the necessary resources for the provision of quality studies (MLS SER Section 3.3.3.). According to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 643 Regulations of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia, the number of students is planned by the Ministry of Defence in the medium term, but determined by the Chief of Defence for each academic year, therefore, the minimum number of students is not set for the academy to ensure the profitability of the study programmes (MLS SER Section 3.3.3., interview with Programme Directors). The cost of all credit points for one student is 3,035.75EUR (MLS SER Finance Annex). The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students (MLS SER Section 3.3.3.). Less than 30% of Joint Command and General Staff Course students this Year have chosen to enroll in MLS. The statistics may vary from Year to Year, nevertheless the number of students participating in the MLS programme could be increased. Students referring to limited time available to write masters thesis during the Joint Command and General Staff Course (interviews with students).

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

Conclusions:

MLS Professional Masters study programme students are fully provided with everything necessary to achieve the study results. The funding to ensure full implementation of the study process is available, however the programme has not set a minimum number of students.

Strengths:

1) BALTDEF COL teaching staff, other resources and support of supervising and assessing of students Master's thesis.

Weaknesses:

1) Limited classroom availability at BALTDEF COL.

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: Fully compliant

Very good and balanced libraries and online catalogs both at NDAL and BALTDEF COL along with well resources financial provision to support achievement of learning outcomes.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. The professional Masters in Military Leadership and Security (MLS) has been operated since 2010 as a formal cooperation between the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) and the NDAL (SER, p.90; interviews with management, interview with Programme Directors). Hence responsibilities for academic staffing are jointly shared although ultimate responsibility rests with the NDAL (interviews with management). The MLS programme is implemented by selecting military and civilian staff from BALTDEFCOL as guest lecturers, who have the necessary military experience, education, and qualifications (SER, p.90; interviews with academic teaching staff). Additional staff from NDAL are involved in supervising students' research for master's theses (SER, p.90). The faculty, comprising mostly individuals with doctoral or master's degrees, bring extensive experience in military education, defence, and pedagogical work. The programme includes military personnel with over 20 years of service and qualified civilian experts in military defence and security (interviews with academic teaching staff). In total, the programme involves 24 academic staff members, with 29% holding PhDs (SER, p.90). Nineteen lecturers are from BALTDEFCOL and five from NDAL, all contributing to teaching, supervising, and reviewing master's theses (ibid). As with the other programmes offered by the NDAL, the MLS utilises military experts as tutors, who, in this case rotate every three years, and who are deployed to BALTDEFCOL to also educate Joint Command and General Staff Course (JCGSC) students. The MLS also has a number of 'permanent' teaching staff who hold open-ended contracts. The qualifications and numbers of teachers and lecturers appears more than sufficient to enable student achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the MLS.

2.4.2. Since the previous accreditation (presumably in 2013), the MLS programme has seen three major improvements that enhance its quality: an increase in military and civilian lecturers with doctorate degrees; the BALTDEFCOL partner organisation now has more lecturers with permanent, non-terminated contracts, and the application of new technology, e-learning, and mixed research methods (SER, p. 100; interviews with management, interviews with academic teaching staff, interviews with research staff).

2.4.3. Analysing the situation as of May 2024 (Annex 2.3.1 of the SER, in conjunction with Annex 2.3.2 CV ENG) experts note that there are currently 23 lecturers exclusively devoted to the MLS programme (that is only teach MLS students). Of these 13 have scientific publications and/or are involved in research-related projects and ten either do not, or have not recorded this information on the supplied Europass CVs (ibid). The 13 teaching staff who included their publications and research-related activity have between them a high number of high quality publications that are relevant to the research interests of Masters students (interviews with students, interviews with graduates) but the contribution of the publications and research activity of the remaining ten members of staff is unknown. However, in 2023-24 seven members of staff were involved in supervising Masters theses (SER, p. 101) and the number of students at this level relatively small in any particular year, and hence there would appear to be sufficient numbers of qualified staff available to implement a high quality doctoral study programme.

2.4.4. Analysing the situation as of May 2024 (Annex 2.3.1 of the SER, in conjunction with Annex 2.3.2 CV ENG) experts note that there are currently 23 lecturers exclusively devoted to the MLS programme (that is only teach MLS students). Of these, a majority (18) have either published in peer-reviewed editions or five years practical (relevant to subject matter) experience and five either do not, or have not recorded this information on the supplied Europass CVs (ibid).

