

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Fire Safety and Civil Defence College

Study field: Internal Security and Civil Protection

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

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The Fire Safety and Civil Protection College (hereinafter College) plays a crucial role in the vocational education landscape, specializing in Civil Protection, specifically focusing on fire safety and protection, under the State Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). The College's mission is to foster comprehensive development, transforming students into professionals in their chosen specialties. (SAR p. 4-5)

Through its strategic specialization, the College develops and implements educational programmes that align with national and occupational standards, ensuring that the training provided is relevant and effective. The diverse offerings, which range from short-cycle vocational higher education programmes to professional development initiatives, equip students with the qualifications needed to excel in the critical sectors of fire safety, firefighting, and civil protection. (SAR p. 4-5)

The College's vision as a dynamic, modern institution emphasizes enhanced educational content, professional mentorship, and improved infrastructure while closely collaborating with SFRS to ensure quality education, fostering an environment of respect, integrity, professionalism, and cooperation. (SAR, p. 5) Despite challenges relating to constrained budgets and infrastructure issues, during the assessment visit it was evident that active efforts have been made to attract students through participation in events and open door days.

The assessment visit provided an in-depth understanding beyond the self-assessment report, which was concise yet limited in describing several processes, impeding conclusive deductions. Most appendices were in Latvian, challenging the international expert team, but this is understandable in the national-focused field and machine translated materials were offered during the process. According to the SAR (p. 5) the College maintains emphasis on applied research and community involvement, promoting its mission through ongoing professional development and public awareness of vocational training opportunities. Strategic goals for 2024-2027 focus on long-term growth, keeping the College at the forefront of fire safety and civil protection education while producing skilled professionals for essential sectors.

The assessment visit to the College highlighted several key strengths and challenges. The College faces difficulties in attracting students, partly due to infrastructure issues and uncompetitive salaries, which are compounded by outdated facilities such as rented buildings and an incomplete training field. Language barriers pose significant educational challenges, particularly for students primarily speaking Russian who struggle with the programme's requirements.

Despite close cooperation with the State Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), there is a clear need for increased support, especially in terms of modernization and digitalization, where infrastructural improvements and e-learning developments are crucial. The College has achieved commendable progress through external funding and project financing. However, the lack of dedicated project management remains a hurdle. Curriculum adjustments continue to evolve in response to legislative and professional standards.

Internships have been enriched to offer more practical experiences, yet improvements are needed in facilities like gyms and sports areas. Alumni demonstrate a strong willingness to support students, bringing practical insights to the curriculum and engaging in scientific endeavors. However, the College must prioritize attracting quality students and faculty by improving salaries and fostering a supportive environment.

Overall, recommendations focus on investing in faculty and infrastructure, digitizing systems, and creating fair budget allocations. It's important to foster an attractive environment for students and staff, with flexible working conditions and interactive learning methods, to align with international standards and achieve educational goals effectively while addressing ongoing challenges.

# **I - Assessment of the Study Field**

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### **1.1 Management of the Study Field**

#### **Analysis**

1.1.1 The College's mission is to create a learning environment that fosters students' all round maturity and enables each student to become a professional in their chosen field of speciality (SAR, p. 5).

It is clear, from the vocational nature of the study field and the graduate outcomes of students that there is strict alignment between these programmes and the mission of the institution. Similarly, the provision is in keeping with the institution's focus on developing a dynamic and modern college in the field of fire safety and civil protection.

The goal of the study field and study programme is to build students' professional competence for work in the field of fire safety, firefighting, rescue and civil protection in accordance with the professional standard "Fire safety and civil protection technician" (SAR, p. 12).

In the instance the study field consists of a single programme and therefore there is no need to consider the interconnection. However, the assessment visit determined that the SAR and SWOT present certain challenges to realizing the institution's vision. In particular, the College's financial constraints and their impact on infrastructure. These challenges inhibit the College's efforts to meet the needs of society, in providing the requisite number of trained professionals (SAR, p.24-25). For example, senior staff, teaching staff and students all referenced the disparity in salaries between those seeking careers in the fire service and the military challenges the sustainable nature of the institution, which presents a national concern.

1.1.2 The institution has produced a SWOT analysis that informs the Development Plan of the field of study for 2024-2029 (see annex: Annex 2 Development plan for the study field of the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College.docx). During the assessment visit College staff and stakeholders spoke clearly and analytically about strategic challenges, demonstrating the institution has a thorough understanding of the context, limitations and opportunities that it is working within. There is evidence of the College taking action based on the contents of the SWOT. This includes securing EU funding and other financial instruments, which provide for both the establishment of a practical training ground and a training complex (ERDF 2021-2027 project "Establishment of a UCAK complex with modern classrooms and training facilities", Norwegian Financial Mechanism project "Construction of Phase 2 and 3 of the UCAK training complex" and IDF 2021-2027 project "Establishment of a SFRS training ground at 10 Krustpils Street in Riga, purchase of training equipment").

In particular, in relation to training facilities, the institution has made progress since the last report, with imminent plans to enhance facilities further. However, in other areas, such as attracting foreign guest lecturers, during the assessment visit it did not yield credible plans for achieving this objective in the immediate term. The Development Plan itself is brief and while it details high-level objectives it contains no detail about the specific steps that will be taken or milestones to achieve the overall objectives (see Annex 2).

Overall, during the assessment visit it was recognised that however sophisticated the College's SWOT analysis and planning processes are, the institution is largely reliant on the Ministry of Interior if they are to truly overcome some of the enduring strategic challenges they face. It was considered during the assessment visit that expanding the strategic dialogue between the College and the ministry, while not in the College's direct control, stood to enhance the fortunes of the institution and the profession at large.

