

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Baltic International Academy

Study field: Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation

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

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The Baltic International Academy (BIA) has acted in the Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organization study field since 2008 providing two different study programmes (“Tourism and Hospitality Management” and “Management of Communication in the Entertainment and Leisure Industry”) in two study modes (full-time and part-time) and two study languages (Latvian and English). The last accreditation of this study field took place in 2017 and resulted in the six-year accreditation term, which finished in summer 2023.

BIA exhibits several commendable strengths across various facets of its operations. Notably, the active and committed faculty members contribute significantly to creating a supportive and welcoming learning environment. Students express high satisfaction with their teachers and the cozy atmosphere, where they feel encouraged and supported. This positive atmosphere is further supported by the enthusiasm and motivation displayed by the Head of the study field.

The experts can see the hard work the BIA has done in changing the strategy and redesigning the BIA's study principles and orientation into studies in Latvian and English. Moreover, there's evident progress in study organization and quality compared to previous assessments, indicating a dedication to continuous improvement. The institution has taken commendable steps in quality management, reflected in achievements such as accreditation by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, hosting scientific conferences, and publishing journals. These initiatives underscore a commitment to maintaining academic excellence and fostering scholarly discourse.

Additionally, the proficiency demonstrated by graduates and students in English is laudable, with interviews conducted during the site visit without the need for interpreter assistance. However, there is room for improvement, particularly among administrative staff, to enhance language skills and motivation for English communication.

The facilities are good, classrooms are well equipped and experts got a good impression. It is good to see that the BIA has made investments in the learning environment. Unfortunately, issues with outdated study materials, particularly in Russian, highlight a need for curriculum alignment and updates to match the study language and ensure relevance and coherence. Similarly, deficiencies in research methodology skills and the empirical quality of student papers point to a gap in research training and academic writing standards that must be addressed.

On the flip side, the institution faces several notable weaknesses that warrant attention. The student assessment system appears to suffer from shortcomings, lacking learning outcome-oriented criteria. This suggests a need for a more robust evaluation framework to accurately gauge student performance and progress.

Another area of concern is the lack of ongoing international projects and applied research collaborations with employers. This limits opportunities for students to gain global exposure and relevance in real-world contexts, hindering their overall academic and professional development.

Whether many students are also working at the time of the studies, or using remote studies opportunities, experts expect BIA to pay more attention to the process and availability of recognition of prior learning or working experiences and find other solutions to support working students and reduce the drop-out rate.

Moreover, the absence of systematic implementation of academic honesty principles (mentioned in BIA internal documents) raises concerns about ethical standards and integrity within the institution. Similarly, the lack of established procedures for managing the use of AI in student works underscores the need for frameworks to ensure responsible and ethical AI utilization.

Lastly, the incomplete quality loop regarding survey feedback suggests a missed opportunity for utilizing valuable insights to drive improvement initiatives effectively. Closing this loop would be instrumental in fostering a culture of continuous improvement and responsiveness to stakeholder

feedback.

Concerning the study programmes in this study field, the Tourism and Hospitality Management study programme exhibits notable strengths - faculty with many Ph.D. holders who actively contribute to scientific discourse, positive financial indicators indicating operational profitability, and high levels of student satisfaction. At the same time, a deficiency in scientific publications directly related to tourism, scarcity of professional literature in English, inconsistency in programme structure, poorly developed rules and syllabi for internships, diminishing admission, and a high dropout rate underscores systemic issues that need urgent resolution to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of this particular study programme and institution in general.

The master-level study programme Management of Communication in the Leisure and Entertainment Industry possesses several strengths - BIA actively involves students in scholarly activities, a good ratio of academic staff with PhDs and professionals, high levels of student and graduate satisfaction, and positive financial indicators of the institution. However, besides these strengths, the programme faces weaknesses - a low student enrollment and high dropout level, a limited number of scientific publications directly related to tourism, outdated professional literature in English, poor research methodology and analytical skills in Master's theses, and incomplete implementation of a learning outcome-based study approach including with the student assessment are the areas of improvement.

In conclusion, while the institution demonstrates strengths in faculty commitment, study quality improvements, language proficiency, quality management, and motivational schemes, there are notable weaknesses in the assessment system, study materials, research skills, international engagement, academic integrity practices, AI integration, and feedback utilization. Addressing these weaknesses through targeted interventions will be crucial for enhancing overall institutional effectiveness and academic excellence.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1. The strategic objective of the study field is clearly defined and is attainable. The self-assessment report (SAR) states that it is defined based on the strategic development documents of Latvia and the development strategy of the BIA, as well as in consultation with students, employers, and professional organizations. Based on the documents, it can be concluded that the strategic objective derives from the BIA's overall strategy and is consistent with the national development documents, whereas there is no evidence of consultation with the industry, students, and professional organizations. During the site visit experts did not receive confirmation that any of the engaged parties, except management, have participated in the development of the strategy.

The strategic objective of the study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" is to prepare highly qualified, competent, and competitive professionals in the field of communication, recreation, and entertainment (SAR, p. 17, 83). Although the BIA Bachelor's degree programme has been created according to the standards of a manager of the tourism service, it seems that the strategic goal of this study field does not anticipate preparing specialists in the tourism industry. As stated in SAR, the goals of the study programme are created top-down from the strategic objective of the study field. The objective of the professional Bachelor study programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management" is to provide up-to-date knowledge in the fields of tourism and hospitality which does not match with the study field. However, it displays the essence of the study field much better. Taking into consideration that the objective of the study field corresponds to the objective of the BIA while not completely matching the strategic objectives of the respective

study programmes, it is advised to revise it according to the industry's needs.

At the same time, it should be noted that the decision of August 24, 2021 states that the BIA complies with the title of the University of Applied Sciences. This has resulted in revised and approved BIA objectives. As part of the redefined strategy of the BIA greater emphasis on applied research in the study field strategy would be desirable.

There are two study programmes in the study field - bachelor and master, which provides both continuity and mutual interconnection.

1.1.2. The BIA has analyzed its strengths and weaknesses and identified opportunities and threats which are reflected in the self-assessment report. To alleviate weaknesses and exploit the defined opportunities, a detailed plan for the development of the study field for 2023-2028 has been prepared (Annex 6). For example, insufficient mobility and international exchange of academic staff and students are mentioned as weaknesses in the SWOT analyses provided in SAR. To resolve this issue, the necessity to conclude cooperation agreements with partner universities in the EU has been pointed out in the development plan (Annex 6). The plan is structured according to the development objectives of the study field thus allowing to assess progress in the development of the particular study field. The tasks for achieving the overall goal are defined in tangible, achievable, but not always measurable terms. This is also reflected by the fact that it is not always possible to pinpoint and assess whether one or another task has been implemented. The required proof of performance (implementation criteria) has been defined, but more specific criteria are lacking to assess the extent to which the result has been achieved. For example, for the objective "Improvement of the study direction "Hotel and Restaurant Services and Tourism and Leisure Organisation" in line with labor market requirements" the indicator of implementation has been assigned as "Compliance of the study direction with the EU Education Area and Accreditation Guidelines". The result, as it has been defined, does not correspond to the substance of the objective and cannot be assessed if it has been achieved or not.

One can conclude that academic staff have been identified as persons responsible for several objectives stated in the Development plan. However, the interviews during the site visit revealed that the ten lecturers who participated in the interview were not aware of such a development plan. Lecturers may perform their assigned tasks in good faith without realizing their place and role in the plan. More structured and targeted implementation of the plan would be necessary to achieve the objectives of the development of the study field as defined in the plan.

Overall, the existence of a plan can be seen as a positive aspect of turning weaknesses into strengths or at least neutralizing them. However, to achieve actual progress, it is recommended to revise the plan by setting measurable values and tangible periods for the implementation of the defined tasks. It is necessary to develop a framework for communicating the plan to the responsible officials and verification of the results achieved.

1.1.3. According to information listed in the SAR one can conclude that the structure of the BIA and consequently - of the study field, is clear, aimed at the efficient operation of the Academy, and is also efficient for decision-making. According to the organizational structure of the BIA (<https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/about-us/structure-of-bia-university.html>), management of the BIA has been divided into two parts where academic activities are the responsibility of the Rector while the Board is responsible for commercial and related affairs. The area of studies is coordinated by the Direction Council, which "develops the strategy, mission, vision, goals and objectives", as well as plans methodological work. Methodological work is controlled and corrected by the BIA Council of the Study Field. As structural changes are in force only from January 25, 2024, effectiveness of the structure on methodological work can not be assessed. There is no evidence that Council has made any decision regarding methodological work so far.

The support provided by the administrative and technical staff ensures that the needs of the study

programmes correspond to the study field. The main support staff includes such units as the Study Department, and Student Information Centre which are subordinated to the Vice-Rector for Studies and Library who, in its turn, operates under the direct supervision of the Rector (according to the structure, stated in the BIA web page). Improved support for the implementation of the study programme both in the Latvian and the English languages would require an enhancement of the level of English proficiency of the support staff. As observed during the site visit, at the library, as well as at the Student Information Centre, the knowledge of English by the staff cannot be assessed as sufficient to provide information to students studying in English.

1.1.4. There is a clear system and procedures in place for the admission of students. According to the information stated in the self-assessment report, the admission process is organized according to the requirements stated in the Cabinet Regulation No. 846 of 10 October 2006 "Regulations Regarding the Requirements, Criteria, and Procedures for Admission to Study Programmes" and with the regulations approved by the BIA Senate – "BIA Admission Rules and Matriculation Procedure".

For the admission of foreign students, the BIA has developed an internal procedure requiring both document verification and English language proficiency verification. The self-assessment report stated that "Foreigners wishing to study in English must submit to the External Relations Department a proof of English language proficiency issued by an international testing institution during the past five years. Language proficiency must be at least at the B2 level of the CEFR." Information was updated during the visit, indicating that interviews are also taking place with foreign students before they are matriculated. Unfortunately, during the visit, it was not possible to verify the actual implementation of the information collected during the admission interviews, but this does not rule out the fact that they are taking place.

Regulations on the procedures for the recognition of competencies acquired outside formal education or obtained by professional experience have been developed and are in force in the BIA. There is a comprehensive document that regulates CP transfer in various situations, including those regarding students who apply for later stages of studies. Experts' evaluation is based on the provided Regulation, which states the general principles of CP transfer.

1.1.5. According to the self-assessment report, students' performance in a study course is assessed in accordance with the content, assessment criteria and requirements specified in the course description. However, only very general methods and criteria for assessing the performance are stated in the course descriptions (all possible methods are listed most often). There is neither a specific indication of the method used in the particular test nor indication of what knowledge is being tested in a particular test. It is positive that study course descriptions point out the percentage breakdown of the final grade.

After evaluating the type of assessments referred to in the study programme and study course descriptions (annex 9 and study programme's "Tourism and Hospitality Management" study course descriptions), one can conclude that in ~ 48% (Bachelor programme) of cases at the end of the study course examination of knowledge takes the form of a pass-fail test, which does not reflect the specific level of competence attained by the student. Although this type of assessment is allowed by the Regulations for Evaluation of the Study Results in BIA (attachment https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Regulations_Evaluation_Study.pdf), it would be advisable to review the type of final examination in many study courses in order to provide the quality of studies. Several study course descriptions mention that the final assignment is a differentiated test. This form of test is not mentioned in the Regulations for the evaluation of the study results in the BIA and thus this method requires clarification.

The self-assessment report states that "BIA conducts strict monitoring over the implementation of study programmes", which is performed by engaging both course lecturers and BIA study process support units: BIA Study Quality Assurance System and "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and

Recreation Organisation” Study Field Council. However, neither the analysis of the documents nor the interviews provide a clear view of how the evaluation methods used specifically in the course of studies and their consistency with the objectives of the programme are monitored.

According to the description of several study courses, the assessment is not learning outcome-based and does not provide an opportunity to fully verify knowledge and skills acquired. Many study courses employ identical study performance assessment criteria - analysis of literature - 40%, participation in discussions - 25%, preparation of a presentation - 25%, and final test - 10% (for example courses - Introduction to Studies and the Profession, Introduction to Entrepreneurship, World Market for Tourism Services and International Economic Relations etc). Assessment criteria for participation in discussions, analysis of literature, etc. have not been defined.

1.1.6. The BIA implements several activities to promote the principles of academic honesty. There are Regulations of the BIA on plagiarism control and a Code of Academic Integrity and Ethics in place. However, there is no discernible common framework and procedures for control and subsequent predefined actions against a student if plagiarism is detected in the student’s work. The self-assessment report makes it clear that each case is considered individually.

During the site visit interviews with both lecturers and students, it was argued that there were no cases of plagiarism at the Academy. This is doubtful since the lecturers interviewed argued that only the final thesis (diploma paper/master thesis) was being tested in an anti-plagiarism system. The assignments submitted within the framework of study courses are not examined at all.

An overview of study materials (presentations) prepared and posted on the Moodle platform leads to the conclusion that not all lecturers use references in their materials. The use of references is an essential prerequisite for promoting the principles of academic integrity in the Academy.

The BIA is yet to start an internal discussion on the regulation of the use of AI in students’ works. Even though the use of AI assistance in students’ work is an increasing problem, the BIA does not have any measures or procedures in place to address the issue.

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

The BIA has clearly defined its strategic objectives and tasks. However, as the Academy moves towards the status of a University of Applied Sciences, greater emphasis on applied research would also be desirable in the strategic objectives and tasks of the study field. The strategic objective of the study field doesn’t fully reflect the acquisition of competencies necessary for the tourism industry. The internal strengths and weaknesses identified by the BIA are justified and relevant. External opportunities and threats are real and present. Based on the findings of the SWOT analysis, the developed study field plan can help by providing useful instruments. However, the expected outcomes should be clarified in the plan. The management structure of the study field is oriented towards its development and decision-making takes place efficiently.

There is a clear system and procedures developed for the admission of local and international students. It is positive that foreign entrants are not only subject to documentary review but also to interviews before the final decision is taken.

A regulation has been developed in the BIA determining the evaluation methods and their application. However, the course descriptions define the assessment criteria in a very general way and therefore it is not clear whether the assessment form is effective in evaluating student performance. In the majority of cases, the student's performance is assessed in the form of a pass-fail test which does not fully assess the level of performance of the student. Revision of assessment methods for competencies in the study programme would be recommended.

The BIA takes a number of actions to promote the principles of academic integrity. There are Regulations of the BIA on plagiarism control and a Code of Academic Integrity and Ethics in place. However, according to the report and the interviews conducted, it cannot be assumed that, in

reality, there is a control of plagiarism in the university. Students' works are tested only once in the study cycle (only the final work is tested). It is highly recommended to consider the possibility of obtaining and using one of the most commonly known anti-plagiarism systems (e.g. Turnitin or CAPS) in all study courses.

Strengths:

- 1) A plan for the development of the study field 2023-2028 has been developed.
- 2) There is a clear system and procedures developed for the admission of students.

Weaknesses:

- 1) The strategic objective of the study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" does not include the preparation of highly qualified, competent, and competitive professionals in the field of tourism (only communication, recreation, and entertainment).
- 2) Individual objectives for reaching the objective, as well as implementation results, stated in the plan for the development of the study field 2023-2028, are too general thus preventing a precise evaluation of their implementation outcomes. There is insufficient communication of issues included and addressed by the plan with the key stakeholders.
- 3) There are no effective anti-plagiarism tools to test student assignments in study courses. The existence of such a system could, in the long run, promote respect for the principles of academic integrity among students and increase the quality of studies;
- 4) A clear, understandable assessment system corresponding to the objectives of the BIA and study field cannot be considered as being fully established at the Academy.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1. BIA has established the quality policy and it is publicly available on the institution's website - https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/quality_policy.pdf. It has been developed based on the BIA's long-term strategy, values, and approach to excellence as defined in the UK standard Investors in Excellence. BIA's quality assurance system describes goals for the quality work and defines roles, responsibilities, tasks, and follow-up processes. As such, a quality assurance system allows the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and both study programmes. In 2023, a new quality assurance administrator was appointed, who has considerable experience in other industries, including ISO 9001 standards. In the field of regulation and implementation of quality assurance, a considerable shift has been made to improve the previous situation (an experienced person in quality management has been employed which now takes care of the QA system; they introduced the British standards Investors in excellence, etc.). The established system has good possibilities for ensuring continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes. These facts should contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study programmes. However, it will be necessary to invest some more effort from the entire institution due to certain shortcomings in the implementation of the designed system, which are described in more detail below. During the site visit when interviewing the QA group, the experts encountered a lack of knowledge of European ESG starting points. However, it is possible that the interviewees got confused and simply did not understand the question, as the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) are covered in the BIA's internal and external quality assurance procedures and documents.