2.4.5. Joint annual programme reviews and planning seminars focus on integrating military and civilian lecturers, considering content, results, and assessment methods (SER, p.101; interview with Programme Directors, interviews with academic teaching staff). Both institutions (NDAL and BALTDEFCOL) hold joint discussions on assessment criteria and pedagogical skills at the start of each academic year and as needed during the programme (SER,p.101; interviews with academic teaching staff). Lessons learned and improvements in synergy between education and research, especially regarding military defence courses, are discussed at the final academic year meeting based on their Memorandum of Cooperation (SER, ibid). Cooperation also occurs through various educational and scientific events, including guest lectures, joint implementation of Master's methodology courses, civil protection courses, and participation in professional and scientific conferences (SER, p. 101; interviews with academic teaching staff).NDAL lecturers frequently attend BALTDEFCOL's annual conferences and contribute to academic journals like the 'Baltic Defence Review' (SER, p.101; interviews with research staff, interviews with academic teaching staff).

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

Conclusions:

The Professional Masters in Military Leadership and Security (MLS) has been jointly operated by the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) and NDAL since 2010, ensuring shared academic staffing responsibilities, though ultimate responsibility lies with NDAL. The MLS programme employs academic staff from both BALTDEFCOL and NDAL, involved in teaching, supervising, and reviewing master's theses. This faculty includes experienced military personnel and qualified civilian experts. Significant improvements appear to have been made since the last accreditation. These enhancements include an increase in lecturers with advanced degrees, a higher proportion of permanent contracts at BALTDEFCOL, and the adoption of new technologies, e-learning, and mixed research methods, all contributing to the programme's overall quality. The majority of lecturers have notable scientific publications or are involved in research projects. The research contributions of some lecturers are not well-documented, but most have either peer-reviewed publications or relevant practical experience, which adds to the programme's academic rigor. Joint annual programme reviews and planning seminars help integrate military and civilian lecturers, focusing on content, results, and assessment methods. NDAL and BALTDEFCOL engage in collaborative discussions on assessment criteria and pedagogical skills at the beginning of each academic year and as needed. This cooperative approach also includes various educational and scientific events, such as guest lectures, joint implementation of courses, and participation in professional and scientific conferences. NDAL lecturers frequently attend BALTDEFCOL's annual conferences and contribute to academic journals like the Baltic Defence Review. The qualifications and the number of teaching staff are adequate to enable students to achieve the MLS programme's aims and learning outcomes. However, there appears to be a reliance on a relatively small number of academic staff for thesis supervision.

Strengths:

- 1) Collaborative Framework: The MLS programme benefits from the formal cooperation between BALTDEFCOL and NDAL, ensuring a broad range of expertise and resources are available. This partnership enhances the academic quality and depth of the programme.
- 2) Active Engagement in conferences: NDAL lecturers' participation in BALTDEFCOL's conferences and contributions to academic journals like the 'Baltic Defence Review' enhance the programme's academic standing and visibility.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Apparent disparity in research activity: There is a notable discrepancy in the research

involvement among the faculty, with ten members either not engaged in research or lacking documentation of their research activities. This could impact the overall research output and academic reputation of the programme.

2) Small number of theses supervisors: With only seven staff members currently involved in supervising master's theses (albeit with a small number of students), there might be constraints in providing sufficient supervision and support, especially if student numbers grow.

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: Fully compliant

There are several discrepancies in the CV's of some academic staff from requirements (a small minority of staff do not have the requisite number of peer-reviewed publications or equivalence in work experience). But overall the teaching staff is of excellent academic qualification, and this staff allows delivering quality education to students. The NDAL proactively manages changes in teaching staff to maintain MLS programme quality and compliance with regulatory standards. Additionally, a mechanism for mutual cooperation among teaching staff has been established, promoting the integration of study courses and the attainment of the programme's goals. This means that R7 criterion can be assessed as fully compliant. A recommendation for NDAL for the future is that working together with BaltDefCol it should regularly (e.g. bi-annually) audit the CV of teachers to see if they fulfill formal qualification 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 generally fulfills the criteria outlined for the Professional Higher Education (Regulation Nr. 305 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (MLS annex 3.2.1). However, while there is a course dedicated for civil protection, as mandated by law, there is no dedicated course for environmental protection, which should be addressed in future to ensure provision is made for students who did not acquire this during their earlier education.