1.1.3 The Regulations of the College of Fire Safety and Civil Protection, published by the Cabinet of Ministers (see Annex 1: "List of the College's main internal laws and regulations), clearly state that the departments are responsible for the content of professional education programmes and their implementation. The Department of Fire Safety and Civil Protection and the Department of Firefighting and Rescue Work make proposals for the development, updating or improvement of new educational programmes, ensure their coordination and approval in accordance with the procedure established by the laws and regulations, ensure the implementation of the educational process in study courses, conduct research work, develop examination content and methods, inform the public about the activities of the College and professional education opportunities at the College (see Annex 1: "List of the College's main internal laws and regulations). They are supported in their work by a range of additional departments including the Personnel and Records Management Sector, Practical Training Department, Education Coordination Unit, Library and Fire Testing Laboratory.

The Chief of the State Fire and Rescue Service is the Chair of the College's Council. However, during the assessment visit it was informed that Council business is relatively procedural and there is limited strategic discussion that takes place in meetings. The expert team considered that the College has the potential to make better use of the Council as a forum for discussing strategy and developing more effective strategies for overcoming challenges faced by the institution.

At the level of the study programme the College has identified three pillars of governance (see annex: Annex 3 Study program governance structure.docx). These include building and developing cooperation and resource management, quality policy and staff management and the Student Council. These domains map directly onto aspects of study process management, including stakeholder involvement monitoring student satisfaction and driving staff satisfaction and performance. During the assessment visit it was considered that this approach was fit-for-purpose and credible.

1.1.4 Admission to the College for full-time on-site and part-time extramural studies is organized based on the College admission rules, which are developed, approved and published on the College's website by 30 November of each year in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.846 of 10 October 2006 "Regulations on Requirements, Criteria and Procedures for Admission to Study Programs".

Admission requirements are based on prior academic attainment, professional aptitude and physical fitness tests. Application decisions are taken by the Admissions Committee based on the Regulations of the Admission Committee.

The College also has a procedure for the recognition of prior accredited and/or experiential learning. These are set out in the College's Internal Regulation No.22/3-1.1.-18/5 of 9 September 2022 "Regulations on the Recognition of Competences and Learning Outcomes Achieved in Prior Education or Professional Experience Outside Formal Education at the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College", and are available on the College's website. Recognition of prior learning is assessed by a College commission composed of the Deputy Principal of the College, the Head of the Education Coordination Unit, the Head of the Department of Fire and Rescue, the Head of the Department of Fire Safety and Civil Protection and the lawyer of the Education Coordination Unit.

During the assessment visit, it was expressed by students that they believed the admissions process could be strengthened to ensure that all applicants understand the rigors of the programme and what will be expected of them should they be admitted. Interviews were described as largely a formality and that they could be used more effectively as part of a dialogue with applicants.

1.1.5 Assessment is carried out in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.305 of 13 June 2023 "Regulations on the State Standard for Vocational Higher Education". The College's Regulations on Examinations determine the types, forms and conduct of examinations, as well as the rights and obligations of students and lecturers in the process of evaluating the results of study

course learning. The degree of achievement of the learning outcomes is assessed on a 10-point scale. Students can consult the regulations and examination procedures on the College's website. (<https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/koledzas-normativie-akti>)

During the assessment visit it was clarified that staff inform students about the form of assessment and outline the requirements at the beginning of each study course, including the assessment criteria. Course descriptions also contain this information and these are due to be uploaded to the e-learning system by the end of 2024. Students confirmed during the assessment visit this process takes place but stated that they would appreciate a consistent approach to assessment preparation, including in relation to referencing and the research component of qualification papers. During the assessment visit, students stated that they considered that the approach across the institution was variable, with some lecturers better than others at explaining to students the requirements associated with research expectations as part of the thesis.

The assessment of students' knowledge and skills is competency based and many of the outcomes require the learner not only to demonstrate knowledge, but also to analyze the competences acquired in practice and relate them to everyday work (SAR, p. 17). During the assessment visit in meetings with academic staff it was revealed that, despite a strong alignment between intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and assessment, staff struggled to articulate this alignment and how their individual practices fit within the framework. Therefore, the expert team recommends enhancing staff understanding of the constructive alignment between programme and course learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and assessment.

1.1.6 The College provides instructions for students regarding how assessment must be constructed and organized. The College has comprehensive and robust regulations, including from the Ministry of the Interior, in relation to professional integrity and expected standards of behavior (see Annex 1: "List of the College's Main Internal Laws and Regulations"). However, the expert team considered that, while the College of Fire and Civil Protection Code of Ethics references academic integrity, the institution currently does not have dedicated and explicit operative regulations concerning academic integrity (College of Fire and Protection Code of Ethics).

During the assessment visit staff informed the expert team that the College would be introducing anti-plagiarism tools in the upcoming academic year. However, staff were not able to articulate how they currently, consistently safeguard against academic misconduct. Some relevant strategies are used at the programme level, for example changing exam questions on an annual basis, where staff are aware that previous and current students share information. However, these approaches are not part of a comprehensive and integrated institutional approach. The expert team also found during the assessment visit in meetings with College leadership and teaching staff that the institution has not begun to consider the implications of artificial intelligence (AI). Current students referenced the fact that their peers are using AI tools presently and that they believed this usage needed to be regulated in the interests of academic standards and fairness.

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

Overall, the aims of the study field are aligned to the College's strategy and mission and clearly work to serve the needs of society. The institution engages in reflective exercises to determine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. As with the recommendations from the previous report, there is evidence that the College makes efforts to use these outcomes to plan and form appropriate actions to respond to its environment and challenges. However, there is scope for enhancing the effectiveness of strategic review and action planning across the College. Admissions to the College are organized fairly and appropriately. Finally, there is a need to ensure that more detailed regulations and arrangements are written to regulate academic integrity at the College, including arrangements to respond to contemporary challenges impacting academic ethics and

conduct.

**Strengths:**

1) The established processes for recognition of prior learning and their contribution to improving accessibility for prospective students.