1.2.2. The procedures for the development, approval, and review of the study programmes at the BIA have been defined and approved at the meeting of the BIA Senate

(https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Development_approval_new_study_programme_eng.pdf). Self-assessment reports for the study field are composed every academic year. One of the areas where there is still a lot of room for improvement is the securing of a closed quality loop, as they do not have systematically established mechanisms for informing and providing feedback to students and other stakeholders.

Based on the information that has been gathered from SAR and during the onsite visit meeting with the QA manager, it was stated that systematic graduate surveys are not implemented yet but it is under development now. It was clarified that they have enlisted graduates and communicate from time to time, presumably, through informal communication. Based on this information gathered during the meeting, it is clear that there is no formal system of communication established with the graduates at the moment, but it is to be developed in the future.

When the expert group asked specifically about employer surveys during the onsite meeting with the QA manager, it was specified that until now, each study programme had its own developed questionnaires and they were very long and extensive. For the tourism study field, the QA manager specified that she had not seen the questionnaires. As it was stated by the QA manager, there is a plan to develop a common procedure - a form of survey that is structured, compact and short and can be adjusted for all study fields and programmes. BIA has the intention to create and implement a unified form of the employer survey questionnaire. Surveys should be conducted regularly and systematically.

1.2.3. BIA's Senate developed and approved a document "Procedure for submission and consideration of student applications, proposals, and complaints" (https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Procedure_submission_consideration_student_applications_proposals_complaints.pdf), which provides the process for students who want to submit proposals and complaints about the study process and other issues. When experts visited BIA, students expressed overall satisfaction about being informed and receiving feedback, although they could not recall giving any proposals for improvement. A student may submit an Application in person at the BIA Student Information Centre. Although the applications and appeals are handled in the same document, it would be wiser to distinguish those procedures due to the different processes and ethical issues (appeals must be solved according a different procedure than applications and proposals).

1.2.4. BIA established a unified system for collecting and analyzing statistical data, which are being collected by different BIA structures. The analysis of information and statistical data is later processed and analyzed by the BIA Computer Centre, which then presents the results to the BIA Governing Board, the BIA management, the head of the study field, and study programmes at operational meetings or by sending them to interested parties. There are many informal contacts with employers and other stakeholders when collecting information and ideas for improving study programmes. Experts confirmed that surveys with students of the study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organization" are being performed; systematic graduate surveys have not yet been implemented. Instead of performing surveys with employers, they simply collect the information from organizations that offer practice for students in this study field.

The data which were provided to experts weren't updated, and different sources gave different information about the basic facts (e.g. SAR and interviews gave contradictory information about the research areas concerning this particular study field; half of presented Erasmus+ agreement were overdue; in syllabuses were credit points in CP, ECTS and/or both). Feedback collection, analysis, and presentation are not systematic. BIA does not have set up KPIs and there is no process to collect data/measure the achievement of the set goals.

1.2.5. Important information on the study field and the study programmes are published on the BIA

website <https://www.bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/>. Information is provided in Latvian and English, which are the languages in which study programmes of the study field are being offered and delivered. Students can find complying information about the programmes and courses. Regarding the accreditation status of both study programmes, there is a mention on the website: "Study Programme "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" is carried out according to BIA Licence No.04030-49. The new accreditation process has started. " Sadly, the given information is erroneous because the titles of the study programmes and title of the study field are mixed up. The title "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" is for the study field, not the study programme. Also, the license of the study programme represents the basis for implementation only till the next accreditation - as both study programmes were licensed in 2008 and 2011 and afterward underwent accreditation in 2017, so this statement is incorrect. Therefore, the information that currently both study programmes do not have valid accreditation is lacking. The BIA representatives argued that the responsibility for this delay partly lies with the AIC since BIA had to wait for the evaluation process to begin. Of course, BIA could have prepared the documents before the expiration of the accreditation. Students that experts met during the site visit were not aware that this was the fact either.

The information about the study programmes "Tourism and Hospitality Management" and "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry" is published in English too.

Public information about the BIA (e.g. found on websites offering studies in Latvia) has not been updated for a very long time: <https://educationbridge.eu/baltic-international-academy> and <https://baltic.study/en/bsa> (here is information about offered dormitory too) and <https://www.rocapply.com/study-in-latvia/latvia-universities/baltic-international-academy/bachelor's-in-tourism-and-hospitality-management.html>, etc. On these webpages also tourism programmes are available and accreditation and state diplomas are promised.

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

BIA has established a quality policy that mostly ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study programmes; it is publicly available on the institution's website. Its quality assurance system allows the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and both study programmes. A formal system of communication for collecting and gathering feedback information should be established with the graduates and employers. In place is a mechanism developed for the submission of student complaints and suggestions, it is effective, promotes the implementation of improvements, and students are informed about such opportunities. BIA does not have set up KPIs and there is no process to collect data/measure the achievement of the set goals. The information that currently both study programmes do not have valid accreditation is lacking, some of the given information on the website is erroneous.

Strengths:

1. In 2023, a new quality assurance administrator was appointed, with relevant experience in the field.
2. The BIA research quality assurance system has been implemented based on the British standards Investors in Excellence, which are internationally established standards.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Inappropriate communication with students and other stakeholders about the status of accreditation for the study field and its study programmes.
- 2) Graduate and employer surveys are not conducted.

- 3) There is no systematized process for providing feedback to stakeholders, the quality loop is not closed.

Assessment of the requirement [1]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The internal quality system has been improved. However there is no systematic gathering of data from graduates and employers in place, the feedback to these two groups should also be formalized. BIA does not have set up KPIs and there is no process to collect data/measure the achievement of the set goals

- 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

BIA has established a quality policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education.

- 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

BIA has accepted the 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.

- 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

The Criteria for the reassurance of the learning outcomes have been developed and are publicly available.

- 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

BIA has developed the procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the work quality.

- 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: Partially compliant

BIA ensures the collection and analysis of the collected information, but in the field of surveys with employers, they should formalize and further develop these procedures.

- 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

BIA ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field through the implementation of its quality assurance systems.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1. According to the information that has been provided in the SAR p.50 as well as the information that has been gathered during the onsite visit, it can be stated that BIA has established a system for determining the financial support for the implementation of the study field of “Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation” as well as the two corresponding study programmes that are implemented in the study field, namely - 1. Professional bachelor's study programme “Tourism and Hospitality Management” and 2. Professional Masters study programme “Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry”.

Under Article 77 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the founder shall provide the financial resources necessary for the continued operation of the higher education institution, including the performance of the tasks set by the founder, and control over their use. According to the SAR p.50, BIA has a single budget, and the principles of budgeting and the overall allocation of funding for the performance of the functions of the BIA are approved by the founders.

According to SAR p.51, since the establishment of the BIA, tuition fees have been the main source of funding for the study process. The analysis provided in the SAR p.51 and the Annex “BIA Revenues” reflects the aforementioned statement of tuition fees. BIA's financial stability is highlighted by the total assets and stable financial indicators that have been indicated in the Annex “BIA Financial Stability Indicators.docx”, which can be accessed under “Annexes” on the e-platform. This stability allows BIA to address financing issues promptly and timely in small groups within strategic specializations.

Following the SAR p.51 and the information gathered during the onsite visit, the revenue of the BIA study field “Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation” consists of 1. Student tuition fees; 2. Scientific activities and 3. Other revenue.

During the onsite visit, the expert group asked about possible budget places provided for some of the students at BIA and it was stated that some students can receive budget places and are selected by top management of BIA for specific study fields and study programmes. Students have to participate in an internal competition for the budget place when they apply with their high school diplomas and their evaluation is mainly based on their grades and achievements. The budget places are rotating, thus the academic performance has to be maintained to keep the budget placed. For those students who do not receive budget places, there is an internal system of discounts established by the BIA. The discounts vary in their amounts but fluctuate starting from 5% to 100%. It is a high priority for BIA to ensure that those students who have a bad financial situation at home can continue their studies, thus, they usually focus on possibilities on how to find a scholarship or funds to manage that these students can finish their studies. Per the SAR p.51, the types of discounts and the sorting system are specified in the “Regulations on Studies at the Baltic International Academy”. When asked the head of international affairs about international student opportunities for discounts, it was stated that they can apply for different kinds of existing Latvian state scholarships, which are available.

The main use of financial resources of the BIA is reflected in the Annex - “BIA expenses” as well as the classification of expenses is shown in Table 2.10. in the SAR p.54. The main use includes such expenses as 1. Salary for the teaching staff; 2. Social contributions and state fees following the

national regulations; 3. Material provision expenses (literature, library collection maintenance, and expansion, external services, business trips, conference organizational expenses, etc.); 4. Utilities (rent, insurance, operational expenditure) and others.

By the SAR p.54, the funding for science consists mainly of BIA's resources and from the EU's structural funds. Expenses include remuneration for scientific staff, professors, and associate professors, as well as expenses that include the organization of conferences, travel expenses, and participation fees for participation in international conferences, and publications of the publishing and editorial board.

Overall, it can be stated that the funding system ensures quality education by guaranteeing necessary resources for students, teaching staff, and the administration. They have the necessary resource base such as library resources and research activities.

1.3.2. Based on the information gathered during the onsite visit including the tour of the facilities as well as the presentation of Moodle and the visit to the library, it can be stated that BIA has identified the necessary infrastructure resources and material and technical support required for the implementation of the "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" study field. The expert group managed to visit the premises - both buildings located in Lomonosova Street 4 and 1/4 (since 21 February 2024 renamed - Valērijas Seiles street).

The established infrastructure consists of computer classes, administrative premises, conference rooms, halls, a library and reading room, a dining hall, a restaurant training room, and others. One of the examples of the use of the large halls is broadcasting lectures from Riga to other branches in Daugavpils and Liepāja remotely. The BIA has equipped classrooms with copying equipment, visual presentation equipment, computer hardware, and TV equipment for teleconferencing purposes. According to the SAR p.58, new equipment and hardware for the needs of the programme are purchased as part of the BIA technical development plan.

However, there were 2 rooms that the expert group did not manage to visit during the tour of facilities: 1. The Laboratory of Neurocognitive Implicit Processes, which has been mentioned in the SAR as also one of the rooms used as part of the studies in this study field and 2. Student Parliament room. Both of these rooms have been enlisted under the resource list in the SAR p.57 as located in Lomonosova Street (since 21 February 2024 renamed - Valērijas Seiles street). The expert group asked during the tour if it was possible to visit the aforementioned laboratory but the tour guide stated that it would not be possible due to the unplanned inclusion of that room in the tour.

During the onsite meeting with students, they stated that they have access to necessary resources, such as Moodle, library, databases for study purposes, and software tools for educational purposes. Masters students specified that as they are mainly international students and they must find housing in Riga, it would be highly appreciated if BIA had their own dormitories/student hostel for them to conveniently live in. They mentioned that they appreciated the assistance provided by BIA when they were moving to Riga, BIA helped them with various possible offers for housing.

In general, based on the information provided in the SAR as well as obtained during the site visit and discussions with management, academic staff, students, and graduates, BIA meets the criteria for infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary for the "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" study field.

1.3.3. Based on the information acquired during the tour of the facilities and gathered during meetings with BIA representatives, it became clear that BIA has developed and established a system and procedure for the improvement and purchase of methodological and informative provision, including library resources and databases, which are available to students and teaching staff. During the teaching staff meeting it was specified that in case there is a need for purchasing a new book, they prepare applications at the library or to the study field director. None of them have ever had problems with the existing mechanism. They also mentioned that the head of the library is very

friendly and helpful to find solutions.

As was observed during the onsite visit, BIA's scientific library provides access to study course literature, periodicals, electronic databases, and other resources necessary for students and academic staff such as printers and scanners. The library collection is accessible in an electronic catalog, facilitating easy access to resources, which is convenient for students. In the SAR, pp.62-63, are enlisted all the accessible databases provided by the BIA including SCOPUS, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, LNB Digital Library, and others. However, when it was asked by students and the library representative, they stated that not all databases are accessible to all students from home such as SCOPUS, but EBSCO can be accessed. SCOPUS database is subscribed to by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia for all higher education institutions of the country, therefore BIA follows the terms and conditions under which this database is distributed. According to the terms of subscription, it can be used only from the premises of the BIA library.

In regards to the existing study materials and their correspondence to the study languages that the studies are implemented in, it has to be stated that there is a significant gap between the resources available in Russian, which are mainly outdated (some of them date back to years as 1960, 1970), with those provided in Latvian and English. It was stated by the librarian that the library is trying to ensure access to the most recent books to study field topics in English and Latvian despite that they are comparably expensive and new books are published rather rarely.

As it has been stated in the SAR p.61 and has been confirmed during the onsite visit, at the beginning of a new study year, newly admitted students have practical classes that introduce the Library's collection, the possibilities of using electronic resources, and the rules for using the Library. Since such an introductory course of study is mandatory for all enrolled students, it is equated with a student's research activity.

1.3.4. According to the information gathered during meetings with students from both study programmes implemented in the study field, students are satisfied with the Moodle e-learning platform. They stated it is the central platform for all the information related to their study process. They can access educational materials there, recordings of lectures, participate in group assignments, submit independent work, view their grades, and communicate with lecturers as well as other students. Study course descriptions as well as study course evaluations are accessible in the relevant course section. Students stated that Moodle is especially convenient during remote studies as all that you need for successful studies is there.

During the meeting with Bachelor students, they stated that their lecturers follow the newest tendencies and modern forms of teaching. One of the examples that was mentioned was discussing Dubai and how to form a great travel destination in the last 30 years. They also shared that they use and have access to the most recent and latest programmes, platforms, and study tools for study purposes such as the aforementioned Moodle, which is easy to navigate through as well as projectors, big TVs, and specified that computers are not lagging.

The expert group identified that one of the most commonly used technological solutions for studies at BIA is also the BigBlueButton (BBB) system that is used for recording lectures online. Especially, for Masters students such a tool is of high necessity and is appreciated. During the tour of facilities, the expert group saw one of the recorded lectures that students had access to for study purposes.

In the SAR p. 67, there is a list provided of programmes and technological resources used by the BIA for study implementation. Based on the technological tools enlisted in the SAR and the ones identified at the premises, it has to be outlined that the list in the SAR seems to be outdated. The SAR p. 67 stated that BIA is using such outdated software as Microsoft Office 2000/XP/2003/2007, while it was clear based on seeing the computers onsite that the software they are using is newer than the ones specified.

1.3.5. Following the SAR p.68, BIA promotes a flexible recruitment policy, aiming to attract qualified

academic staff. It is stated in the SAR p.68 that an open competition is announced for vacant places by regulatory enactments. The documents submitted by the applicants are evaluated in accordance with the “Regulations on Academic Positions of the Baltic International Academy” and “Regulations on the Scientific Advisory Board of BIA and Elections of Professors and Associate Professors at the Baltic International Academy”. The Senate (academic staff, administrative staff, students), Scientific Advisory Board, Direction Council, and students participate in the recruitment process. The contrary to what has been stated in the SAR, the expert group did not find out how exactly students are involved in the recruitment process of academic staff, except the expert group does take into account that students are represented in the Council, however, not in other parts of BIA management structures, where decisions on recruitment of academic staff are decided. The information gathered during the onsite visit from various representatives did not confirm the involvement of students as was stated in the SAR. During the onsite visit, none of the students mentioned that they are taking part in such a procedure. Evaluation of applicants for academic positions includes reviewing their scientific biographies, relevant work experience, and references, in addition also the opinion of the Senate members is taken into account when making the decision. The Senate of BIA assesses qualifications that align with the goals and tasks of the study field and programmes.