- 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: Fully compliant

In reference to the professional standard of this study programme, the NDAL provided an explanation, which states that taking into account the fact that the study programme was subordinated so that a graduate could be appointed to a military position in the armed forces, the Master's study programme was developed and approved without a qualification. The NDAL conclude by saying that currently, there is no qualification awarded after the completion of this study programme, but the level of acquired knowledge and skills corresponds to the performance of the functions of the commanding staff of the Joint Headquarters for different

types of forces and different military capabilities. At the same time, the NDAL note that they are aware of the need for compliance with the currently valid regulations, therefore the NDAL is developing the standard for the profession of a Senior military leader (7. LQF), and indicate that the standard is planned to be approved by the Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council of Professional Education and Employment at the end of 2024 and will cover the knowledge, skills and competencies already provided by the study programme (MLS annex 3.2.6). Experts find this situation justifiable and look forward to the standard's approval.

- 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

The study course descriptions and materials are prepared in the language in which the programme is implemented - English, are also available in Latvian, and comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561, Paragraph two and Section 562, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (MLS annex 3.2.4).

- 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: Partially compliant

The Diploma sample for completing the study programme is partly in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures for Issuing State-Recognized Higher Education Documents (Regulation No. 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers) (MLA annex 3.1.1). There are discrepancies in the terminology used compared to the specific wording outlined in the Regulation. In the version of NDAL, the Diploma on page 3 use the wording "Ar Valsts pārbaudījuma komisijas", whereas the Regulation specifies that "Ar valsts pārbaudījumu komisijas" should be used in this manner. Additionally, the title of the diploma should be in accordance with Annex 3 to Cabinet Regulation No.202 - Professional Higher Education Diploma, not Master's Diploma.

- 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 programme is implemented in English, all teachers and supervisors are proficient in the language.

- 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: Fully compliant

The Attestation signed by the NDAL Rector confirms that the teaching staff who are involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2 level knowledge in English in accordance with the European Language Proficiency assessment levels (Annex 2.3.4).

- 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

Sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement and requirements of the Mandatory Provisions To Be Included In The Study Agreement (Regulation Nr. 70 of the Cabinet of Ministers).

- 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

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia as represented by the NDAL has signed a Memorandum of Intent with General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (MAL), which include provisions of MAL's capacity to provide the possibility to complete degree studies for Baltic Defence College students in case of termination of the study programme "Military Leadership and Security" by enrolling in MAL's academic master's study programmes "Defence studies", "Defence resource management", as well as in programmes prospectively registered in the study field of "Defence Studies". Under these circumstances, the NDAL and the MAL will initiate an agreement between The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia and The Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, determining the status of students in Lithuania and other relevant provisions. (annex 2.1.3).

- 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

The explanation on compensation of damage provided by NDAL states that, based on the Paragraph 12 of the Regulation No. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Rules of Procedure of the National Defence Academy of Latvia", Paragraph 3 of the Regulation No. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedure for Sending a Soldier of Professional Service to an Educational Institution to

Obtain Education Necessary for the Execution of Official Duties and for Covering Educational Expenses, as well as the Procedure for Reimbursement of Such Expenses”, the first paragraph of Section 48 of the Law on Military Service and the first sentence of Section 49 of the Law on Military Service, a soldier receives a soldier's remuneration during the direct performance of his military service and is also partially dependent on the State for maintenance, rent compensation, uniform and necessary service equipment, and a soldier does not finance his/her own studies at a military educational institution (the National Armed Forces finance the tuition fees from the state budget funds allocated to the Ministry of Defence for this purpose), therefore, if a study programme is not accredited or the study programme licence is revoked due to an action (act or omission) of the higher education institution and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme, he/she shall not suffer any loss (annex 2.1.4).

- 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: Fully compliant

Generally, the study programme complies with the specific regulatory framework of the military sector, including criteria:

1) Number of students, recruitment of students, conclusion of student contracts (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, Section 18, Paragraph 2 of the Military Service Law, Sections 10 and 11 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia" and Section 6 of the Regulation Nr. 953 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedures by which a soldier of the professional service is sent to an educational institution for the acquisition of education necessary for the performance of official duties and training expenses covered, as well as the procedure for the reimbursement of such expenses").