**Weaknesses:**

1) The development plan lacks detail about how overall objectives will be achieved.

2) Academic integrity is only briefly addressed and in summary in College regulations and policies.

3) Students consider that the interview process does not sufficiently help them to understand the rigors of the programme.

4) Students report that there isn't a consistent approach to assessment preparation, including in relation to referencing and the research component of qualification papers.

5) Staff understanding of constructive alignment between programme and course learning outcomes, teaching and learning and assessment is variable across the institution.

6) Council's focus on procedural matters, which limits the opportunities for strategic discussion and hinders the development of effective strategies to address the institution's challenges.

## **1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System**

### **Analysis**

1.2.1 The analysis of the internal quality assurance system at the College reveals a structured and proactive approach to enhancing the quality of its study programme. According to the SAR (p. 19), the College regularly evaluates its programme delivery processes to ensure compliance with both external and internal legislation, aligning with the quality standards outlined in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The College claims to have established a quality policy documented in the Quality Policy and Quality Assurance Handbook. However, this documentation was not found to be publicly available on the College's website in the English version, it should be noted that this is not counted negatively, as the College primarily serves Latvian students, and the documents are accessible in Latvian.

The Quality Policy (College Order No. 22/3-1.1.-5/108 dated 06/26/2023) emphasizes key areas such as continuously improving educational content to meet the needs of students and stakeholders, enhancing academic staff competence through professional development, adopting a student-centered approach, and developing infrastructure to ensure access to necessary resources. The main idea of the policy is that it applies to all College activities, holding everyone accountable for quality assurance while aspiring to position the College as a prestigious institution with significant infrastructure and partnerships.

The implementation of the Quality Policy is not limited to documented procedures, which is not excessively long but outlines the fundamental principles that all individuals are expected to adhere to, but is integrated into the College's everyday activities. This integration was seen during the assessment visit in the College as the commitment to improving educational content, enhancing staff competence, and applying a student-centered approach, thereby embedding quality assurance into daily operations. For example during the assessment visit, while there was no direct discussion about the implementation of the quality evaluation documents, indirect confirmations were received by the students indicating positive changes at the College. Students who had previously studied at the College reported increased openness, allowing for freer communication and discussion with instructors, which is valued deeply in a field dealing with diverse rescue scenarios requiring multiple solutions.

To promote continuous improvement, the College regularly assesses various aspects of its educational offerings by incorporating feedback from surveys of students, employees, teachers,

graduates, and employers to respond effectively to stakeholder needs (SAR, p. 19). Demonstrating adaptability, the College has introduced initiatives such as a fire safety supervision internship in response to survey results and enhanced administrative efficiency with the integration of technology like the Namejs document management system (SAR, p. 19).

Investments in upgrading material and technical resources are pivotal to maintaining a high-quality educational atmosphere. Overall, the internal quality assurance system at the College is efficient and well-structured, effectively ensuring the achievement of its study programme objectives. This proactive approach not only enhances educational quality but also allows the College to remain responsive to the evolving needs of its stakeholders (SAR, p. 19).

1.2.2 It is stated in the SAR (p. 19-20) that the development and updating of study programmes at the College strictly adhere to the Law on Vocational Education and internal laws and regulations of the college (see annex: 11\_developing Updating\_study\_program.docx and additional regulation which are available only in Latvian at: <https://ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/koledzas-normative-akti>), ensuring compliance with established educational standards. Internal regulations specify the procedures for creating and updating programmes, emphasizing that all changes must align with sector regulations.

Initiatives for new programmes originate from the SFRS or the academic staff, with final decisions made by the College Council. A designated working group develops each new programme in line with the College's strategic goals and those of the SFRS, focusing on clearly defined learning outcomes. (SAR p. 19-20) During the assessment visit, it was discussed that there is a close collaboration between the teaching staff and the SFRS. When there is a need for changes—such as new legislation or the introduction of new techniques or methodologies—the college is among the first to become aware, allowing necessary modifications to be incorporated into the curriculum. This was confirmed also by the finding that the education provided is sufficiently modern, enabling graduates to enter the service without needing to "re-learn" but rather effectively supporting their success in the field.

Study programmes detail the professional qualifications to be attained, programme objectives, expected outcomes, and required learner prerequisites. All changes are reviewed and approved by the College Council, with updates communicated to the relevant staff. (SAR p. 19-20)

Student representatives are actively involved in the development and evaluation process, ensuring that their feedback is incorporated alongside input from graduates and current students. This collaborative approach promotes ownership of the study process and ensures the curriculum remains relevant to the needs of students and the SFRS. (SAR p. 19-20) As mentioned earlier, during the assessment visit, several examples were provided illustrating how students are encouraged to provide feedback and are welcomed to engage in discussions with instructors if they hold different perspectives on the topics. This practice was especially appreciated by students with prior work experience, as there are rarely identical incidents in the rescue service; thus, multiple solutions often exist. It is important for students to understand various options and, when necessary, to receive explanations as to why specific approaches are taught. This shift represents a significant change in the educational experience and has been highly valued by students, demonstrating how the quality assurance system functions and how feedback is utilized to enhance study implementation.

In summary, the College's systematic and inclusive approach to programme development ensures that educational offerings are continually updated and aligned with regulatory requirements while enhancing the quality and relevance of its study programmes.