Following the information provided in Table 2.19. of SAR p.69, the BIA distinct academic staff, who are elected teaching staff and guest lecturers. In comparison to academic staff, in the case of recruitment of guest lecturers, BIA recruits guest lecturers without an open competition, vacation days are in proportion to the hours they have worked, and guest lecturers can work in parallel in various institutions and other differences.

Following the SAR p.68, in the study field of “Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation”, the academic staff is selected to ensure compliance with the study programme’s implementation conditions as well as legal requirements, including qualifications, language skills, and pedagogical experience.

1.3.6. Based on the meeting with the study programme director, it was clarified that BIA is constantly trying to ensure that its teaching staff is developing their skills. The largest majority of teaching staff participated in a qualification-raising course (Innovation in Higher Education, 160 academic hours) before the Covid pandemic in Daugavpils and they received certificates from that. The study programme director has participated in an event/course evaluation of the competencies of students at universities and other professors also participated there.

According to SAR pp.71-72, BIA promotes the growth of their teaching staff in various ways such as by participating in the annual inter-university methodological seminars "Methodology of Socio-Humanitarian Cognition and Operation" organized by the BIA, which are conducted by both Latvian and foreign experts. In the 2019/2020 academic year, several seminars were held at the BIA and the teaching staff attended such as methodological seminars "Methodology of Socio-Humanitarian Cognition and Operation" and "The Role of Social Sciences and Humanities in the Modern World" on 28 January 2020. The seminars enlisted in the SAR happened 4 years ago. Based on the information that has been provided in the SAR, there are no pedagogical or didactic courses mentioned after 2020, which raises the question of whether there is enough budget for training for the academic staff. However, later on it was specified that there are other courses and seminars that have happened more recently such as 1. Two-day traveling seminar "Smart Weekend" (Gudras brīvdienas) jointly with Daugavpils University for administration and academic staff of the BIA (June 2022, Lilaste);

2. Seminar "Conflicts: what are they and what to do about them?" (November 2023) <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/lv/par-bsa/zinas/1281-kvalifikacijas-paaugstinasanas-kursi-baltijas-starptautiska-akademija-2.html>.

3.Seminar of the BIA Centre for Psychological Counselling “Neural networks of artificial intelligence

and modeling of creative activity" (April 2024)
<https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/about-us/press-service/1349-discussion-about-issues-of-artificial-intelligence.html>;

4. professional development course "Innovations in modern andragogy" – 40 ac.h., 1.5. ECTS, (from March 2024)
<https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/lv/par-bsa/zinas/1281-kvalifikacijas-paaugstinanas-kursi-baltijas-starptautiska-akademija-2.html>.

BIA employs teaching staff with diverse qualifications and ensures direct relation to the study field of Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation" including those with master's and doctoral degrees in related fields. This information can be reviewed under Annex "CV_EN_7z".

Academic staff involved in the implementation of study programmes taught in English are required to have confirmed proficiency in the language, as indicated by their higher education documents and self-assessment in the EUROPASS Language Passport.

Academic staff members stated that their performance is largely evaluated based on student feedback provided in surveys that they evaluate at the end of each semester. It is also an assessment of the teaching staff's knowledge and skills. In the opinion of the expert group, it is important to continue to gather feedback from students as it helps identify areas for improvement and assesses the impact of professional development activities on teaching quality.

1.3.7. Based on the information gathered during the onsite visit and provided in the SAR p.70, BIA tries to ensure that the workload of teaching staff is balanced. BIA is supportive of initiatives of teaching staff to participate in improvements of their qualification. These improvements usually are either participation in scientific conferences, projects, training, or exchanges abroad.

Based on the information that is accessible in such documents as study course descriptions - 8.ANNEX_Mapping of study courses to achieve the study results of the Bachelor's study programme (1).docx and Man.of_commun.in the leis.&ent.ind._ Course descriptions.zip, it can be identified that there are several occasions when one lecturer has 5 or more study courses per one group of students. The same lecturers have been enlisted as the researchers and in addition have administrative positions in some cases, which does raise a question from the side of the expert group - how balanced is the workload of the teaching staff if they have so many duties and courses in parallel. Two of the teaching staff members who were present in the onsite meeting mentioned that BIA is trying to be forthcoming as these two lecturers have jobs in two academic institutions in parallel, which of course sometimes can be challenging.

1.3.8. Based on the information gathered during onsite visit meetings with students, it can be said that BIA has established a system to ensure necessary support for their students. Masters students, who are currently all international students, specified that BIA assisted them in finding housing, and helped with necessary paperwork before their arrival to Latvia. Students also noted that there is a special introductory week, where they get to know the premises and the country.

Another thing students mentioned was a lack of interaction between Latvian and English streams sharing that they would prefer to have more social events, parties, BIA organized events for them to spend more time together to get to know each other and socialize. It is also closely related that international students wish to be more integrated into practical lessons with Latvian stream students to better understand other cultures and religions and how to deal with exposure to a new culture when you need to adapt to a new environment.

Based on the meeting with the ERASMUS coordinator, she stated that she has to coordinate ERASMUS projects in addition to assisting students who wish to study at BIA from Turkey and help with visa permits and other relevant specificities and special requirements for them. For international students from third-world countries, it is the responsibility of the vice-rector as she is also the head of international affairs. Based on the meeting that was additionally organized with the

vice-rector, BIA had to develop a special process for taking in international students and they are under the care of the study programme director. The specific procedure requirement of necessary additional admission assessment of international foreign students is described and specified under Cabinet Regulations of 21.06.2010 No. 554 "Noteikumi par valstīm, kuru pilsoņiem, izsniedz vīzu vai uzturēšanās atļauju, veic pārbaudi." As it was clarified by the vice-rector, BIA follows all the necessary steps in the process of admission of foreign students, so that it is smooth and easy for them.

BIA also has a Study Information Centre aimed at offering counseling to students on various aspects of the study process, communication with the administration, and engagement with the teaching staff, which the expert group had the opportunity to visit during the onsite visit. This centralized resource helps students navigate academic and administrative matters effectively.

Based on the information gathered during the onsite visit, students were asked about the social activities and events organized by the BIA as well as their opportunities to participate in Student Council and students mentioned that Student Council has become inactive since Covid and it feels as if it has not recovered. However, there has been one event that has pointed in the direction on building friendly relations among students that was taking place in the study year of 2023/2024, the BIA organized International Festival of Student Friendship (<https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/about-us/press-service/1213-international-student-friendship-festival-2.html>), which was attended by foreign students of the BIA and their friends from other higher education establishments in Riga. Thus, similar activities and events are encouraged to be continued. When the expert group asked if any of the students present at the meeting were involved in Student Council activities, none of them stated that they were. All the social events students take part in are self-organized. Thus, it means that if no activities are organized for students, it means that the budget that has been specified under SAR p.7 that "The Student Parliament of the BIA is financed from the centralized funds according to the provisions of the Article 53 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and includes 1/200 part," is not used. Based on the students that were met during the onsite visit, the expert team was not able to make a clear distinction of the situation of student representation in decision-making bodies as none of the students present stated that they are involved in any of the bodies as the student representatives. However, students are rarely aware or properly informed of students who are representing their interests in decision-making bodies. In SAR, it has been stated that students are represented, thus, an expert group suggests, in case there is a lack of information provided to students, to bring awareness of these activities to students and ensure that students are properly represented, if not done already.

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

BIA demonstrates a well-defined system for financial management, with stable indicators and clear allocation strategies contributing to programme sustainability and quality. The BIA has identified necessary infrastructure resources and invested in modernization, ensuring students and staff have access to adequate facilities and technological resources. BIA has established a system for methodological and informative provision, with an openly accessible library and access to relevant resources for academic staff and students. However, it has to be noted that a significant amount of study materials and literature is outdated and has to be updated in the future. Not all databases are accessible for students from home, which should be solved in the future if the BIA wishes to develop and expand its research activities with student involvement. Moodle effectively supports the study process, providing a versatile environment for teaching, learning, and communication. BIA follows a structured and transparent approach to recruiting qualified academic staff, ensuring alignment with academic goals and student needs. BIA tries to ensure a balanced workload for teaching staff, however, there seems to be a need for improvement. BIA has established a comprehensive support system for students, addressing various needs and promoting an inclusive learning environment.

However, some areas require improvements as more social activities for students since COVID-19 there is a lack of social events organized for students.

Strengths:

- 1) Use of modern examples and the latest programmes in the study process;
- 2) Reward system for research activities for teaching staff;
- 3) Significant support for international students with visas and necessary paperwork to enter Latvia for their studies;
- 4) Effective use of Moodle e-platform for study purposes.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Lack of interaction between Latvian and English streams;
- 2) Outdated existing study materials and their lack of correspondence to the study language requirements;
- 3) Not all the bachelor students who study in Latvian are satisfied with the language study options and students' needs and expectations should be considered;
- 4) Lack of social events for students as well as inactivity of the Student Council in organizing student-related social activities.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1. Scientific activity is emphasized as one of BIA's main goals focusing on applied research and knowledge transfer (SAR, p. 8). The main activities of the BIA also bring out the importance of scientific activity describing scientific research including science, research, knowledge transfer, innovation, and cooperation with enterprises of the national economic sector as the core of the academy.

The mission of the BIA mentions BIA's ambition to provide the Latvian and world economy with high-quality internationally recognized higher education and educational services based on integration with the Latvian and world economic and educational communities, science, and research. The mission also confirms that the BIA values science and research activities. BIA has set up specific tasks and goals concerning the science activity and those also refer to science to be one of the bases for the whole university's existence and its coherence with the academy's strategic directions and study fields.

The organization of research groups is based on the initiation and personal interest of a particular teacher/academician and is not regulated or directed by the institution or study field. Therefore there is no comprehensive overview also for the stakeholders (including students, colleagues, and employers) in which research group or research they could be involved. Different interviews, annexes, and content of SAR gave contradictory information about the research areas (from intercultural communication and psychology to tourism in rural areas) concerning this particular study field. Based on the given information the possible research niche/strength/specialty of this study field is not visible and crucial to see direct research contribution to the study programmes.

Although the students, in some cases, contribute to the companies' research through their internship or writing a thesis, the systematic collaboration with the companies/labor market regarding the applied research is missing. The BIA does not ask, and companies do not offer any feedback or ideas for the development of research or scientific activity; there is no collaboration between researchers of the LBTU and employers looking together to find practical solutions for existing problems. In 2024 (the time of the assessment visit) there are no ongoing or starting applied research projects together with the companies.

As stated in the SAR p 79, the table 2.2.1. (annex 2.4.1. scientific research directions 2017 - 2023)

bringing out the main directions of scientific activity, gives confusing information about the partners (eg. concerning all mentioned Estonian partners: Euro Academy has not existed since 2020, prof. Kirch has not worked at Tallinn University of Technology since 2015 and a lot of Russian partners are mentioned) which makes doubt also other information about the research partners and research activity.

1.4.2. BIA has a clear understanding at the general level of how the research/scientific activity should support the studies. SAR (p.80) brings out the main aspects - students are involved in research work and teachers integrate their research results into their teaching. It is worth mentioning that students are encouraged to participate in different research activities and academic writing together with research skills is one of the focused competencies. Students have to write at least one academic paper (term paper, bachelor or master thesis) during their studies and are supported in finding suitable research topics and working in the research team with the teachers. Supervisors of student's academic papers also motivate them to write articles and present those at scientific conferences.

The match between research areas and the study field and programmes is random and the main responsibility is left for the teachers to link the content of the courses with their and colleagues' research results, in presenting research results for the students in general and those whom they supervise.

According to the information listed in Annex 2.4.4 Summary of quantitative data.docx, the BIA academic staff publish a number of articles annually which are indexed to WoS or SCOPUS bases. Although the articles published by the teachers of Tourism study field make up half of all articles published by BIA staff, then in many cases the connection between the article and the study field remains too far (no clear input to the study field/programmes can be detected).

1.4.3. International collaboration of BIA is divided into four main categories: ERASMUS+ exchange of students and teachers, participation in international projects (as an institution or individual), participation in international conferences, and collaboration in organizing scientific conferences.

A number of activities were carried out by the academic and administrative staff of the Academy and partner universities between 2018/19 and 2022/23, such as summer schools, guest lectures, master classes, presentations, conferences and discussions on the development, economics, management and marketing in tourism and hospitality within this study field's projects. These activities supported the amount of incoming and outgoing mobility of academic and administrative staff in this field of study. Despite that, the BIA is mainly not involved as an institution, but activities are carried on in the framework of the wider programmes, where BIA's staff is represented as individuals.

In the list of Erasmus+ international partners, 49 (12 from Turkey) different partner institutions from 17 countries are mentioned, but less than half (22) of the agreements are still valid/are updated. Concerning the international partners for research, the provided list of partners in SAR (2.4.1) is not updated and shows old data. Despite the variety of Erasmus+ partners, the ongoing and outgoing mobility is focused just on between a few partners.

1.4.4. The motivational package of the teachers' participation in research and scientific activity is described in the document "Regulations on the Organisation of Work Remuneration and Types of Pedagogical Workload for Academic Staff and Visiting Lecturers at the Baltic International Academy". Mainly three support directions are implemented: 1) Teachers' participation in conferences as presenters is supported by the BIA covering the direct costs and counting preparatory work to the teachers' workload. 2) Teachers are also involved in the organization of BIA's conferences and publication of the BIA journal, which enables collaboration with other academicians and researchers from partner universities. 3) BIA's academic staff is encouraged to participate in the Erasmus+

exchange.

Based on the results (number of teachers participating in Erasmus+ exchange, number of articles published and presented in conferences, and number of teachers participating in the organization of the scientific conferences), the BIA has been successful in motivating the staff to participate in research activities. Although, the research areas could be better aligned with the study field and study programmes content.

According to the aforementioned results and feedback collected in the interviews with the academic staff during the site visit, they are satisfied with the motivation (especially financial bonus) package and contribute to the research activities.

1.4.5. As the SAR (p. 86) refers, students are motivated to participate in scientific and research activities by two measures. 1) granting students incentives for participation in BIA scientific conferences, and 2) Erasmus + (enabling students to participate in international exchange and covering their direct costs). One of the student's motivations could also be to get quality support in preparation and writing his/her final paper. In this study field, BIA has made efforts to integrate the necessary competencies for individual scientific research into the study process - bachelor students participate in different research projects, write different academic papers, and are encouraged to present at conferences. All those activities support students to achieve research-oriented outcomes. Students' participation in conferences is obligatory for master-level students and voluntary for bachelor-level students. Students confirmed that they get comprehensive support from their teachers in preparing and presenting their articles. Unfortunately, the students' papers, which were available for the expert group, did not testify to the quality of research competencies - basic statistics, simplified pie charts showing yes and no answers, no correlation, or little more complicated analysis methods, etc.

1.4.6. It is really good that BIA has been successful in implementing Moodle and BBB (BigBlueButton) into its activity, but this cannot be named as innovation (as mentioned in the SAR) when the majority of the HEIs are already doing that, and much more.

According to the SAR, BIA established the Laboratory of Neurocognitive Implicit Processes, which enables academic staff and students to conduct fundamental studies of the cognitive mechanisms of implicit social cognition, as well as modern applied research aimed at the study of implicit attitudes in various fields of professional activity. According to the SAR (p. 89) every year some of the students from this study field also choose their thesis to be written on a connecting topic. Although during the visit the interviewed students and staff were asked about their knowledge of the laboratory, none had had any knowledge about it.

BIA management have followed the recommendations from the previous accreditation and have created labs for restaurant and bar service training as well as a special Amadeus lab for tourism and hospitality IT training. These facilities could be regarded as innovations at BIA.