2) Academic staff (Section 7, Paragraph 21 (Part 2) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Sections 16 (16.3) and 17 of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

3) NDAL Constitution (Section 10, Paragraph 10 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Regulation Nr. 576 of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the Approval of the Constitution of the National Defence Academy of Latvia". It should be noted, however, that this Regulation (Nr. 576) is no longer in force and the new legislation - Regulation Nr. 447 of the Cabinet of Ministers, must now be considered. Nevertheless, since it was approved on 11.06.2024, NDAL appropriately adhered to the correct legislation when applying for accreditation).

4) NDAL governing bodies (Section 12, Paragraph 3; Section 14.1. Paragraph 17 and Section 14.2. Paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, and Paragraph 1, Parts 1.1. and 1.2. of of the Regulation Nr. 643 of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the Operation of the National Defence Academy of Latvia").

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

While the study programme largely complies with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments, there seems to be an issue with the language used, specifically on page 3 of the Diploma.

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

Conclusions:

The MLS Professional Masters study programme, jointly operated by the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) and the NDAL since 2010, is uniquely available to a select group of active duty officers. The programme's high-quality and specialized curriculum is closely aligned with the future duties and career paths of Latvian officers. Accredited by NATO, it attracts top-level speakers from NATO, the EU, and beyond, ensuring the content remains relevant and interconnected with the needs of the armed forces. Collaboration with framework countries' Ministries of Defence enables rapid curriculum updates, ensuring the programme stays current and relevant.

Students in the programme are fully supported, with necessary resources and funding readily available, although no minimum number of students is set. The involvement of experienced military personnel and qualified civilian experts from both BALTDEFCOL and NDAL in teaching and supervising Master's theses adds to the programme's academic rigor. Recent improvements, such as an increase in lecturers with advanced degrees, more permanent contracts, and the adoption of new technologies and research methods, have enhanced the overall quality of the programme.

The programme emphasises personalized attention, with dedicated teachers ensuring a high standard of education. Theses are aligned with military careers, although high dropout rates suggest a need for mechanisms like extended stays to support thesis completion. Joint annual programme reviews, planning seminars, and collaborative discussions between the NDAL and BALTDEFCOL on assessment criteria and pedagogical skills further integrate military and civilian lecturers, enhancing the program's content, results, and assessment methods.

Overall, the qualifications and number of teaching staff are adequate to achieve the programme's aims and learning outcomes, although there is a reliance on a small number of academic staff for thesis supervision. The cooperative approach, including various educational and scientific events, guest lectures, and participation in professional and scientific conferences, reinforces the programme's academic and practical strengths.

However, there are relatively high dropout rates among students. These tend to occur mainly after they have completed the taught portion of the programme but before the thesis submission deadline. This period often coincides with students returning to active duty.

Strengths:

1) High-Quality, Relevant Content: Courses are of high quality and directly relevant to future duties and career paths of Latvian officers. Content is up-to-date and interconnected, meeting armed forces requirements.

2) NATO Accreditation: The BDC's NATO accreditation ensures quality assurance and attracts top-level speakers from NATO, the EU, and other regions.

3) Qualified and Diverse Teaching Staff: Teaching staff includes experienced military personnel and qualified civilian experts.

4) The recent increase in lecturers with advanced degrees and permanent contracts at BALTDEFCOL.

4) Use of new technologies, e-learning, and mixed research methods.

Individual Attention to Students: International quality of BDC courses ensures personalized attention.

5) Collaborative Framework: The formal cooperation between BALTDEFCOL and NDAL enhances academic quality and provides a broad range of expertise and resources.