1.2.3 Full-time students at the College, who are also employed as cadets, have the right to engage in decision-making processes and submit proposals or complaints regarding College activities. Feedback is provided in accordance with established legal procedures. Through their participation in

the Student Self-Government, students represent their interests, evaluate and improve the study process, and contribute to the development and updating of study programmes. The Statute of the Students' Self-Government outlines their rights and responsibilities in representing student interests in College decision-making bodies and in enriching the curriculum and overall educational strategy. (SAR p. 20-21)

Each course of study includes a designated tutor, offering students a point of contact for discussing any concerns or questions. The College also provides a physical mailbox for suggestions, proposals, and complaints, allowing submissions in writing, electronically, or anonymously. Adhering to the Whistleblowing Act, the College has established a designated whistleblowing contact person, with relevant information available on its website. (SAR p. 20-21)

Students can challenge decisions made by the College Admissions Committee by submitting a written application to the College Director within three working days after results are announced. The Director will consider the application within two working days, and students may appeal decisions following the Administrative Procedure Law. (SAR p. 20-21) During the assessment visit, no examples of such complaints were presented, as most issues have been resolved and formal complaints are deemed unnecessary, however some examples are provided in the SAR (p. 21) about proposals for example, students requested an additional microwave oven for the kitchen to facilitate lunchtime meals, a request that was fulfilled and communicated back to the students by the course curator.

In summary, the College encourages active student participation in governance, providing various channels for communication and feedback, which fosters a responsive and collaborative educational environment.

1.2.4 The College regularly collects a variety of data to inform its educational practices and enhance quality. This includes annual results from admissions, monthly student attendance records, yearly reasons for expulsion, student evaluations of lecturer performance and the study process, annual evaluations of internship supervisors, employer satisfaction surveys, graduate employment statistics, and results from students' qualification thesis defenses. This data is systematically gathered and stored in the National Education Information System and the resource management/accounting system "Visma Horizon," which enables effective tracking of graduates' employment within the State Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and assists in organizing surveys. (SAR p. 21-22)

One of the advantages of the College is its small student population, which allows for personalized attention and individual discussions to promptly identify and address specific issues. Additionally, focus group meetings are convened as necessary to gather insights from students, employers, and lecturers regarding the short-cycle vocational higher education programme and areas for improvement. (SAR p. 21-22)

The analysis of survey results (see annex: Annex 7 Analysis of student, alumni and employer survey results.docx) from students, alumni, and employers indicates that the College is effectively addressing the needs of its stakeholders through continuous feedback and improvement. Employer surveys confirm that college graduates generally possess relevant theoretical knowledge but require additional practical experience, which employers acknowledge as acquired through real work environments. Student surveys highlight satisfaction with internship organization and curriculum improvements, leading to enhancements such as the introduction of a fire safety supervision placement. Alumni feedback emphasizes the need for modernization in the learning environment, which the College is currently addressing with new facilities. The College's surveys for specific courses and teaching effectiveness result in actionable insights that drive curriculum and teaching improvement. The library survey underlined the need for better utilization of resources, prompting the College to offer guidance on using the electronic catalog. Overall, the College's commitment to using survey results for adaptive improvements underscores its dedication to maintaining a high-



quality educational experience.

The results of these surveys are communicated to relevant departments, SFRS representatives, and discussed during departmental meetings, SFRS meetings, and College council sessions to ensure that feedback is integrated into ongoing improvements. Based on the collected data, the College continually refines its study processes, content, and both material and informational support. The evaluation of lecturer performance by students leads to targeted analysis by department heads, highlighting areas for lecturer development. (SAR p. 21-22)

To streamline and enhance the data collection process, the College plans to develop internal rules that will govern regular surveys. In summary, the systematic collection and analysis of a wide range of data enable the College to effectively improve its educational offerings and support services, ensuring a responsive and high-quality learning environment for its students. (SAR p. 21-22)

1.2.5 The College's website, accessible at <https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv>, provides comprehensive information about the institution and its short-cycle professional higher education study programme. Hosted on the National Web Single Platform, the website is managed by designated staff members appointed by the College Director to ensure accurate and up-to-date content. (SAR p. 22-24)

The website features key sections such as "About Us," "Publications and Reports," and "Research," with each area overseen by specific personnel. It includes information on legislative acts, international cooperation, vacancies, and services like the Fire Testing Laboratory and library. Admission details, educational programmes, and frequently asked questions are managed by the Education Coordination Unit. (SAR p. 22-24)

Both Latvian and English versions of the site ensure accessibility, and the content aligns with the National Education Information System and the Higher Education Quality Agency's E-platform. Responsibility for maintaining information is clearly defined, with a senior specialist overseeing teacher data and a methodologist managing student information. Overall, the website is a vital communication tool that fosters transparency and facilitates access to educational resources. (SAR p. 22-24) While the information provided is consistent with that found on the website, it is important to note that the English version is significantly more limited than the Latvian version, which encompasses all essential information and documents. This observation also applies to the SAR, as the documents presented in the annexes were initially available only in Latvian. The expert team acknowledged that, from the perspective of a specific field in which the curriculum is not offered in English and where there are no international students, the English-language information may not be deemed relevant. Nevertheless, from a forward-looking perspective, it is advisable to consider the dissemination of more comprehensive information in English and to explore opportunities for enhancing international collaboration, particularly in relation to guest lecturers, if not students.

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

The College has established a structured and proactive internal quality assurance system that enhances its study programmes by aligning with European Higher Education Area standards. This system emphasizes regular evaluations and ensures compliance with legislation. While quality policy documentation is primarily available in Latvian, reflecting the predominantly local student body, it underscores improvement in educational content, staff development, and infrastructure. Assessment visits revealed that these principles are integrated into daily operations, fostering open communication and adaptability, particularly beneficial in the dynamic field of rescue services. Feedback from student and employer surveys further validates the programme's responsiveness and effectiveness, while active student involvement supports a collaborative environment. The College excels in data collection and analysis to inform educational practices, supported by modern facilities and comprehensive surveys. Although the English website provides less documentation

than the Latvian version, the College's commitment to high-quality education through ongoing improvements and stakeholder engagement is evident.