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

As a small institution offering education in the level of applied sciences, BIA has made good efforts in supporting and motivating the academic staff and students to actively participate in scientific research by presenting and publishing their papers in BIA's own and other journals and conferences. Although the number of publications is quite high, their results in initiating, getting, and implementing the applied research and other projects are missing at the BIA level. The academic staff is involved in several projects, but as persons, not the representatives of BIA and BIA is not a partner in those projects. In the field of internationalization, the BIA's focus is on ERASMUS+ activities, where the teachers and students are quite active, but again the collaboration with the international partners in other joint activities (joint publications, project consortia, etc.) needs

improvements. From the SAR and interview with the academic staff, the experts got some examples, of how the teachers present and use the latest and their own research results in the teaching, but those examples cover just a few courses and there is no comprehensive approach in the BIA and study field, how the academic and research activity could systematically support and develop the study quality.

Strengths:

1. Involvement of the students in presenting and publishing their articles.
2. BIA's scientific conferences and journal.
3. Active teachers (Erasmus, individual projects, etc).

Weaknesses:

1. Unclear link between research areas, taught courses, and study field.
2. No (international) projects connected with the study field.
3. Limited partners' list (number of active partnerships is unclear).

Assessment of the requirement [2]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Good number of publications, but the number of articles with the highest rankings (WoS and Scopus) has been decreasing constantly since 2016. In many cases the connection between the article and the study field remains too far. Successful involvement of students into the research activities, but no applied research and (international) projects.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

1.5.1. Based on BIA's SAR (page 92): BIA is a member of the Association of Hotels and Restaurants of Latvia (AHRL), the Association of Travel Agents and Operators of Latvia (ALTA), the Rural Tourism Association of Latvia "Rural Traveller" (LLTA) and the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK). Thanks to membership in associations, there is an opportunity to find out all the most important news of the industry. Associations offer opportunities to attend conferences, training seminars, and discussions on the development of the industry. BIA students and lecturers take advantage of these opportunities. Participation in professional organizations is very important for establishments of higher education as membership in those organizations gives access to the newest information from the industry which can be implemented in the study process.

Experts were able to meet several highly accredited professionals from the industry at the employers' meeting organized by BIA during the site visit. Employers are participating in the examination commissions as well as the lecturers for students for both study programmes in the Tourism study field: bachelor and master.

SAR (page 91) describes the wide cooperation of BIA with other institutes, schools, and universities in Latvia, additional information can be found in Annex: List of co-operation agreements (updated by BIA during the visit). In meetings with teachers and vice-rector for science and research experts were told about close co-operation with the University of Latvia, which is a good sign as more often we see the small institutions operate alone rather than jointly.

Experts would recommend implementing a BIA policy document for cooperation with local institutions and businesses to implement joint research projects and good internships for students of

BIA.

1.5.2. BIA's SAR (page 94) emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in theory but experts were unable to detect many ongoing cooperation projects at the time of assessment except the Erasmus projects. Concerning the programmes initiated by the Latvian of Foreign Affairs and Development Agency of Latvia, BIA as a partner is not mentioned in the public media (at least in English).

Management of BIA was following the recommendations from the previous accreditation and organized accreditation for the master's study programme from the UN World Tourism Organization. Very few establishments of higher education in Latvia have similar accreditation. BIA gives detailed information on the process and results of UN WTO accreditation in SAR (pages 92-94).

There are many past signs of very strong cooperation with partners from post-Soviet countries (eg. Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), which is very limited today due to political conflicts. Experts understand that BIA needs time and resources to restructure cooperation in the Western direction. Visits of guest professors and participation in the Erasmus project are present, ongoing, and can be intensified in the future. Source: www.bsa.edu.lv and meetings with study field director. Experts noticed good progress in the development of English language skills for teachers since the last accreditation, which is a good future sign for cooperation with English-speaking Universities/institutes, and academies.

Probably the strongest direction of international cooperation is providing internships with foreign employers. This was emphasized during the employers' meetings and meetings with students.

Experts would recommend BIA implement a policy document for cooperation with foreign institutions and businesses to implement joint research projects and good internships for students of BIA.

1.5.3. SAR (p. 100) informs that it is "planned to involve BIA's academic staff, study programme managers more actively in attracting foreign academic staff, using their contacts in Europe and beyond European borders". The management is not satisfied with the actual state of teaching staff coming from abroad.

During the assessment process experts met international students and discussed their way to BIA. Two students mentioned that they decided to study in BIA after it was recommended by a BIA graduate from their country. One student mentioned that the students' recruiting agent recommended studies at BIA. Students were asked if they were using the Erasmus programme, some of them mentioned that they had considered it but decided to stay at BIA. BIA SAR (page 98) states: that during the period from the academic year 2016/2017 to the academic year 2022/2023, 58 students had left Latvia for studies and internships within the framework of the Erasmus+ exchange programme. Students are participating in both outgoing and incoming mobility.

Regarding the incoming international students SAR (page 99) states: that during the academic year 2016/2017 to the academic year 2022/2023, 47 international students studied under the ERASMUS programme in the study field "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation". The largest number of students came from Turkey (22 students), the Czech Republic (7 students), Portugal (6 students), and Spain (5 students). The most active was the 2017/2018 academic year (24 students), and the smallest number of students was in the 2019/2020 academic year (1 student) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding teaching staff mobility information can be found in SAR (page 100): 32 outgoing mobility visits and 18 incoming mobility visits from partner Universities in the period between 2016/2017 and 2022/2023. As BIA is mentioning on page 100 of the SAR, they are planning to increase mobility in the future. Experts assess that it will take some time to restructure the partner's base because BIA stopped cooperating with some of the past partners due to the geopolitical situation.

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

BIA co-operates with institutions from Latvia and abroad. BIA values its membership in professional employers organizations of Latvia. BIA is stimulating students' and lecturers' mobility.

Strengths:

1. Great cooperation with employers. Mutual satisfaction with the cooperation.
2. UN WTO (TedQual) accreditation for master's programme.
3. Membership in professional organizations/ associations.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Weak cooperation with Western universities, and organizations.

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

Strong cooperation with professional employers' organization. Teachers and students' mobility is increasing.

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

Analysis

1.6.1. The Academy has done a lot to implement the recommendations made during the previous accreditation procedure. Improving the English language skills of students and academic staff can be seen as the key achievement. During the site visit, experts were reassured that both students and the Faculty (academic staff) can communicate in English. As the knowledge of English has increased, so has the mobility of lecturers. Every year several lecturers of the study field take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme. Knowledge of the English language of the supporting staff still cannot be assessed as fully sufficient and should be improved. There was no assurance that students in the support units such as the library or the information center could receive appropriate information in English.

The BIA has responded and implemented one of the previous recommendations and in between the two accreditations has acquired UNWTO TedQual accreditation. This accreditation acquired for its maximum period possible stands as a testimony that the BIA abides by the UNWTO standards in the implementation of its tourism study programme in terms of its management and the study process.

The management of the study field has significantly promoted and improved cooperation with the industry. Both the study field management and employers as well as students value their cooperation as active and productive. Following the law, a study field Council has been established, the composition of which also includes the study programme managers, academic staff, general staff, students, and strategic partners - "agents of change" (practice supervisors, employers, and industry professionals). According to the interviews during the site visit, many issues relevant to the study field are discussed and approved by the Council. However, this fact has not been fully documented. Minutes of Council meetings did not reflect discussions on opinions, stated in meetings. An increased cooperation of the academic staff with employers in a relevant industry sector or area could be desired. This would provide an opportunity to incorporate a larger number of industry development aspects/ topical issues into the content of study courses.

According to the SAR, "in 2017/2018, with the direct participation of students, the student scientific research club COLUMB was established, which was focused on solving business problems, project

development, and cooperation with business structures. Students presented papers at scientific-practical conferences, and developed scientific articles". During the site visit, experts could learn and receive proof of the student's participation in scientific conferences. However, no assurance was obtained that this was within the scope of the research club COLUMB. During the interviews, neither the students nor the teaching staff mentioned their activities within the club, so there is no certainty as to what extent and how actively the club operated. One could certainly wish for more student collaboration with the industry and business companies. There has been no evidence of the participation of students in the industry outside the mandatory study courses. The willingness to engage more with the industry was also pointed out by the students themselves.

The recommendation to acquire more tourism-related books in English for the library cannot be considered fully implemented. No assurances were obtained during the library visit that the books necessary for the provision of study content in English had been purchased. The aspect of the insufficient number of books in the Latvian language directly related to the area of tourism and hospitality mentioned in the SAR (Table 2.18.) was noted during the site visit. According to the SAR, out of 177 titles related to the area of tourism, 40 titles were in Latvian, 61 - in English, and 76 - in other languages. 57% of tourism-related books are in Latvian or English (Table 2.18. Summary-analysis of the collection "Tourism and Hospitality Management"). Books in other languages are always welcome, but the basic library tourism book collection in Latvian and English cannot be considered sufficient. The electronic library of the UN World Tourism Organisation provides minimal information without additional fees. The expert group does not have evidence that BIA dedicates adequate financial resources to subscribe for full access to the UN WTO library, therefore, it can only be viewed as an additional rather than the primary source of information for tourism study courses. Moreover, the library does not stock any books on tourism marketing in English or Latvian. Also, several study course descriptions (syllabi) do not list new and up-to-date books in English as compulsory literature.

It was recommended to adapt the objectives of the internship to a specific company providing such opportunities. The assessment of the BIA Internship Regulation, Internship descriptions, and the student's internship reports does not fully provide assurances that all internship tasks have been adapted to providing analyses of specific companies. Detailed information is provided in sections 2.2.4. and 3.2.4.

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

Overall, it can be concluded that BIA has implemented a significant part of the recommendations made earlier. The most important improvement is the substantial development of English language proficiency, thus opening up more opportunities for international cooperation. Cooperation with the industry has also been intensified and formalized. However, more confirmation of the implementation of the industry recommendations in the study process or content would be desirable. Unfortunately, the library has been undersupplied with tourism-related books in English. There are also very few books on research methodology in the library. The books available in English are only in 1-2 copies. It must be admitted that there is no discernible succession in the study practices, according to what is mentioned in the practice descriptions. The objectives, tasks and expected results of the internships are very similar or even coincide.

Strengths:

1. A significant increase in the English language knowledge of both students and academic staff has been achieved;
2. Active cooperation with the industry representatives at the study programme management level has been achieved;
3. Active scientific work of students, presenting their research at scientific conferences;

4. The study programme has received TedQual accreditation indicating the programme's compliance with the UN WTO standards.

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient knowledge of the English language by the supporting staff;
2. The library funds cannot be considered sufficient for ensuring the implementation of the study programmes included in the study field. There are not enough basic textbooks or industry-specific books available in the Academy's library;
3. Assignments for introductory internships have not been individually tailored for students choosing to conduct their internship in one or another specific company. Internship descriptions do not provide for a total understanding of a student's obligations and tasks during an internship. Some Bachelor's and Master's internship descriptions are the same.

Assessment of the requirement [4]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

There is significant progress in the majority of recommendations, but still significantly insufficient library funds in English. Organization of internships also requires further alignment.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

- | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Increase the diversity of incoming and outgoing mobility through better targeted cooperation with a number of European universities. |
| 2) It is important for the academy to update the material base (incl. library resources) with newer sources in the study languages, particularly English, to enhance educational relevance and quality. |
| 3) Renew the activities of Student Council as it has significantly decreased since Covid and ensure a more active student social life. |
| 4) Find an opportunity to acquire an anti-plagiarism system. This would make it possible to check the works submitted by students in the earlier stages of their studies and make sure that they do not contain signs of plagiarism. |
| 5) To develop an AI use policy in the Academy. |
| 6) Determine the research directions in the tourism study field (small institutions should focus on priorities and not "run" in many directions) and initiate the research groups to implement those directions. Connect the research directions with the study programmes (how this research contributes to the study content and quality). |
| 7) Review the mutual compliance of the documents regulating internships in the study field's programmes. It is highly recommended to distinguish aims, tasks, and learning outcomes for each internship. |
| 8) Ensure that there is student representation in decision-making bodies. |

Long-term recommendations

- 1) It is necessary to increase the amount of social activities, and events for both Latvian and English stream students, so that they have more opportunities to spend time together, get to know each other, and socialize.
- 2) BIA should encourage the students to be involved more in research, by ensuring that the scientific databases (such as SCOPUS) which are currently only available at the premises of BIA can be accessed also from home.
- 3) By establishing and nurturing partnerships with local and international social partners, the academy must harness its ability to drive innovation and advance research initiatives in the field.
- 4) BIA needs to find more possibilities to initiate and participate in projects which directly contribute to the development and study content of this study field.
- 5) To take more active participation in numerous industry events in Latvia and professional fairs such as Riga Food, Balttour fairs, as well as employers organizations like LTRK and LDDK.
- 6) To attend international events, travel, and tourism fairs (for example ITB Berlin) to look for mobility and cooperation contacts in western Europe.

II - "Tourism and Hospitality Management" ASSESSMENT

II - "Tourism and Hospitality Management" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. Professional bachelor study programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management" by its curriculum, awarded qualification, and goals does comply with the Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation study field.

The study programme Tourism and Hospitality Management is well-suited to be categorized under the broader study field of Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organization. The Tourism and Hospitality Management programme encompasses essential aspects of hospitality services, which are integral components of the Hotel and Restaurant Service segment within the broader field.

Overall, the Tourism and Hospitality Management programme fits seamlessly under the Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism, and Recreation Organization study field due to its comprehensive coverage of hospitality services, tourism management, and recreation organization. By addressing key themes and objectives of the broader field, the programme prepares students for diverse career opportunities within the dynamic and multifaceted hospitality industry.

2.1.2. Study programme code is 42812. Code 42 corresponds to second-level professional higher education. Code 812 corresponds to the field of "Tourism and Recreation Organisation" under the section "Individual Services". The study programme code is relevant.

The degree to be obtained after graduating from the study programme is Professional Bachelor degree in Tourism and Hospitality Business with professional qualification of Manager of Tourism Services. The professional standard of Manager of Tourism Services corresponds to level 6 professional qualification.

The duration of the study programme is full-time 4 years (240 ECTS/ 160 CP) or 4 years and 5 months as part-time studies. Studies are held in Latvian and English as two separate study groups, although it was mentioned during the interviews that in the Latvian programme, some courses are held in English, and Latvian-speaking students need to work with the materials in English.

(<https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/bachelor-study-programmes/tourism-and-hospitality-management.html>) mentions the new accreditation process, but not any dates, the "apply course" link from the English page leads to the application form in Latvia, etc., admission requirements are not mentioned, etc.

The admission requirement for the Latvian study programme is a high school diploma - secondary education. To study in English, the applicant must confirm their English language skills to be at least level B2 and have a recognized secondary education.

The study programme has a defined goal (SAR, page 108): "to provide knowledge in the fields of tourism and hospitality management according to the current market demands, maintaining the quality of studies by European education standards, which can strategically and analytically solve the problems of tourism and hospitality management, develop the personality of students and provide the opportunity to obtain a professional qualification with the right to continue Master's studies". This goal correlates with the study field and title and gives input for the learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the goal could be shorter and focus on the expected results/primary outcome of the programme - why this programme has been launched. The necessary competencies for achieving the goal should be mentioned in learning outcomes.

Among the other programme tasks, the aim "To promote the qualification of academic staff in scientific and research work, participation in conferences, preparation of publications, participation in research and projects" is described. All the other four programme tasks are student-oriented, as they should be based on the learning outcome-based studies approach.

The characteristics of the Tourism and Hospitality Management study programme (title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualification) are in line with the programme's aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements. All the characteristics are well chosen to open the content of programme and show the programme focus on developing new specialists in the field of Tourism and hospitality.

2.1.3. Since the previous assessment, three significant changes have been made in this study programme. 1) changes in the content concerning the launch of a new professional standard for Managers of Tourism Services, 2) change of credit points system from a national credit points system to the European Credit Transfer system, and 3) closing study programme implementation in Russian.

Based on the launch of the professional standard, the study programme was updated - the aim, objectives, and study outcomes of the study programme were specified; the gained professional qualification was renamed, new study courses were added, and some other course titles and descriptions were revised to reflect requirements of professional standard. Although some changes were formal (e.g. English language in tourism vs Professional English in Tourism), the programme's structure is now more precise and in line with the professional standard.