6) Active Engagement in Conferences: NDAL lecturers participate in BALTDEFCOL's conferences and

contribute to academic journals, enhancing the programme's academic standing.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Limited direct influence on the Baltic Defence College's Joint Command and General Staff 2) Course content: The NDAL cannot directly affect the content of the course (which forms the majority of the credits of its MA) and must coordinate with the national MoD for formal communication of its requirements to the BDC.
- 3) Significant Dropout Rates: High dropout rates suggest a need for mechanisms like extended stays to complete drafts and other support measures.
- 4) Limited Availability: The programme is only available to majors sent to the intermediate officer career course, and on the approval of the Chief of Defence, limiting broader access.
- 5) Classroom Availability: Limited classroom availability at BALTDEFCOL.
- 6) Disparity in Research Activity: Notable discrepancy in research involvement among faculty members, with some lacking documented research activities.
- 7) Small Number of Thesis Supervisors: With only seven staff members currently supervising master's theses, there might be constraints in providing sufficient supervision and support, especially if student numbers grow.
- 8) Discrepancy between the wording in NDAL's diploma sample and the prescribed format for state-recognized higher education documents.

Evaluation of the study programme "Military Leadership and Security"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Excellent

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Military Leadership and Security"

Short-term recommendations

1) To reduce significant dropout rates, mechanisms such as extended stays for completing drafts and additional support measures should be introduced. These measures should be developed and implemented by the end of 2025, with the goal of reducing dropout rates by at least 20%.

2) To improve the enrolment system for the professional Master's study programme, a review and overhaul of the system should be conducted. This should include steps to increase both the number and motivation of JCGSC students, with changes to be implemented within the next academic year.

3) To address the disparity in research activity amongst academic staff, a research development programme should be introduced. This programme should provide support and incentives for staff to engage in and document their research activities, with the goal of increasing overall faculty research involvement by 30% within the next two years.

4) To improve the enrolment system for the professional Master's study programme, a review and overhaul of the system should be conducted. This should include steps to increase both the number and motivation of JCGSC students, with changes to be implemented within the next academic year.

5) Ensure the language on the diploma sample is revised to align with regulatory requirements. Specifically, correct the term to match the official terminology as specified in the relevant regulations. This amendment should be completed within the next three months to ensure compliance.

Long-term recommendations

1) Subject to increasing student admission, increase the number of thesis supervisors from seven to at least ten to ensure adequate support for all students. This should be an aim to meet by the next assessment visit.

2) The NDAL should consider accrediting another MA Military Leadership and Security programme for senior officers not selected to study at the BDC. This programme could offer a comprehensive curriculum tailored to the professional development needs of these officers, covering essential topics like military leadership, strategic planning, and international security and be delivered in the Latvian language. This dual approach will enhance career advancement opportunities for senior officers and strengthen the NDAL's overall capability and readiness. The goal is to design and accredit the 'parallel' MA programme in the next two to three years, or sooner if possible.

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
<p>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:</p>	Fully compliant		<p>The internal quality management system of the Academy operates in accordance with the NDAL Quality Policy, which was approved by the Senate on 30 November 2022 and enacted by the Rector's order on 2 December 2022. The Expert Group found this system to be effectively applied and in full compliance with Latvian national regulations.</p> <p>To further enhance and streamline the system, the Expert Group recommends implementing a monitoring scorecard and considering the adoption of a managerial standard such as NATO SAT. It is evident that the NDAL has made significant efforts in recent years to improve its quality assurance (QA) system. Although limited data is currently available on the operation of this newly developed system, the Expert Group has no reason to doubt the commitment of the Academy's management and staff to ensuring its success.</p> <p>While the system meets the minimum QA requirements of national regulations, the Expert Group encourages the NDAL to consider adopting additional QA standards that align with its ambitions for delivering high-quality academic programmes.</p>
<p>R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)</p>	Fully compliant		<p>The integration of scientific and applied research within the study process is logical and well-justified across all levels. These elements are incorporated into the curriculum, and international cooperation in these fields is actively pursued and developed. The institution has effective mechanisms to involve teaching staff and students in research, ensuring their active and efficient participation.</p>

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.	Fully compliant		Although there are minor gaps in the long-term internationalization plans within NDAL's regulatory framework and some international mobility numbers are modest, the NDAL generally has an excellent system in place for cooperation with both local and international partners.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.	Fully compliant		Most of the previously expressed recommendations have been taken into account, except for some cases that are not relevant in connection with the specifics of the profession and are justified in the report.

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	Air Forces Military Leadership (42863)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
2	Naval Forces Military Leadership (42863)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
3	Land Forces Military Leadership (42863)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
4	Command Staff Officer (46863)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good
5	Military Leadership and Security (47863)	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Excellent

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

There are no dissenting opinions of the experts.