**Strengths:**

- 1) The College's Quality Policy underscores continuous improvement in educational content, development of academic staff, a student-centered approach, and well-developed infrastructure, ensuring accountability and aspiring to be a prestigious institution.
- 2) The principles of the quality policy are seamlessly integrated into everyday operations, fostering an environment of open communication and responsiveness, particularly valuable in the dynamic field of rescue services.
- 3) Student and employer surveys are effectively used to adapt to stakeholder needs, confirming the efficiency of programme development and review procedures. This active feedback process encourages a collaborative educational atmosphere.
- 4) The College efficiently collects and analyzes diverse data sets to inform educational practices and enhance quality, further supported by modern facilities and comprehensive survey use.

**Weaknesses:**

- 1) The quality policy documentation is primarily accessible in Latvian and not on the English version of the website. Although this is understandable given the predominantly Latvian student body, it limits visibility for non-Latvian speakers.
- 2) Employer feedback indicates that while theoretical training is strong, graduates could benefit from more practical experience to fully prepare for their roles.

**Assessment of the requirement [1]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The evaluation determined that compliance was fully met according to the criteria; however, areas for improvement still exist. It underscored the need to strengthen the development planning process and to fully address all aspects of academic integrity within the College's procedures. While there are solid frameworks established, there is considerable potential for further development in these areas.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The College has established a structured and proactive internal quality assurance system that enhances its study programmes by aligning with European Higher Education Area standards.

- 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

The Regulations of the College of Fire Safety and Civil Protection, published by the Cabinet of Ministers, clearly state that the departments are responsible for the content of professional education programmes and their implementation. Relevant structural units are established to ensure supervision of their performance and periodic inspection of study programmes - The

College Council and the College Convention ensures all stakeholders involvement in College development.

- 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

Students are informed at the beginning of the studies what kind of study outcomes and achievements are expected from them to accomplish the study outcomes. The regulations are published at the College webpage.

- 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

The College promotes up-to-date requirements for the provision of education in accordance with the Law of Higher Education Institutions. College ensures that all teachers have the necessary education and professional qualifications as required by law, as well as continuing professional development. (SAR, p. 10) The College collaborates with the colleagues of the other European fire services on applied research activities for enhancing the international networking of teaching staff (SAR, p. 34-35). The conference organized at the College allows the full-time teaching staff to fulfill the necessary conference attendance activity according to the regulations for elected lecturer and assistant professors (SAR, p. 36).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The college gathers information through feedback questionnaires formally, while the communication between students and faculty is also open, and most of the feedback is shared directly. Students are informed about their options, and income is ensured during their studies.

- 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

Quality assurance system is implemented and continuous improvement, development and efficient performance are ensured by deep cooperation with SFRS. The College's actions and process management are reflected in its annual work plan, statutes, regulations, internal rules, orders, decisions, job descriptions and other documents (SAR, p. 11)

### 1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

#### Analysis

1.3.1 The procedure for financing the College is determined by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 27 June 2023 No.354 "Regulations on Financing of Colleges of the System of the Ministry of the Interior" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/343160-iekstlietu-ministrijas-sistemas-koledzu-finansesanas-noteikumi>). The institution's primary source of finance is the state budget grant. However, the College also receives money through foreign financial assistance, donations and gifts and generates their own

income through the provision of services. (SAR, p. 24). Part of the College's income, including various paid services related to the study process (issuing certificates, settling academic debts, etc.), is determined by an external normative act - Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 633 of 7 November 2023 "Price List of Paid Services of the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/347225>). The financial autonomy of the College is limited, as the College is a direct state administration unit, subordinated to the State Fire and Rescue Service and is largely reliant on the Ministry of Interior. This creates an unwieldy governance model which may limit the College's flexibility and capacity during the long approval process.

An additional aspect to be taken into account when assessing the planning and management of the College's resources is the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 27 June 2023 No.354 "Regulations on Financing of Colleges of the System of the Ministry of the Interior" stipulating in Sub-paragraph 6.3 that when planning the number of college teachers for a given financial year, the number of student places in a given educational programme and the condition that the study group may not be smaller than 18 shall also be taken into account. This was also mentioned during the evaluation visit as an obstacle, as such a regulation limits the college's capacity to accommodate all capable applicants and makes it necessary to find other ways to offer them work and study opportunities.

The College's income has fluctuated slightly in the period 2015-2023. In 2023 revenue totalled 1,828,029 Euros of which 1,816,699 Euros were from grant funding. Total expenditure in the same year was 1,827,912 Euros. Staff remuneration is by far the greatest cost the College bears. In addition to the annual wage bill, the institution makes modest investment in learning resources wherever possible (9 books in 2021 and 45 books in 2022).

Procurement is coordinated through a dialogue with the Heads of Unit who identify requests and submit these to the SFRS on an annual basis.

Although the regulations establish general budget principles, it became clear during the assessment visit that the college operates based on the budget allocated to them. However, the distribution principles do not reflect the actual costs of education. Training in the field of rescue is among the most expensive educational programmes, and the overall logic of funding for education does not cover these costs. Moreover, there is certainly insufficient funding for development initiatives. It is commendable how the College has managed to utilize external funding for the development of its infrastructure and learning environment, but this is not sustainable without increasing government support. The College does not currently have a clear funding system for research activities, which should be improved and developed in the future.

There was also an impression during the assessment visit that educational institutions under the Ministry of the Interior's governance are not in an equal position, as one institution is provided with digital solutions to support educational activities, while another is not. At the same time, it is clear that these concerns cannot be resolved by the College alone, there is a need for intervention at the national level.

It can be concluded that while there is a defined procedure for funding at the College, the current system is not effectively supporting the financial needs of applied research. The primary funding sources, primarily reliant on state budget grants, alongside limitations imposed by regulations and a governance structure that restricts financial autonomy, hinder the College's capacity to fully support research initiatives. Additionally, the absence of a clear funding system for research activities further underscores the need for improvement. Overall, while the College has made some strides through external funding, sustainable and effective funding frameworks must be developed to enhance research capabilities.