The transformation of the national credit points system to the European credit transfer system still needs to be completed, and based on Cabinet Regulation no 305, the new system must be adopted by the end of 2024. At the time of the assessment visit, the different documents provided different information - e.g. in some syllabi, the national credit points were mentioned; in some ECTS-s and in some, both systems were in use.

Although, according to Article 56 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, BIA no longer admits students and does not implement study programmes in Russian, there are still signs of Russian materials, language use, etc., in the institution. Some of the students' documents were available only in Latvian and Russian (even though English is one of the study languages and Russian is not), literature in Russian was listed among the mandatory study materials in the syllabi of Latvian and English study programmes, documents and notifications in the buildings (e.g. on the door of student information center) were in Russian, etc.

2.1.4. BIA brings some examples based on prior labor market research and analysis, explaining the increasing need for managers and higher education graduates in the labor market. Unfortunately, this analysis says only that specialists with higher education and managers are needed and does not justify the need for specialists in the tourism and hospitality area. However, during the interviews, the representatives of social partners confirmed that the specialists graduating from BIA are welcome in the labor market. They also stated that graduates of the bachelor programme in this field are ready to start and fill specialist positions in the sector but probably will only be hired as managers once they accumulate enough experience working in the area.

According to the graduates survey whose results are given in the SAR (pages 123-125), most of the graduates are employed, but not in the field (only 46% of respondents are working in restaurants, tourism, or the recreation sector). A very high % of graduates (38%) work in the service area, which is general and does not indicate the need for special higher education.

In the period from 2016/2017 until 2022/2023, the number of students in this study programme decreased by 38.3%, from 193 to 119 students. BIA justifies the decrease with the demographic situation observed in the country in recent years, the decrease in the total number of university students in the country as a whole, higher competition among universities for students, crucial economic situation (people have less money to pay for higher education), and still impacting effect of Covid-19 to tourism and hospitality sector. In 2022/23 out of 119 students 32 were foreign (three main origins - Russia, Cameroon, Uzbekistan) which shows that the BIA hasn't been able to attract enough students from EU countries.

The number of students is decreasing not only because of the diminishing admission but also the high dropout level. Admission in 2022/23 was just 28 students and only to full-time studies, with no admission for part-time studies. If 369 students were enrolled in the period from 2016/17 to 22/23, then 266 students dropped out (SAR page 128, figure 3.8), which is a high percentage. Main dropout reasons are indicated in the SAR (page 128), but BIA does not have a systematic plan on how to diminish the dropout rate.

2.1.5. N/A

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

The study programme complies with the study field, admission requirements are in line with the general requirements. During the last few years, the BIA has had to cope with several major changes in the external environment, which highly impacted this study programme - pandemia, geopolitical conflicts, diminishing number of potential students in Latvia, changes in the higher education law (eg. CP to ECTS) and more. Although some transitions have been successful, this does not reflect yet in the increasing student numbers and decreasing dropout. The BIA needs to make many changes and decisions to turn negative processes into positive ones.

Strengths:

1. Not identified.

Weaknesses:

1. Information on the website is not in line with the actual and formal information and provided study language.
2. Some changes in the course titles and outcomes are formal and do not reflect the content-rich change.
3. BIA hasn't finished the transition from CP to ECTS and both systems are mixed in the documents

and everyday use. This creates a lot of confusion and misunderstanding.

4. Russian language use is still a visible part of BIA's work and study organization.

5. BIA hasn't been able to cope with diminishing admissions and high dropout rates.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The study programme was developed according to the rules and regulations in force in the Republic of Latvia and the decisions of the BIA Senate. A study course on civil and environmental protection is included in the program: Civil Defence and Environmental Protection. There is also a study course in Latvian for foreign students: Professional Latvian in Tourism. Experts agree that the content of the study programme Tourism and Hospitality Management (42812) is topical; its courses are both interconnected and complementary. However, as evident in Annex 9, the curriculum design has been constructed in the way that almost all the tourism industry-specific study courses are stated in Part B - as professional optional courses. As evident from the curriculum, for several semesters, students do not have sufficient freedom to select a B part study course based on their interests since the scope of the study courses offered directly corresponds to the scope defined in the study plan. The offer of the B part study courses amounts to 95 CPs but, according to the programme, students must acquire 90 CPs. A more flexible approach by the Faculty in this regard would facilitate reaching the study goals.

Even though programme objectives and learning outcomes are being realized only partly, its learning outcomes meet the challenges and trends - it has been confirmed both by employers and graduates of the programme in interviews during the site visit.

The following problems were raised in a deeper analysis of the study programme and syllabi:

1. Learning outcomes should express the different parts of competencies - knowledge, skill, or attitude/ability/responsibility. Each learning outcome has just one verb to enable clear and fair student assessment.

2. Based on the number of verbs, which indicates the learning outcome level, there is no course with less than seven outcomes in this study program.

3. In the syllabi template the learning outcomes are divided into three and translated as knowledge, abilities, and competences. Law and professional standards distinguish knowledge, skills, and competencies. Abilities and skills are different constructs.

During an onsite meeting, students stated that they wish to have a broader choice between foreign languages that they wish to study as their second foreign language. There was a significant difference noticed between Bachelor students from Latvian and English streams. Those students who studied in the Latvian stream stated that they have a limited choice in studying foreign languages which are either German or English, while English stream students can choose to study French, for example. The expert group would advise including French as a second alternative for Latvian stream students as well. During the onsite visit, one of the students shared a wish to study Spanish, which would be highly appreciated, if possible to include as one of the C elective courses.

Despite the formulation and structural problems, the labor market needs are expressed in the study programme, and the range of the courses is well chosen to enable the achievement of intended outcomes/competencies for a career in the tourism sector companies.

2.2.2. Not applicable.

2.2.3. The methods for study implementation are diverse, they include lectures, seminars, discussions, case methods, reports, essays, analysis of scientific articles, preparation of presentations, observation and analysis, interview collection and analysis, self-analysis, and practicums. Guest lecturers are often invited to give insight into trends, offering practical examples,

thesis topics etc. One of the often used methods in the programme is field trips and educational excursions. BIA provides e-studies: attending video lectures, seminars, and discussions, as well as taking exams and defending a bachelor's thesis in the e-environment in live mode. BIA has created two systems for e-studies: Moodle and BigBlueButton (BBB). Part-time students of the study programme are offered the opportunity to fully participate in the study process in the electronic learning environment - both lectures, consultations with instructors, and taking exams in the e-environment. Students expressed satisfaction with the level of student-centredness and confirmed the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes.

Forms of assessment are differentiated, the final grade is structured from activity in discussions, work in groups, activity, and participation in seminars and practical works, project submission, final exam, etc. The completion of the study course is assessed on a 10-grade scale following Cabinet Regulations No. 305 and the "Regulations on Study Course Exams and Tests at the Baltic International Academy" approved by the BIA Senate. Decision No. 211 is based on the following criteria: the volume and quality of knowledge acquired; skills acquired; acquired competence according to the planned learning outcomes (www.BIA.edu.lv).

2.2.4. Regulations on Internships at the Baltic International Academy" (https://bsa.edu.lv/wp-content/docs/2020/BSA_Prakses_nolikums_lv.pdf) define the rules for students' internships (available in Latvian and English), which complies with the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 305 "Rules on the state professional higher education standard" (21.06.2023.), stating that the amount of practice must be at least 30 CP (BIA demands 39 CP). According to the documents, the internship is organized in an institution (agency, company, organization) related to the student's profession, where fulfillment of the tasks specified in the methodological instructions of the internship is guaranteed.

However the assessment of the BIA Internship Regulation, Internship descriptions, and the student's internship reports do not fully provide assurances that all internship tasks have been adapted to providing analyses of specific companies.

In the Bachelor's study programme the composition of study practice consists of 3 internships - introductory internship (9 ECTS), qualification internship (18 ECTS), and undergraduate internship (12 ECTS). Aim and objectives of the introductory internship (SAR annexes - 3.2.4. Bachelor_practice_program.doc and Tour.&Hosp.Manag._Course descriptions.zip) state that it is expected that students will acquire a very general idea of tourism and hospitality institutions during the internship, by visiting information centers, hospitality companies, etc. The internship is not targeted at exploring a particular company (the practice programme and Introductory internship description do not make clear which organizations are the targeted signatories of internship agreements). The Introductory internship description also states that for each of the topics (8 overall), there are lectures constituting 44 contact hours and 9 hours of practical visits to the company. This description does not fully comply with the notion and the core idea of an internship. The description of the pre-diploma practice does not provide complete assurance that the same competencies are not examined 2 times - during the presentation/defense of the pre-diploma practice and the actual presentation/defense of the diploma paper. For example, 40% of pre-diploma practice assessments are based on a literature review, which is an integral part of any diploma paper. The experts found the aim, tasks and even content of the Introductory internship of the Master's study programme to be the same as of the Qualification practice of the Bachelor's study programme, which is probably the technical error, but made the assessment of the internship more complicated.

The study programme is also implemented in the English language, students expressed satisfaction with the level of teachers' proficiency. The provision of internship in a foreign language (including for foreign students) is satisfactory, students have the opportunity to go on an internship in an organization in Cyprus, for example.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Experts received titles of the thesis and checked some examples of the thesis during the visit and confirmed that the topics of students' final theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme aims and goals. Students choose the topic of their diploma thesis from the study topics offered by the leading lecturers of the study programme, which are posted in the BIA Moodle system. A student also has the opportunity to propose his thesis topic. Here are some examples of thesis topics: Development of Gastronomic Tourism in Kraslava Region; Creation of a Universal Platform for the Popularization and Development of Music Tourism in Latvia; Positioning and Increasing the Popularity of South Korea in the Tourism Market of the Baltic States; Application of digital marketing for tourism company Nikos Travel; Unusual Places to Stay in Latvia; Tourism development in Germany during the Pandemic; Increasing the Competitiveness of the Latvian Hotel Business Exemplified by the Radisson Blu Daugava; Hotel Development of Ecological Tourism in Latvia; etc (in 3.2.6. Tēmas TVV_Eng).

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

The study programme is in concordance with the Cabinet Regulations and professional standards, its content is topical and relevant. Stakeholders confirmed that the studies are student-centered, teaching methods are modern and diverse and enable students to acquire the prescribed knowledge and acquire the necessary competencies. The study programmes' internship partly complies with the requirements stated in Paragraph 26 of CR No. 305. Introductory internships, according to the Syllabus and opinions expressed during interviews, take place not just in a single company, but the students rather receive an introduction to the tourism industry as a whole by visiting several tourism-related organizations (museums, tourist information centers, etc.). According to the Syllabus, the practical management of an internship does not facilitate the evaluation of its actual progress since only 39% of the total internship hours have been devoted to practical training in the company.

Strengths:

1. Numerous guest lecturers from abroad and the labor market coming to lectures are welcome and appreciated by students.

Weaknesses:

1. Internship reports are not tied to a specific company.
2. Learning outcome-based study principles have not fully been implemented.
3. Poorly developed practice descriptions. In many places identical goals and objectives, as well as expected results.
4. Each learning outcome has just one verb to enable clear and fair student assessment while learning outcomes should express the different parts of competencies - knowledge, skill, or attitude/ability/responsibility.
5. Courses have too many learning outcomes to focus on specific competencies.
6. In the syllabi template the learning outcomes are divided into three and translated as knowledge, abilities, and competencies. Law and professional standards distinguish knowledge, skills, and competencies. Abilities and skills are different constructs.

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.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. Based on SAR (p. 142) and the experts' team's on-site visit to buildings of BIA Lomonosova 1/4 and Lomonosova 4 (since 21 February 2024 - Valērijas Seiles street): the facilities available for the implementation of the study programme (classrooms, computer labs, laboratory, library resources) are fully adequate. BIA is proud of its wide art collection shown in classrooms and public amenities, adding a special uniqueness and inspiring atmosphere. The Moodle study e-environment has been used since 2015. The lecturers of the study programme in Moodle have created study courses in which students have access to study materials, a description of the study courses, and requirements for the study course. In several study courses, students take tests, submit homework, and communicate with the lecturer in the Moodle environment. Experts found the Moodle platform sufficient and easy to navigate. During the interviews with students, experts were asked about their satisfaction with the study process and resources. Bachelor students confirmed that they are satisfied with both, the process, and resources. Many students made their decision to study in BIA based on recommendations of graduates of BIA which is a good sign itself.

Library: as stated in SAR(p. 143) the library consists of two parts - a subscription and a reading room. In the reading room, 11 computers with Internet access are placed for students' convenience, and printing and copying facilities are provided. There are also opportunities to work with portable computers. Literature is available for use in almost all study courses and an increasing proportion of literature is in English. Experts came to an agreement that further increasing the number and the variety of books in English, especially the newest editions of professional and academic literature in the field of Tourism and hospitality would add value to the bachelor study programme and learning in BIA in general. Further discussion about the possibility to offer access to scientific databases to students of BIA from their homes is possible.

BIA management has followed the recommendations from the previous accreditation commission and has created labs for restaurant and bar service training as well as a special Amadeus lab for tourism and hospitality IT training. Amadeus programme is available for the students during the Tourism Agency simulation and can be also used together with the professor during the consultancy.

2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. Based on SAR (page 146): The cost of a study place in the study programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management" is 1497 EUR. In the 2021/2022 academic year, tuition fees in the bachelor's study programme: full-time in the Latvian language - 2050 EUR per year, full-time in English (depending on the country) - 2200 - 3000 EUR per year; part-time - 1750 EUR per year. Considering the number of students in the study programme (as of February 1, 2022 - 133 students), the financial support for the study programme is sufficient. The financial situation of the study programme is stable, which serves as security support in case of a sharp decrease in the number of students.

Table 3 from Annex 5 shows a decrease in the number of students in the study programme. It also could be related to the overall geopolitical situation in the region and the crisis in the tourism and hospitality industry due to COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The overall financial situation of BIA according to Annex No. 6 BSA revenue and Annex No. 8 BSA expenses is stable and sustainable and experts can conclude that the organization operates with profit and is considered financially stable.

Although BIA has done several activities to cope with the diminishing number of students (eg.

optimizing the number of open study groups), then the break-even point in group size is not detected and promoted, which can cause misleading information for the student candidates (eg. if the person will apply, then she/he does not know till the very last minute whether the group will be open at all or not). In the experts' opinion, the number of students per year is sufficient to ensure the profitability of the study programme till now, but BIA has to continue the group number optimization to cope with the smaller number of admitted students and possible dropouts.

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

Resources and provision of the study programme are sufficient. BIA has been investing in resources to implement recommendations from previous accreditation.

Strengths:

- 1) Auditoriums and classrooms are ambient and well-equipped.
- 2) High student satisfaction with the study process and resources.
- 3) BIA financial indicators are good, the organization operates with profit.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Professional literature in English is limited and outdated. Recommendation to purchase the newest editions of books on Tourism and hospitality in English.

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

Auditoriums and classrooms are ambient and well-equipped.

High student satisfaction with the study process and resources.

BIA's financial indicators are good, organization operates with profit.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. According to the SAR and observations during the site visit, it can be concluded that the qualification of the academic staff employed in the study programme corresponds with the BIA strategic goals, and teaching staff members meet the requirements set out in the laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia. Forty-four members of the teaching staff are engaged in the implementation of the Professional Bachelor's Study Programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management". 21 of them are elected lecturers of the BIA. Overall, 28 lecturers engaged in the implementation of the programme (64% of the total number of lecturers) hold a Doctoral degree, 15 of whom are elected staff members. There are 6 lecturers who are currently awarded the status of the Latvian Science Council expert. Overall, this indicates a high degree of scientific engagement, which is also important for the implementation of the study programme. However, the list of teaching staff in the study field (attachment 2.3.7.) shows that there are several study courses (for example, economics, e-marketing, etc.) that are implemented by several lecturers in a particular language, including the invited foreign lecturers. At the same time, some faculty members are conducting many study courses on their own (for example, two teachers together conduct almost half of the courses in the bachelor programme and have a significant amount of master-level

courses). This list does not allow experts to understand who conducts study courses or how, in addition to the language of implementation of the study course, one decides on which lecturer conducts a particular study course. When concluding the implementation of the study courses according to the outline contained in the Annex, one cannot gain sufficient assurances that the current composition of lecturers and their expertise provides for the complete implementation of the learning outcomes defined for the programme.