1.3.2 The College informed during the assessment visit that it owns and lists the fixed assets and has the necessary material and technical equipment to be able to implement the study programmes in the field of study. The institution's building contains a total of 5 classrooms, 3 computer labs, a specialist dispatcher classroom, library and meeting rooms. The campus also houses a fire testing

laboratory, canteen and gym (SAR, p. 26).

The College also has a number of buildings (smoke chamber for training in unsuitable environments for breathing and rescue work, training tower for training at heights and with fire fighting equipment, etc.) and equipment (obstacle course, roof-cutting stand, etc.) on its premises, as part of the training facilities, which are used for the implementation of the study programme and for the acquisition of vocational skills. (SAR, p. 26)

During the assessment visit, it was recognised that the training facilities in particular have been enhanced significantly since the previous report and that this has been achieved on limited resources, drawing on cooperation partners for support.

The Fire Testing Laboratory, which was introduced during the assessment visit, has been assessed by an accreditation certificate, which certifies the laboratory's competence to perform testing in accordance with the requirements of EN ISO 17025:2017 "General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories (ISO/IEC 17025:2017)" standard. The Fire Testing Laboratory is used for physical testing of liquid and solid substances, fabrics, fire hazard characteristics of construction products, fire extinguishing agents and firefighting agents and for training students in these processes. (SAR, p. 26)

The College has managed to leverage funding from an EU project that will result in the construction of a new College building that is scheduled to be completed in the first half of 2027. This positive development will enable the College to build a gym and weight room, "warm zone" rooms: changing rooms, protective clothing washing room, drying room and storage room for spare uniforms and other equipment as part of the first phase. Subsequent phases will result in the creation of duty rooms and dormitories. (SAR, p. 26)

This will bring significant improvements to the learning environment and the quality of education, modernisation in the future. During the assessment visit, in meetings with the College management, lecturers, students, the need for renewal of the infrastructure, which is significantly outdated, was repeatedly emphasized. It is positive that this is realized and acknowledged by all parties involved in the administration, but the improvement of the situation, at least minimally, is hampered by limited financial resources. The main desires for future improvements in the infrastructure of the College were identified during the assessment visit as the development of more modern technological solutions, the renovation of classrooms to make them comfortable and suitable for work both in winter and summer, and the need to renovate student and staff lounges, the gym, restrooms and shower rooms. It is positive that students and staff are well informed about future plans for infrastructure improvements and the construction of the new college campus, but improvements to the existing infrastructure would also be appreciated.

1.3.3 The College boasts a well-equipped library, accredited by the Ministry of Culture in Latvia as a library of local importance. It serves the college's students and staff, as well as personnel from the SFRS. Open weekdays from 8:00 to 16:30, with a lunch break, the library features a floor area of 106m<sup>2</sup> and has recently acquired new furniture. (SAR, p. 27)

The library offers an open-access collection that includes 2,043 information resources, comprising 1,039 books and journals, and 1,004 unpublished materials. It has 11 reader workstations, 3 stationary computers, and facilities for photocopying, printing, laminating, and binding, along with wireless internet access. (SAR, p. 27) It could be concluded that the collection supports various study programmes related to fire safety, rescue operations, and occupational safety, and includes sectoral literature and a selection of fiction.

Library resources are developed in collaboration with teaching staff based on their needs, with services for interlibrary loans available. The library has implemented the School Alice information system, enabling users to manage publications and access consultations on using the catalog and bibliographic references. (SAR, p. 27)

Students can find essential study-related information on various websites, including those of the

SFRS and the College, as well as access research databases. During the assessment visit, it was found out that one of the most popular library services is the possibility to use the Latvian and international standards catalog. The College provides online access to relevant Latvian and international standards in alignment with their field of study. Additionally, the Moodle e-learning platform offers course information and other academic resources, but user statistics for individual students cannot be determined as the websites serve a broad audience of college students and SFRS employees. (SAR, p. 28)

However, it would be advisable for the library to have a more stable and predictable annual budget for replenishment and renewal in the future, as the information provided in the SAR (p. 25) shows that this has been very variable in recent years. This would also improve the flexibility of the teaching staff to update and develop the content of study courses and offer students more opportunities to broaden their horizons.

1.3.4 All classrooms at the College are equipped with computers, projectors, and internet access for teaching staff, while three dedicated computer labs also provide internet-enabled computers. One classroom features an interactive whiteboard. (SAR, p. 28-29)

The College's e-learning system, Moodle, is continually improved, with a more modern version introduced during the assessment visit, which is set to be launched in September 2024. This system enables remote learning and accommodates individual learning needs, ensuring continuity in exceptional circumstances. During the assessment visit, it was confirmed that various stakeholders are eagerly anticipating the implementation of the new version of Moodle, which will significantly enhance capabilities. However, it was also noted that this update does not fully address the College's actual needs to remain a modern and flexible educational institution.

Students have access to course descriptions, lesson lists, and other relevant study information on Moodle. Instructors provide outlines of course content, quizzes, and forums for discussion. The system facilitates semester and final examinations for multiple courses. Each course has a designated lecturer who oversees course requirements and offers advisory support to students. (SAR, p. 28-29)

However, the evaluation visit identified a number of challenges in this area of digitisation of studies. Currently, a number of educational, administrative processes are still not automated and digitized, e.g. the system for the accumulation of student grades, the fulfillment of study plans, etc. During the meeting, the representatives of the College also indicated that they would like to have an information system for the management and administration of study data, digitisation of the staff training log, but they are discouraged by the availability of financial resources. The provision of distance learning through the Webex digital tool, introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the increased circulation of electronic documents are positive things that are being practiced after the pandemic.

1.3.5 The requirements and procedures for academic positions at the College are outlined in College Regulation No. 14, dated December 17, 2007. When a position for assistant professor or lecturer becomes vacant, the College Council proposes an open competition published in the official publication "Latvijas Vēstnesis." The Personnel and Records Management Sector prepares the vacancy information, detailing candidate requirements, duties, courses, remuneration, and application procedures, which is then made available on the College's website. (SAR, p. 29)

Once applications are received, the Principal presents the applicants to the College Council, which invites them to a meeting. The Council elects an Assistant Lecturer by secret ballot within two months, and if no complaints arise within ten days, the applicant is appointed. Complaints about the election process are directed to the SFRS, which reviews them. (SAR, p. 29)

If a teaching position is vacant, the College Council may choose not to open a competition and can recruit an assistant professor or lecturer for up to two years, granting them similar rights and

obligations as elected academic staff. (SAR, p. 29)

For specialized topics where the College lacks qualified staff, guest lecturers with relevant expertise are invited. The HR and Records Management Sector circulates vacancy information to the State Employment Agency and posts it on the SFRS and College websites. After evaluating applications, the College conducts interviews and determines whether candidates meet the requirements, with successful applicants receiving fixed-term contracts. Additionally, specialists from the SFRS who are practitioners in the field may be contracted for specific courses or topics. (SAR, p. 29)

Although the criteria and process for selecting teaching staff are well established and the collaboration with the SFRS is strong, the assessment visit revealed that individuals tend to seek employment at the College either as their primary career begins to wind down or after they have already retired. While active service experts are willing to contribute as guest lecturers, finding full-time faculty members is challenging. This difficulty, as noted in the assessment visit, can largely be attributed to the relatively lower salaries for teaching positions compared to active service roles, despite the fact that the qualifications required for teaching staff are generally higher as they must meet standards in both the fire service and the education sector.

1.3.6 The academic staff at the College consists of qualified educators with Master's or Bachelor's degrees specializing in fire safety and firefighting. These instructors are committed to continuous professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills. (SAR, p. 30)

The College promotes and facilitates professional growth by allowing staff to participate in paid development opportunities twice a year, including training courses, seminars, webinars, conferences, and experience-sharing events. Teachers' educational qualifications are recorded in the National Education Information System (VIIS) and RVS HORIZON. (SAR, p. 30)

During their term, College teachers are required to complete 160 academic hours of professional development, including at least 60 contact hours focused on innovations in higher education, didactics, or educational management. This development may involve international mobility and participation in relevant conferences and seminars. (SAR, p. 30)

During the assessment visit, it was found that professional development activities for academic staff are one of the few expenditure items that the College can pay for itself without additional approval from SFRS, which highlights the problematic financial situation of the College. If it had more financial resources and autonomy in deciding how to use these funds, it could introduce, for example, staff support and motivation measures and programmes, as was evident from the information gathered during the visit. In this context, professional development courses are also being sought as a ready-made outsourced service, such as the University of Latvia's didactics course offer, and the opportunities offered by the Ministry of the Interior and the National School of Administration, which are free of charge. In general, as the College Director pointed out and the teaching staff confirmed, the College supports the initiatives of the teaching staff within the limits of its resources.

According to SAR (p. 30) teaching staff actively engage in scientific conferences, improve their foreign language skills, and broaden their perspectives through travel, all of which contribute to enhancing the quality of the educational experience. Performance appraisals for academic staff follow the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of December 20, 2016, assessing both teaching effectiveness and professional development needs. Although the documentation indicates that the teaching staff meet the requirements, the mobility and international travel described in the SAR (p. 30) were not widely utilized among faculty members. There were more opportunities for such activities during periods of extensive collaboration with Belarus. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have significantly impacted international outreach, leading to a reduction in these activities. Therefore, there is certainly room for development in this area at present.

To create a modern learning environment, the College organizes seminars aimed at innovative teaching methods for academic staff and affiliated lecturers, covering topics such as qualification paper development and the use of the MOODLE e-learning platform. Since 2018, monthly training

sessions on information technology, cyber security, and digital privacy have been provided. (SAR, p. 30)

In addition to their teaching roles, staff members enhance their qualifications by undertaking service duties with the Riga Regional Administration of the SFRS, improving their firefighting and rescue skills. For instance, a lecturer in Finland enhanced his competencies in high-altitude rescue work and incorporated this knowledge into the "Rescue Work" course, utilizing techniques such as triple blocks for moving rescuers vertically and horizontally. (SAR, p. 30)

1.3.7 The College's academic staff is responsible for implementing the short-cycle vocational higher education programme, which includes assistant professors, lecturers, and guest lecturers. The data on teaching staff involvement from 2014 to 2023 shows a slight fluctuation in numbers, with an increase in assistant professors, but a decrease in both lecturers and guest lecturers over the reporting period. (SAR, p. 31-32)

As of the 2022 academic year, there were eight assistant professors and six lecturers, with the assistant professors holding Master's degrees and those with higher education having substantial practical experience in the SFRS. In the same year, the College engaged eight guest lecturers, including three with PhDs and four with Master's degrees. (SAR, p. 31-32)

By the beginning of the 2023 academic year, the number of assistant professors remained the same at eight, while the number of lecturers increased to seven. Similar to 2022, the assistant professors included a mix of Master's degree holders and those with practical SFRS experience, while the lecturers also had extensive practical work histories. (SAR, p. 31-32)

In addition, four SFRS employees were contracted to deliver specific courses, contributing their significant experience in the field. (SAR, p. 31-32)

The academic staff's workload includes study work, methodological work, research, and other responsibilities such as serving on entrance examination boards and conducting physical fitness assessments. The analysis indicates that teaching work comprises 68-95% of the total workload, while administrative duties account for 6-32%. (SAR, p. 31-32)