2.4.2. According to the self-assessment report, the BIA has increased the staff engaged in the implementation of the study programme during the reporting period, including the teaching staff holding a Ph.D. degree. Despite the inaccurate calculations provided in the self-assessment report (part 3.4.2. in SAR), the overall quantitative and qualitative qualifications of the teaching staff are considered as good.

There is a teaching staff development policy in BIA, which determines the engagement in the BIA teaching process of “young scientists as well as foreign professors”. According to information provided in the self-assessment report, the BIA is purposefully attracting new academic staff who have either just acquired a Ph.D. degree or are currently studying in doctoral programmes. However, it is unclear whether the BIA is also working purposefully on attracting foreign professors. The information available shows that foreign guest lecturers often duplicate study courses conducted by local lecturers.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. The SAR gives the impression that over the past 6 years, most elected lecturers have published at least one scientific article in a peer-reviewed edition, however, unfortunately, the published list submitted as an annex does not provide for a complete understanding of the number and importance of publications (multiple links are not active, the journal where the article was published has not always been specified, etc). Several members of the BIA’s Faculty have been very active in publishing several scientific articles annually. However, based on the titles of the published articles, it can be concluded that only 17 of the 442 articles listed are directly related to tourism or hospitality. Although tourism is an interdisciplinary sector, articles devoted to the problems of telecommunications, metalworking, wood processing, etc. cannot be applied to the tourism study field.

Four out of 20 elected academic staff members have practical experience (according to information stated in the CVs of lecturers). However, only one of them has direct work experience in the tourism industry. Out of 19 visiting lecturers engaged in the implementation of the study programme, two are tourism professionals with significant practical experience. This is highly welcome, especially taking into account the strategic objectives of the entire BIA and this study field in particular. However, according to the students’ interviews, greater involvement of industry professionals in the implementation of the study programme is desirable.

2.4.5. In its self-assessment report, the BIA has identified 4 mechanisms for facilitating cooperation in the implementation of the study programme - 1) Methodological Council; 2) meetings with academic staff, initiated by the Study Programme Director; 3) meeting at the beginning of study year to discuss topical issues; 4) academic staff invites students to publish their research (143 p). Three of the mechanisms have not been fully institutionalized and rely mainly on the initiative of the study field/Programme Director and the lecturers. The functioning of the Methodological Council could be considered as such an institutionalized mechanism. However, the visit and provided memos did not confirm that the Council is operational and active. A regulation regarding the activities of the Council has not been submitted either, making it difficult to assess the importance of the Council in ensuring cooperation. As the self-assessment report shows, the director of the study field organizes

regular meetings, which, inter alia, address the content of the study programme and monitor and evaluate the implementation of study courses. During face-to-face interviews, the academic staff pointed out that updating and approving study course descriptions takes place in the Study Direction Council. It is therefore not entirely clear what cooperation mechanisms are most effective and how they operate.

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

There are significant qualitative and quantitative changes in the academic staff, compared with previous accreditation. This has led to positive effects on the quality of the implementation of the study programme. It seems that there are just a few professors, who, according to provided information, implement the majority of A part of the study courses. A more in-depth assessment should help to understand what are the reasons for such a high concentration of ECTS under the responsibility of a few lecturers.

Although the submitted list of scientific publications of the academic staff (annex 2.4.) is not complete, it seems that all the Faculty members actively publish scientific articles. Overall, 442 publications have been included in the list. However, only 17 articles on the list are directly related to tourism or hospitality.

Tourism professionals, despite being actively engaged as internship placement providers and reviewers of diploma papers, are not sufficiently involved in the implementation of study courses. This was also the view expressed by the students.

There are mechanisms for the cooperation of the academic staff in the implementation of the study programme, but they have not been institutionalized and most often work based on the individual initiative of the director of the study programme. Due to the absence of evidence of their actual functioning, it is difficult to assess their effectiveness.

Strengths:

1. 28 (out of 44) faculty members who hold Ph.D. are engaged in implementing the study programme;
2. There is significant scientific work performed by the majority of Faculty members since at least 15 faculty members published more than 2 scientific publications annually.

Weaknesses:

1. There are only a few scientific publications directly related to tourism. Several publications cannot be considered as being even indirectly related to the tourism industry.
2. Taking into account that this is a professional study programme emphasizing practical aspects of the work in the tourism industry, the lack of such practical experience by the members of the academic staff represents a current weakness.
3. There are no established clear and institutionalized mechanisms for the cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme. The existing mechanisms are largely operating based on self-initiative and are irregular.

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

Despite an insufficient activity directly related to the tourism related research, academic staff

can be considered sufficient.

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

In accordance with the Annex 6. Compilation to the national education standard.docx the study programme complies with the National Education Standard pursuant to Cabinet Regulations No. 305, of 13 June 2023, "Regulations regarding the State Standard for Professional Higher Education",

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342818-noteikumi-parvalsts-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitibas-standartu>

- 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 accordance with the Appendix 7 TVV_Tourism_services_manager.docx, the study programme complies with the professional standard Manager of Tourism Services.

<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-253.pdf>

- 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 are prepared in English and Latvian (Annexes - Tour.&Hosp.Manag._Course descriptions.zip)

Descriptions comply with the regulations established by the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

The study materials, published on Moodle, are not fully developed in two languages. There are parts of the study material designated for students studying in English which contain information in the Latvian language. The BIA is working on transition to ECTS. Some channels (Moodle, webpage) still give national credit points and not ECTS. But during the site visit, experts gained confidence that the process will be completed in time.

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The BIA has provided a sample of the diploma under annex Sample diploma and appendix TVV lat stream.pdf

and it complies with the procedure according to which state recognized documents are issued.

- 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

According to the information acquired onsite as well as annexes: CV_ENG.7z and knowledge of national languages.edoc it can be concluded that the language proficiency of the teaching staff is compliant with Cabinet Regulation. No. 733 " Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official 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 teaching staff members, involved in the implementation of the study programme in English have at least B2 level, as it was demonstrated during interviews and stated in the following documents: CV_ENG.7z and knowledge of the English language.edoc

- 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

The sample of the study agreement as provided in the annex 2.1.4. AGREEMENT_TV.V.docx complies with the provision to be included in the study agreement in accordance with the Cabinet Regulation No. 70 "Mandatory Regulations to Be Included in the Study Agreement".

- 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 BIA has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education at Turība University's (BAT) Bachelor's study programme "Tourism and hospitality management", if the implementation of the study programme is terminated, in

accordance with the annex Agreement on cooperation with Turiba 56-2020.docx

- 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 BIA has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the license is revoked due to actions of BIA and the student does not wish to continue their studies in another study programme, in accordance with Section 55(8) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and Cabinet Regulations No 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations on Licensing of study programmes", Paragraph 13.4., based on the annex Fulfillment of obligations Tourism.pdf.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme complies with regulatory enactments.

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

In conclusion, while the Tourism and Hospitality Management study programme exhibits notable strengths in various aspects, including a faculty with many PhD holders who actively contribute to scientific discourse, positive financial indicators indicating operational profitability, high levels of student satisfaction with the study process and available resources, and the integration of numerous guest lecturers from both abroad and the labor market, there are significant weaknesses that require urgent attention. Despite the presence of qualified faculty, there's a deficiency in scientific publications directly related to tourism, limiting the academic depth and relevance of the study programme. Moreover, the scarcity of professional literature in English, coupled with its outdated nature, hampers the institution's ability to provide students with up-to-date and relevant knowledge. Study programme (appendix 9) is highly interdisciplinary in its nature. However, the composition of the programme does not completely convince that a student acquires all the necessary competences upon graduation. A large part of the industry-related courses have been included in the B-part, which are professional optional courses. Out of all courses included in the A1-part -the Basic Courses of the Industry (a total of 54 ECTS), only one course - Introduction into Studies and Profession (1 ECTS) can be viewed as being directly related to the area of tourism.

The disconnect between internship reports and specific companies and poorly developed rules and syllabi for internships reflect a gap in practical training and real-world application, hindering

students' ability to acquire hands-on experience in their field of study. Furthermore, the incomplete implementation of learning outcome-based study principles suggests a lack of alignment between educational objectives and student assessment practices, undermining the effectiveness of the curriculum. Moreover, the institution's inability to address diminishing admission and a high dropout rate underscores systemic issues that need urgent resolution to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of this particular study programme and institution in general. Addressing these weaknesses through targeted interventions and strategic planning will be essential to enhance the study programmes quality, relevance, and competitiveness in the study field.

However, experts acknowledge that BIA is on the right path, and with motivated staff and students, further positive developments are achievable. None of the mentioned shortcomings are overwhelming, and they can be addressed or improved through continued efforts to establish BIA as a reputable and high-quality higher education institution.

Evaluation of the study programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Tourism and Hospitality Management"

Short-term recommendations

- 1) Information and templates (e.g. application form) available in the webpage must be in line with the study language.
- 2) Information about the accreditation process and deadlines must be clearly communicated for all target groups, especially students.
- 3) To fully finish transition from national credit point system to ECTS, ensuring that information is consistent across all documents.
- 4) All the mandatory study materials and documentation must be fully available in study implementation languages.
- 5) Follow the learning outcome-based study principles (optimal number of outcomes, one verb per learning outcome, assessment criteria based on learning outcomes etc.) in all documents (especially in study course descriptions) and studies.
- 6) Give specific focus to each internship (avoiding identical goals and objectives) and formulate distinguished internship syllabi.
- 7) The academy should prioritize students' expectations by ensuring equitable access to foreign language courses for Latvian stream students, as it is enabled to their English stream counterparts.
- 8) Expert group would advise to include French as a second alternative for Latvian stream students as well.
- 9) To align study programme more closely with industry needs and to ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the job market, it is imperative to integrate tourism industry-related study courses directly into the curriculum as a mandatory component.

Long-term recommendations

- | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Define and implement the strategy to increase the admission numbers - attract more and quality candidates and students. |
| 2. BIA has to apply for a variety of measures to help students to overcome or cope with the problems which may lead to the drop out. |
| 3. Develop a collaboration with the sector companies to enable content-rich internships for every student and encourage more analytical, meaningful, company-tied internship reports. |
| 4. To purchase the newest editions of books on Tourism and hospitality in English. |

II - "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry" ASSESSMENT

II - "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. Professional Master study programme "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry" by its curriculum, awarded qualification and goals does comply with the Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation study field. However, neither the title of the study programme nor the degree or qualification to be obtained do not insinuate, that the study programme is related to tourism, it's only the leisure and entertainment industry, which might be somehow misleading to both students and employers. Still, objectives of the programme could be reconsidered and reformulated, to explain the connection with the tourism field better.

Programme follows the mission and strategic plan of BIA, providing "an internationally competitive high-level education in the field of communication, entertainment, and leisure to prepare critical thinking and qualified professionals with modern knowledge, leadership skills, and competencies..." The programme's connection to the field can be seen through courses related to tourism, such as Sustainable Development in Tourism and Leisure, Leisure and Entertainment Industry, Innovative Technologies in Leisure and Entertainment, etc. But the main point of the programme, also important for a person working in tourism is connected to the communication competencies and managing cultural differences. Students acquire these competencies in courses like Intercultural communication, Globalisation and Cultural Diversity, Cultural markets, and cultural practices, etc. Awarded qualification - Head of an organization, also complies with the study field. Students acquire needed competencies for leading positions in an organization through courses like International Project Management in Leisure and Entertainment, Leadership Concepts and Strategies, Business Economics and Management in Leisure and Entertainment, etc. Descriptions of the programme's goals and tasks have been used in the mapping of courses; included courses are justified and correspond to the specifics of the study programme within the study field.

2.1.2. Professional master's study programme "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry" (47812), the degree to be obtained: professional Master degree in management of leisure and entertainment company and qualification - Head of an Organisation, aim and objectives, as well as the admission conditions, are interconnected and appropriate. The study programme is implemented in 1.5 years (90 ECTS) and 2 years (120 ECTS) of full-time studies, which is reasonable and justified. The study programme was accredited for delivery in Latvian and English, but at the moment BIA delivers it only in the English language.

The title of the study programme refers to one of the core competencies of management -

communication, and prioritizes this competence in the work of managers of leisure and entertainment industry. Although the one competence is brought out in the title, the obtained degree, qualification and chosen study field are appropriate.

The study programme code is 47812. Code 47 corresponds to the master-level professional higher education. Code 812 corresponds to the field of "Tourism and Recreation Organisation" under the section "Individual Services". Study programme code is relevant.

The degree to be obtained after graduating from the study programme is Professional Master degree in management of leisure and entertainment company with professional qualification of Head of an Organisation; it corresponds to level 7 professional qualification.

The duration of the study programme is full-time 1.5 years (90 CP) or 2 years (120 CP) for students coming from other fields of study. Studies are held in Latvian and English, although it was mentioned that currently only the English language stream is being provided.

The admission requirements are Professional bachelor's degree or professional qualifications 5.-6. level in business, management, marketing, finance and/or economics." and Admission to the study programme is open to persons who have obtained: 1.) an academic Bachelor's degree in business, management, marketing, finance and/or economics (in this case, an additional internship of 30 CP aimed at deepening the practical understanding of the tourism, leisure, recreation or hospitality sector); or 2.) a bachelor's degree in professional higher education in other fields (in this case, it is necessary to complete 30 CP of study in the preparatory semester, which develop basic social, communicative and organisational skills, including study courses for the development of professional competence in entrepreneurship); or 3.) an academic Bachelor's degree in other fields, provided that they have at least three years of work experience in the entertainment, leisure or hospitality sector (in this case, students are required to take an additional 30 CP of study in the preparatory semester, which develop basic social, communicative and organisational skills, including study courses to develop professional business competences). English at least at the B2 level.

The study programme has a defined goal (SAR, page 155): "to provide an internationally competitive high-level education in the field of communication, entertainment, and recreation to prepare critical thinking and qualified professionals whose modern knowledge, leadership skills and competences would allow them to work in international teams and effectively manage organisations in the state, non-state and private sectors, ensuring that development and change". All programme tasks are student-oriented, as they are based on the learning outcome-based studies approach.

It can be concluded that the aim and objectives of the professional master's study programme, as well as the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired during the studies are interconnected and allow one to achieve the goals of the study programme according to the professional standard Head of an Organisation.

2.1.3. Following the previous assessment, some significant changes and updates have been made to this study programme: the programme's goal is now more focused, the number of programme tasks was reduced from 10 to 5, achievable learning outcomes are reorganized, competencies reduced from 27 to 4, which is appropriate. The qualification to be obtained was changed from "Manager of an enterprise in the field of leisure and entertainment" to "Head of an Organisation".

The transformation of the national credit points system to the European credit transfer system still needs to be completed, and based on Cabinet Regulation no 305, the new system must be adopted by the end of 2024. At the time of the assessment visit, the different documents provided different information - e.g. in some syllabi, the national credit points were mentioned; in some ECTS-s and in some, both systems were in use.

2.1.4. There are only three higher education institutions in Latvia, offering a master study programme in tourism. At first glance, the study programme does not show a connection with tourism, nor does the acquired qualification, however, considering the contents of the program and

the expected working position that the graduate should occupy, both are suitable. At the same time, it provides BIA an important competitive advantage. The implementation of the study programme is economically justified, as the number of students in all groups is not less than 10 students (although decreasing), therefore BIA did not incur losses in the implementation of the study programme. The social importance of the study programme is justified by the fact that business education in the tourism and hospitality industry has special importance in the development of the national economy. OECD (2020) reports: "Tourism is an important source of export revenue and a key contributor to GDP in Latvia. According to the Tourism Satellite Account, in 2016, tourism directly contributed 4.5% of Latvia's GVA. Tourism exports were EUR 1.3 million in 2018, or 5% of total exports and 17% of service exports. Tourism and related industries provide 77100 jobs, accounting for 8.5% of total employment."

(<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/6eed417e-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/6eed417e-en>)

The study programme is having some difficulties with the numbers of admission and student number, due to the changed political situation and demographic picture in Latvia. The students' drop-out might be connected with the same reasons.

2.1.5. Not applicable.

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

The study programme Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry (47812) has been amended according to changes in the legislation and the new professional standard. The title, code, the degree and the professional qualification of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are interrelated. Delivery of the study programme is economically and socially justified. Due to the poor demographic situation in Latvia, BIA is trying to attract foreign students and maintain a satisfactory number of students in the programme.

Strengths:

The need for the study programme is relevant to national economic development.

Weaknesses:

1. Low number of students and high level of dropout in the study programme.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The title of the study programme refers to one of the core competencies of management - communication, and prioritizes this competence in the work of managers of leisure and entertainment industry. Although the management competence is brought out in the title, the obtained degree, qualification and chosen study field are appropriate and in line with the content of the study programme. The study programme aim in Annex 6 (to provide an internationally competitive high-level education in the field of communication, entertainment and recreation in order to prepare critical thinking and qualified professionals whose modern knowledge, leadership skills and competences would allow them to work in international teams and effectively manage organizations in the state, non-state and private sectors, ensuring that development and change) also highlights the matching management competencies, although the aimed potential field of work for the graduates could be narrowed down to tourism and hospitality sector. The study programme content covers the main study outcomes given in the national standard (occupational standard for

the Head of an Organisation) and the competences expressed in the occupational standard are reflected in the study programme.

Annex 9 (Professional Master's study programme) has two variations for the 2-year programme (120 credits). The first variant offers the possibility to get all 120 credits by passing four parts of the study programme (A: in-depth study in the field (30 credits); B: courses of research and creative work and management (21 credits); C: Internships (39 credits); Master Thesis (30 credits)) giving exactly 120 credits, which means that there are no elective student choice possibilities. The second variant offers a total of 132 credits (A part (30 credits) and B part (21 credits) and Master thesis (30 credits) parts are precisely the same as in the first alternative, but 30 credits of study courses providing knowledge in of the fundamentals of leisure and entertainment in theory and practice and Internship 21 credits are added), where the students need to choose 120 credits to get the diploma. It is unclear why those two alternatives are offered and when the first or second alternative/variation is implemented. Concerning the second alternative, it is also unclear which courses are mandatory for the student to pass and which are not (and in what circumstances).

The confusion is even bigger, when analyzing the courses which are presented as mandatory to fill the standard requirements (Annex 6, page 3) - e.g. the Strategic Marketing Course is marked as mandatory, but is offered only in one study programme form (among "preparatory semester courses") - how then the students studying in other forms can achieve mandatory requirements at all.

The following problems raised in deeper analysis of the study programme and syllabi:

1. Conflict between course requirements and course semester (given in Annex 9) - e.g. course Business Economics and Management in Leisure and Entertainment takes place in 1st semester, is taught only for the students having previous degree in other fields (not in business, management, finance, marketing, economics), but requires preliminary knowledge in Economics, Basics of Business, Basics of Management. e.g. Business English in a multicultural environment is a mandatory course for all the students, requires B2 level English, but based on the admission requirements only the students who study in the English study programme, language skills are controlled/expected/proved, not Latvians.
2. Learning outcomes should express the different parts of competencies - knowledge, skill or attitude/ability/responsibility. Each learning outcome has just one verb to enable clear and fair student assessment. Therefore the outcome (only skills) "to develop research papers independently, to choose the right methods for obtaining, systematizing and classifying data and information. To use methods and technologies for analyzing, interpreting, and presenting data and information, to be able to structure and write scientific work, to formulate theses, summaries, conclusions and proposals. To be able to prepare and format large documents, to analyze statistical information, to compile research results and to present them - to present and comment. Work in a team, plan and organize your work effectively, acquire new knowledge independently, systematize and analyse data and information, communicate with group members and lecturer, and comply with legal requirements and academic ethics." (Communication research methods and presentation) has 19 verbs in 2 outcomes and this means 19 correct learning outcomes, not just 2 (specific and general skills).
3. One course should have not more than 4-6 (recommended by EU HE framework and OECD) learning outcomes to focus on specific competences during the particular course. Lower number of intended learning outcomes also enables the learning outcome based student assessment where the achievement of every learning outcome must be evidenced and clear.
4. Based on the higher education taxonomies and qualification frameworks, the master level programme learning outcomes (both in programme level and course level) must be focused more on achieving/teaching higher level outcomes (based on the verbs) - less describing, implementing, understanding and more creating, designing, developing and arguing, defending, analyzing etc.
5. In the syllabi template the learning outcomes are divided into three and translated as knowledge,

abilities and competencies. Law and professional standard distinguish knowledge, skills and competencies. Abilities and skills are different constructs.

Despite the formulation and structural problems, the labor market needs like field-specific management skills are expressed in the study programme and the range of the courses is well chosen to enable the achievement of intended outcomes/competencies for a career in the tourism sector companies. The chosen courses are a nice mix of traditional (Strategic Management, Quality Management Systems etc.) and new competencies (e.g. Sustainable development, Innovative technologies etc.) necessary for the market and employment statistics of the graduates and employers feedback confirms that.

2.2.2. There are several good approaches in professional higher education to support the students' scientific research and understanding of the necessity of science in their future work and studies. Firstly, lecturers are researchers themselves and bring the latest news from the particular science field also to their courses (e.g. courses: Cultural markets and cultural practices, Creative Thinking Technologies), mediating and directing the students to read scientific papers and research. Secondly, the lecturers involve students in their research projects. The list of students' presentations and articles was given as proof, during the site visit the students confirmed that they had been introduced to the opportunities to participate in the research activities of the BIA - participation in the BIA's scientific conference by presenting and publishing their article is mandatory for the master students. Thirdly, the students are encouraged to write their master thesis about the practical topic, the thesis must be based on the latest scientific research and achievements and show the use of the new scientific results in practice.

2.2.3. The variety of the used study methods is short, but some chosen methods prove that the students are actively involved in the study process. Methods like seminars, practical sessions, workshops, discussions, colloquiums etc. enable student participation and support more likely deep learning and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. At the same time in the majority of syllabi only the same four general study methods are mentioned: lecture, discussion, literature analysis, and independent work (independent work is study form not method), but modern and student-centered study principles enable a huge variety of methods more appropriate nowadays - e.g. PBL (problem-based learning), flipped classroom, blended learning, gamification etc.

According to the course syllabi, the student assessment is not observe the learning outcome-based principles in the following reasons:

- * Some of the mentioned assessment methods are more like study methods (and do not enable assessment (e.g. independent work, lecture).
- * Many translation mistakes (e.g. study and assessment method as "permanent job " (should be independent work) is popular in many courses, in Business Economics and Management in Leisure and Entertainment course students' independent work includes "weddings" etc.), if English is the study language, then such mistakes must be avoided.
- * No content-rich assessment criteria or course-related grading criteria. Grades descriptions do not reflect the learning outcomes (grades do not show the achievement of the learning outcomes) - all courses;
- * Incorrect assessment criteria. Based on principles of the learning outcome-based studies the grades cannot be lowered because of being absent or not participating in classes - grades must show the achievement of the learning outcomes and nothing else. Participation can be a prerequisite to allow students to take the assessment, but cannot change the final grade.

2.2.4. Internship in BIA is organized according to the general Internship rules document: PROVISIONS FOR TRAINEESHIPS AT THE BALTIC INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY, from 2018. The document is not updated, providing information which is already been changed in the law (e.g. paragraph 2.3.3. says

that in vocational Master programmes – at least 26 credits for academic Bachelor programme graduates or at least six credits for vocational Bachelor programme graduates, but must be accordingly 29 and 9 credits, it is also unclear whether the credit points are in Latvian system (valid in 2018) or already transferred to the ECTS system).

In different documents the titles of the internships are different. Annex 8 (Mapping of study courses) gives three practices as Research practice, Introductory practice and Qualification practice, in Annex 6 (prof.master's study programme compliance with the state standard) provides even two options: 1) in p.4: Research practice (9 CP), Practice I (12CP); Practice II (18CP); 2) in SAR p. 6: Practice I, II and III, but according to the description practice I seem to be Research practice. In the study programme (annex 9) even the fourth option is presented: Internship I - Introductory Internship; Internship II - Qualification Internship and Research practice.

Aims and tasks for introductory and qualification internships are exactly the same, although the learning outcomes, number of credit points are different. The submitted internship descriptions also show that there are no significant differences between the Bachelor's Introductory Internship and the Master's Introductory Internship.

The structure of the assessment methods (those are not evaluation criteria as translated in the syllabi) is the same for each internship: visiting the place of internship, company practice manager grade, formatting the report, and defending the report. None of those methods (criteria) show the achievement of expected learning outcomes eg. students are able to develop the professional skills of an organizational manager or are able to make sound objective decisions etc.

Based on the provided information, the requirements and expectations for the Latvian-speaking and English-speaking students are the same. Students are responsible for finding internship places and according to the interviews with the students and graduates, many of them used the possibility of having an internship abroad. The BIA has provided several opportunities for students to apply for internships abroad. Finding an internship partner for a Research internship is much more complicated and causes several problems for foreign students.

2.2.5. Not applicable.

2.2.6. Among 45 master theses (2017 - 2023) only seven were related to the particular company. Whether the Research Internship should be done in the organization of the sector, then remains unclear how the other students connected their research during the internship with the internship place and passed the internship. These statistics also show the weak link between sector companies and BIA's research intentions. Applied research through the master thesis is low.

The topics of the final thesis are relevant to the field and mostly correspond to the study programme (eg., while the majority of theses are handling the hospitality sector companies or regional tourism destinations). Some of the titles of the master theses are: “Разработка концепции социального предприятия в туристическом бизнесе”, “Усадебный туризм как новый тренд в постковидный период”, “Особенности и преимущества этнографического туризма в регионе Испании Эстремадура”. Nevertheless, not all thesis topics are linked with communication management and rather focus on creating concepts and strategies for tourism companies and regions in general, although the study programme focuses on communication management in the leisure and entertainment field. The experts expect the students to be directed and to choose more organization-level topics to show their understanding and competence as managers of leisure and entertainment companies.

According to the presented master thesis during the assessment visit, the level of research methodology needs improvement. In most of the theses, only descriptive statistics in basic visualization (pies, one-dimensional graphs, etc.) were used, although master-level research skills should enable at least correlation, segmentation, factor analysis etc.

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

Although the content of the study programme is justified and mostly follows the expectations of the labor market and higher education standards, problems in implementation of studies cause problems in study quality. The study programme is in line with the state educational standard and national standard. Communication management is one of the core competencies necessary for the modern manager in the leisure and entertainment industry, and this is reflected in the programme aim, learning outcomes, and the list of courses. Minor problems in the formulation and implementation of the programme, its learning outcomes, and its assessment system indicate the need for improvement. BIA applies different approaches to support the students' scientific research and understanding of the necessity of science in their future work and studies. The internship organization needs some clarification - the amount of the internship in the study programme, the titles of the internship courses, and outdated internship regulations - but the students and social partners are satisfied with the internship possibilities and outcomes. The topics of students' final theses are applicable to the domain and correspond to the study programme.

Strengths:

1. Involvement of the students to the BIA's research conferences to write, present, and publish their articles.

Weaknesses:

1. Inconsistency in the study programme content in different versions of the programme.
2. Prerequisites for the courses are not in line with the study plan and admission requirements.
3. Inconsistencies in content between different documents.
4. A small variety of study methods used.
4. The learning outcome-based study approach is not fully implemented. The formulation of the learning outcomes is incorrect and needs mutual efforts and learning to improve.
5. Student assessment is not in line with the principles of the outcome-based studies.
6. Old and contradictory information concerning the study requirements and internships. Very poorly developed practice descriptions. In many places identical goals and objectives, as well as expected results.
7. Low level of research methodology and analytical skills in Master thesis.

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: Partially compliant

However, experts acknowledge that BIA is on the right path, and with motivated staff and students, further positive developments are achievable. None of the mentioned shortcomings are overwhelming, and they can be addressed or improved through continued efforts to establish BIA as a reputable and high-quality higher education institution.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. Based on the information that has been gathered during the onsite visit meeting with Master students and the academic staff, it can be stated that they are satisfied with the availability of the existing resource base including the library resources, databases, Moodle platform, various existing

communication channels such as BigBlueButton for provision of online lectures and seminars. For various purposes, based on the SAR p.193, the BIA information system NEXUS and "My BIA" are used. All important information and notifications are placed in the "My BIA" system in the "Notifications" section. In the "My BIA" system, students can view their academic progress, as well as information about financial payments.

It has to be noted that based on the SAR p.192 The BIA does not separate infrastructure by study programme, but assesses resources for the whole Academy. Based on the information assessed and gathered during the onsite visit, it can be concluded that the existing books and periodicals of the BIA library, including both Latvian and English, contribute to supporting scientific activities and providing informational resources for students and academic staff. However, it should be noted that the majority of resources are outdated and mainly in Russian. Thus, it is highly necessary to increase the amount of books or e-books in English.

The expert group agrees that the facilities in Riga with the accessibility to auditoriums equipped with modern technical tools, easy access to computers and Wi-Fi at the premises of BIA, printing, copying, a

2.3.2. N/A.

2.3.3. Based on the information that has been gathered during onsite visit and what has been provided in the SAR p.195, the main source of funding for the study process of the Master study programme "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry" is tuition fees. The amount of study fees and the payment procedure for each study year are determined and approved by the BIA Senate. There are different options for students on how to cover their tuition. Based on the information that has been provided in the SAR p.195, students can choose to pay - 1. For the entire programme; 2. For the entire study year; 3. For one semester; 4. Per month, in accordance with the payment schedule provided for in the contract, strictly observing the payment terms and the amounts to be paid. However, the information on the BIA website differs. Under section "Studies", sub-section "Tuition fee", it is indicated that for Latvian and EU citizens there are two payment options, which are 1. If the student pays the tuition fee by month, only one or more months may be paid for entering into the contract and 2. Pay for an entire academic year with a 10% discount. The information can be accessed here: <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/tuition-fee.html>. In another sub-section "Tuition fee for Latvian citizens in Riga", there is a distribution of payments in 3 ways: 1. Paying by months; 2. Paying for full semester; 3. Paying for a full year.

The information provided in the SAR p. 196 does not comply with the information that has been provided on the website <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/tuition-fee/tuition-fee-for-latvian-citizens-in-riga.html> and <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/tuition-fee/tuition-fees-for-international-applicants-from-the-eu-eea-countries-ch-and-the-uk-effective-from-1-september-2023.html> and <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/tuition-fee/tuition-fees-for-international-applicants-from-the-cis-central-asian-countries-georgia-and-ukraine-effective-from-1-september-2023.html> and <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/tuition-fee/tuition-fees-for-international-applicants-from-other-countries-effective-from-1-september-2023.html>. The tuition fee numbers differ. For international students, the study fee amounts differ based on their citizenship. The first group is international students from the EU/EEA countries, CH, and the UK. The second group is CIS/Central Asian countries, Georgia and Ukraine and the third group is non-EU/EEA/CIS/Central Asian countries, CH and the UK and applicants, who are not citizens of Georgia, or Ukraine. This diversification is accessible under section "Studies", and sub-section "Tuition fee" on the right side.

Based on the information provided in the SAR p.196, in the 2021/2022 school year, tuition fees for the professional Master study programme "Management of communication in the leisure and

entertainment industry": full-time in Latvian - 2150 EUR per year, full-time in a foreign language (depending on the country) - 2600 - 3000 EUR per year. However, the information that has been provided on the website of BIA differs. Expert group presumes it is based on the fact that since inflation tuition fees have increased and changed since 2021/2022.

Registration fees also significantly differ based on the group of countries the student is applying from, which seems questionable why is that so. For international applicants from the EU/EEA countries, CH and the UK, for example, the non-refundable registration fee for admission and visa processing is 50 €, while for international applicants from the CIS/Central Asian countries, Georgia and Ukraine it is 150 € and those from other international countries - 250 €. For international students from other international countries, the guarantee fee of 500 € is refunded upon successful completion of the study programme and defense of the diploma which is specified here: <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/en/tuition-fee/tuition-fees-for-international-applicants-from-other-countries-effective-from-1-september-2023.html>. According to the regulations, this is a common practice of HEI to request for guarantee fees for international students from other countries, however, there is a lack of specification from BIA when the sum of money is refundable and when it is not. All that is known is that the student must complete their studies, not taking into account that there might be cases of unpredicted circumstances, which should be specified by the BIA.

The financial support for the study programme is deemed sufficient based on the number of students enrolled, and the income generated from tuition fees covers study expenses. In the expert team's opinion, the study programme maintains a positive balance between income and expenses, indicating profitability. The cost per student is provided in SAR p.196, and it is mentioned that study expenses are completely covered by income per student, ensuring financial viability. The financing system is structured to ensure quality education for every student, irrespective of the number of students in the group, by guaranteeing necessary resources, contact hours, library access, and research opportunities.

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

The Master study programme involves the use of modern education practices and ensures student engagement through the use of e-learning platforms like Moodle and BigBlueButton, which are used on an everyday basis by students and lecturers. The provision of diverse communication channels and online resources contributes to accessibility and satisfaction among students. The BIA financial model is primarily reliant on tuition fees, ensures financial viability and enables the provision of necessary resources for students. However, there are areas for improvement, such as purchasing more books in the English language as well as a necessity to ensure that information provided on tuition fee amounts and discounts is provided the same on the SAR and BIA website. There is an unclarity on how tuition fee discounts are formed and why there are such major differences on tuition fees based on groups of students and their citizenships. There is a guarantee fee for international students from other countries, which is a common practice, however, it is necessary to specify by the BIA in which cases the sum of money is refundable and when it is not.

Strengths:

1)Utilization of modern e-learning platforms like Moodle and BigBlueButton.

Weaknesses:

1)Low amount of literature in the English language;

2)Tuition fee information differs in various documents, such as the official BIA website and SAR;

3) Inclarity of discount system formation.

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

BIA provides various forms of resources including informative, material and technical provision. Despite a number of weaknesses that have been enlisted as a low amount of literature in English and lack of consistent information of tuition fees in different sources that needs to be resolved.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. Based on BIA SAR (page 197): The structure of academic staff of the programme meets the requirements in Latvia for the composition of academic staff in higher educational institutions - academies: in the master's programme, no less than 50% of the academic staff of the programme are Ph.D. In the master's study programme "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry", 60% of the academic staff have Ph.D.

Based on meetings with teachers, experts were able to see a good balance between academic staff and professionals from tourism industry, owners of travel agencies, well well-established and peer-recognized professionals involved in teaching students of master's programme. Some of the well established and well-known industry professionals with successful businesses are teaching at BIA. The involvement of the industry representatives in teaching is confirmed in the feedback of graduates and even students, who have been able to use their knowledge obtained at BIA to establish their own business in tourism.

According to academic positions (table 3.11. SAR), study quality is ensured by two professors (7%), three associate professors (10%), two associate visiting professors (7%), 8 assistant professors (28%), 5 visiting assistant professors (17%), 2 lecturers (7%), 6 guest lecturers (21%) and 1 leading researcher (3 %). In the opinion of the experts, it is the right balance.

2.4.2. From SAR (pages 200- 201): In the period from the academic year 2016/2017 until the autumn of the academic year 2022/2023, analysis of the dynamics of the number of teaching staff shows that the number of teaching staff has increased from 19 to 29 people. Not only did the quantitative composition of the teaching staff change but also its qualitative changes were made, for example, in the academic year 2016/2017, there was only 1 full professor among the lecturers of the study programme, then in 2022/2023 – 2.

Recommendation regarding the teaching staff qualifications from the previous accreditation is fully implemented. Recommendation: "To introduce a formal programme in Pedagogy, Assessment and Technology" has been fulfilled: "In cooperation with Daugavpils University, 40 BIA teachers participated in the professional development programme "Innovations in Higher Education" in 2020". Sources: 3 Annex Expert recommendation fulfillment and meeting with study field director.

2.4.3. Not applicable.

2.4.4. The academic staff of this study programme has demonstrated a consistent publication record over the past six years, with each lecturer having at least one publication. However, a significant portion of these publications is not directly relevant to the study field. This discrepancy suggests a potential misalignment between the research interests of the staff and the focus of the programme. Additionally, there has been a decline in research activity in the past two years, indicating a need for revitalization in scholarly endeavors within the department.

While some lecturers exhibit productive publication rates, concerns arise regarding the quality and relevance of their work, especially considering the disconnect from the study field. According to the information listed in Annex 2.4.4 Summary of quantitative data.docx, the BIA academic staff publish a number of articles annually which are indexed to WoS or SCOPUS bases.

Four out of 26 lecturers involved in the implementation of the master programme have practical experience (according to the information stated in the CVs of lecturers). Two of them have direct work experience in the tourism industry. Students highly appreciate lecturers with practical experience, but, according to the students' interviews, greater involvement of industry professionals in the implementation of the study programme is desirable.

2.4.5. Based on SAR (page 203): Currently, 27 full-time students are studying in the master's study programme "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry", 22 teaching staff are working in the accredited study programme in English, and 17 in Latvian. Accordingly, the student-teacher ratio is 2.3, but all the teachers contribute their time also for the students from other study programmes and fields.

The lower ratio of the number of students and teaching staff can allow students to establish closer relationships with teachers, get feedback on the evaluation of written assignments faster, as well as participate in interactive seminars and discussions. During the site visit, the students mentioned that they can get feedback for their assignments only if they ask, meaning that the small student-teacher ratio hasn't been used as an advantage so far.

Experts interviewed master programme students and they showed a very high level of satisfaction with the study process and teachers. The lower number of students per teacher might work in favor of students as a more individual, tailor-made approach can be used in the study process.

Although BIA is describing 4 collaboration models on how the teachers can collaborate and contribute to the studies and study programme development, only a few examples were provided. BIA gave examples of cooperation between several teachers in one study course, offering a wider perspective on the topic for master students (SAR, page 202), but systematic collaboration models are not in use.

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

Teaching staff qualification is in accordance with requirements. During the meetings with students, experts had an impression that students were satisfied with the teaching staff qualifications and professional experience. Knowledge of professionals teaching at BIA was highlighted. Nevertheless, there is space for improvements in the systematic collaboration between teachers and their involvement in the study programme and field development. The academic and professional qualifications of teachers at BIA are sufficient. The academic staff at the BIA has demonstrated a sufficient level of scholarly output through their publications. However, it is noteworthy that not all of these publications are directly relevant to the tourism and hospitality study field. Despite the overall quantity of publications, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of publications over time.

Strengths:

- 1) Good ratio of academic staff with PhD and good balance between academicians and specialists from the labor market.
- 2) High student and graduate satisfaction with the teaching staff of BIA.
- 3) The academic staff at the BIA has demonstrated a sufficient level of scholarly output through their publications.

Weaknesses:

- 1) Lack of systematic and supported collaboration between teachers.
- 2) The topics of the articles are not always connected with the study field and study programme.

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

Academic and professional qualifications of teachers at BIA are sufficient.

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

In accordance with the 6 Annex_Prof.master's study programme compliance with the national education standard.docx, the study programme complies with the State Education Standard pursuant to Cabinet Regulations No. 305, of 13 June 2023, "Regulations regarding the State Standard for Professional Higher Education",
<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342818-noteikumi-parvalsts-profesionalas-augstakas-izglitibas-standartu>.

- 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 complies with the valid professional standard in accordance with the Occupational Standard for Head of Organisation, approved 18.09.2019,
<https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-114.pdf> pursuant to Annex APPENDIX 7. Head of KVIAI Organization.docx.

- 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: Partially compliant

The study course descriptions are prepared in English and Latvian and can be accessed under annexes - Man.of_commun.in the leis.&ent.ind._ Course descriptions.zip and KVIAI_Kursa apraksti.zip.

Descriptions comply with regulations outlined in the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The study materials can be accessed and are prepared in both implemented languages.

However, the course descriptions define the assessment criteria in a very general way and therefore it is not clear whether the assessment form is effective in evaluating student performance. In the majority of cases, the student's performance is assessed in the form of a pass-fail test which does not fully assess the level of performance of the student. Revision of assessment methods for competencies in the study programme would be recommended. In

addition, it has to be noted that there is poor quality of translation of study course descriptions in English, which has to be improved.

- 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 BIA has provided a sample of the diploma under annex 20.01.24 Sample diploma and appendix KSV Latvian stream.pdf. Generally, it complies with the procedure according to which state recognized documents are issued, however, it has to be noted that there is a lack of consistency when it comes to terminology used in translation of the documentation. It must be consistent and compliant as the name of the qualification differs in two of the languages and varies in documents provided by the BIA at the moment.

- 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

Based on the acquired information during site visit as well as relevant annexes: CV_ENG.7z and knowledge of national languages.edoc it can be evaluated that the language proficiency of teaching staff is compliant with Cabinet Regulation No. 733 " Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official 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

As one of the implementing languages of this programme is English, it is required for the teaching staff to have at least B2 level English. The attached documents: CV_ENG.7z and

knowledge of the English language.edoc provide reasoning that academic staff complies with this requirement

- 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

The sample of study agreement as provided in the annex 2.1.4. AGREEMENT_TV.V.docx complies with the provision to be included in the study agreement in accordance with Cabinet Regulation. Nr. 70 "Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi".

- 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

BIA has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education at Turība Business University (BAT) Master's study programme "Strategic Management of Tourism"(47812), if the implementation of the study programme is terminated in accordance with the annex Agreement on cooperation with Turība 56-2020.docx

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

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

BIA has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the license is revoked due to actions of BIA and the student does not wish to continue their studies in another study programme in accordance with Section 55(8) of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and Cabinet of Ministers No 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations on Licensing of study programmes", Paragraph 13.4. based on the annex Fulfillment of obligations Tourism.pdf.

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

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

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

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

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The study programme partially complies with regulatory enactments.

Study course descriptions are general, revision of assessment methods for competencies in the study programme would be recommended, translations of study course descriptions are not

done in high quality.

There is inconsistency in the qualifications acquired in translation to English in sample of diploma.

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

In conclusion, the study programme Management of Communication in the Leisure and Entertainment Industry possesses several commendable strengths that underpin its academic framework. Notably, BIA actively involves students in research conferences, providing them with opportunities to engage in scholarly activities such as writing, presenting, and publishing articles. This initiative not only fosters a culture of research among students but also contributes to their academic and professional development.

Furthermore, the institution demonstrates a good ratio of academic staff with PhDs and professionals that enriches the academic environment, ensuring a diverse and knowledgeable faculty pool capable of delivering quality education. Moreover, high levels of student and graduate satisfaction with the teaching staff underscore the institution's dedication to fostering a supportive and conducive learning environment. The positive financial indicators further bolster the institution's stability and sustainability, ensuring its ability to fulfill its educational mission effectively.

However, alongside these strengths, the programme faces weaknesses that warrant attention and remediation to enhance the overall effectiveness and student outcomes. Challenges such as low student enrollment and high dropout levels in the programme pose obstacles to achieving programme viability. Moreover, the limited number of scientific publications directly related to tourism, coupled with outdated professional literature in English, highlights a need for improvements. Similarly, the small variety of study methods and deficiencies in research methodology and analytical skills in Master's theses indicate areas for improvement in the educational approach and curriculum design.

The incomplete implementation of a learning outcome-based study approach, along with issues in student assessment alignment, underscores the importance of refining educational strategies and assessment practices to better align with desired learning outcomes. Additionally, the lack of systematic and supported collaboration between teachers, coupled with outdated and contradictory study requirements and internship descriptions, points to the need for enhanced coordination and clarity in programme administration and delivery.

By building upon its strengths and addressing areas for improvement, the institution can continue to uphold its commitment to academic excellence and student success.

However, experts acknowledge that BIA is on the right path, and with motivated staff and students, further positive developments are achievable. None of the mentioned shortcomings are overwhelming, and they can be addressed or improved through continued efforts to establish BIA as a reputable and high-quality higher education institution.

Evaluation of the study programme "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry"

Short-term recommendations

1. Regarding prerequisites for the courses not aligning with the study plan and admission requirements, it is needed to consider revising the course prerequisites to better match the study plan and admission criteria for a more smooth and coherent learning experience.
2. To address inconsistencies in content between different documents, BIA has to review and ensure that all documents are updated and aligned to maintain consistency and accuracy in information provided to students.
3. To enhance the variety of study methods available, BIA ought to incorporate a wider range of study techniques and approaches to cater to different learning styles and preferences, thereby offering a more comprehensive learning experience.
4. Collaborate on refining the formulation of learning outcomes through mutual efforts and continuous learning to ensure that the learning outcomes are clear, accurate, and effectively guide the learning process. In the development of learning outcome based studies, follow the learning outcome-based study principles (optimal number of outcomes, one verb per learning outcome, assessment criteria based on learning outcomes etc.) in all documents (especially in course descriptions) and teaching.
5. In order to align student assessment with the principles of outcome-based studies, review and update the assessment methods to better reflect the achievement of learning outcomes. This may involve revising assessment criteria and procedures to ensure they are in line with the principles of outcome-based studies.
- 6.. To address the issue of different study forms not fully aligning with the study programme structure, it is recommended to review and adjust precourse requirements with the study forms to ensure they are in accordance with the study programme structure.
7. Regarding old and contradictory information concerning study requirements and internships, it is recommended to conduct a comprehensive review of all documents and information sources to ensure they are up to date and consistent. Any outdated or conflicting information needs to be revised and updated to provide accurate and reliable guidance to students.
8. BIA needs to clarify the information concerning the tuition fee (amount, payment structure, available discounts and application procedure) to have the same information in every channel to ensure that candidates and students can always get the right and relevant information and instructions.

Long-term recommendations

1. Define and implement the strategy to increase the admission numbers - attract more and quality candidates and students.
2. BIA has to apply a variety of measures to help students to overcome or cope with the problems which may lead to the drop out and decrease the dropout level.
3. To address the low level of research methodology and analytical skills in Master thesis, it is recommended to provide additional training, workshops, or resources focused on enhancing research methodology and analytical skills for students working on their thesis. Building up the system for supporting students` methodological and research skills, encouraging students to seek guidance from faculty members who can also help improve their research and analytical capabilities.

4. Low amount of field connected literature in the English language. It is necessary to supplement the accessible literature in English.

5. To foster systematic and supported collaboration between teachers for the development of their teaching and study programme, it is recommended to establish a system of regular meetings or workshops where teachers can share best practices, exchange ideas, and collaborate on enhancing the curriculum. Providing resources and support for professional development opportunities can also encourage teachers to work together to improve teaching methods and the overall study programme.

6. Develop the collaboration with the sector companies to enable content-rich internships for every student and encourage more analytical, meaningful, company-tied internship reports.

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

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

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:		Partially compliant	The internal quality system has been improved. However there is no systematic gathering of data from graduates and employers in place, the feedback to these two groups should also be formalized. BIA does not have set up KPIs and there is no process to collect data/measure the achievement of the set goals
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)		Partially compliant	Good number of publications, but the number of articles with the highest rankings (WoS and Scopus) has been decreasing constantly since 2016. In many cases the connection between the article and the study field remains too far. Successful involvement of students into the research activities, but no applied research and (international) projects.

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			Strong cooperation with professional employers' organization. Teachers and students' mobility is increasing.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.		Partially compliant		There is significant progress in the majority of recommendations, but still significantly insufficient library funds in English. Organization of internships also requires further alignment.

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	Tourism and Hospitality Management (42812)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Good
2	Management of communication in the leisure and entertainment industry (47812)	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

No dissenting opinions.