The primary responsibilities of academic staff involve teaching activities, including conducting classes, evaluating exams, and supervising thesis work. The academic workload remains consistent yearly, with variations primarily due to staff illness. Should teaching responsibilities decrease, staff are assigned more methodological or other related work, which includes preparing materials and vocational training topics for the SFRS. (SAR, p. 31-32)

An additional point to note is that the principles for determining the number of academic staff are regulated by an external normative act; in addition, the duties and extent of duties included in the workload of academics are determined by the Minister of the Interior. Regulation No 354 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 27 June 2023 "Regulations on the Financing of Colleges of the Ministry of the Interior System" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/343160>), paragraph 6, provides that "when planning the number of college teachers for a given financial year, the following shall be taken into account: 1. the scope and content of short-cycle vocational higher education programmes; 2. The number of students (learners) in a given educational programme and the condition that the number of seats in a training group shall not be less than 18 (except for training groups of professional specialization); and 4. The duties and the extent of the duties included in the workload of teachers shall be determined by the Minister of the Interior." While acknowledging that the college management system includes hierarchical relationships among high-level officials, it is important to recognize that this is still a higher education institution. Therefore, the highest level of management—the Ministry of the Interior—should be invited to assess the effectiveness of this approach and explore opportunities for system improvements. This evaluation could provide colleges with greater autonomy in planning their internal academic staffing and defining staff responsibilities.

During the assessment visit, the issue of workload did not emerge as a critical concern, the parties accepted the conditions and adapted to work within them. The teaching staff showed a very high



motivation to work with students, to pass on their accumulated knowledge to the next generation, but they are also concerned about the low salaries, both in academic work and in the sector in general, as well as about the results of student enrolment. However, as mentioned in the previous subsections, finding qualified teaching staff is a challenge, and organizing extensive courses with a significant number of guest lecturers results in a substantial increase in workload. It can also be inferred from the focus and workload dynamics that raising the scientific standards of research papers and qualification theses has emerged as the highest priority. This need was primarily expressed by students and alumni who desire greater guidance and direction. This suggests that the existing workload is predominantly allocated to administrative tasks and the management of educational activities, leaving less time for engagement in research.

1.3.8 The College offers a range of support services for both full-time and part-time students, including academic, psychological, and medical assistance. Students, who are officers with a special rank wearing state-issued uniforms, are provided with personal protective equipment for practical classes and internships by the SFRS. (SAR, p. 33) Due to the specific nature of the field, distance learning is not offered, and only students who are in good physical condition and have passed a medical examination are admitted. Foreign students are not admitted to the College, studies are implemented only in Latvian.

Information regarding College resources is accessible through the College's website, the Moodle e-learning system, bulletin boards, and course tutors. Students have opportunities for individual tutorials and can engage in representing their interests through the Student Council, where they participate in decision-making processes at the College Council level. (SAR, p. 33) During the assessment visit, the experts had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Student Council. Student activism, which includes not only the organization of cultural and sports activities, but also active involvement in academic work, should be highlighted positively. During the visit, both students and representatives of the College administration highlighted the involvement of students in the work of the College Council, where students actively make suggestions, for example, for the modernisation of teaching methods, which the College takes on board as far as possible.

The College has established procedures for addressing student complaints or grievances, adhering to the Whistleblowing Act with a designated whistleblowing contact person. Comprehensive information regarding these processes is available on the College's website, and students can submit complaints or suggestions via a physical mailbox, electronically, or anonymously. (SAR, p. 33)

As service officials with special ranks, students receive remuneration, social guarantees, and vacation days. They also have access to various paid health services and psychological support through the Psychological Support Unit of the Health and Sports Centre of the Ministry of the Interior. (SAR, p. 33) The assessment visit confirmed that students and alumni appreciate the support opportunities currently available, but it would be advisable in the future to further improve the College's infrastructure for staff welfare (sports facilities, access to the swimming pool, etc.) and to explore the possibility of creating a network of students and alumni to promote networking, exchange of experiences and a sense of belonging to the College.

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

The analysis of resources and provisions for the study field indicates that while the College has established effective financial management and support systems, significant issues were raised during the assessment visit. The reliance primarily on state budget grants leaves the College with insufficient funding to cover the actual costs of delivering high-quality education in the expensive field of rescue. The College faces limitations in financial autonomy due to its governance structure,

which hinders flexibility and timely decision-making. Despite some success in securing external funding, its current financial model does not adequately cover the high costs of training in rescue operations, and there is insufficient support for research activities.

The infrastructure is sufficient for delivering the study programme, with various specialized facilities and equipment. A new building is under construction, which will improve the overall learning environment. However, the current infrastructure is outdated and lacks modern technological solutions. The College's library and IT systems are functional but could benefit from a more predictable budget and further digitalisation to meet future educational demands.

The difficulty in attracting full-time faculty, attributed to lower salaries compared to active service roles, was a major concern. This issue is further compounded by the overwhelming administrative workload on teaching staff, which detracts from meaningful research engagement. Although teaching staff are highly motivated and committed to student success, the heavy administrative workload and challenges in research engagement hinder their ability to fully realize their potential. Feedback from students and alumni emphasized the need for greater guidance in raising the scientific standards of research papers and theses.

Additionally, while the College offers commendable support services for students, disparities exist among educational institutions governed by the Ministry of the Interior, particularly regarding the availability of digital solutions.

In summary, addressing these critical issues—financial sustainability, faculty recruitment, and research support—will be essential for the College to effectively meet its educational objectives moving forward.

#### Strengths:

- 1) The College has demonstrated its ability to secure and utilize external financial support, particularly from EU-funded projects, to enhance its infrastructure and improve its learning environment, despite its limited budget.
- 2) The College is equipped with purpose-built facilities such as the fire testing laboratory and training towers, which provide students with practical, vocational skills that are critical for their professional development.
- 3) The College is able to bring in guest lecturers for specialized topics, providing a diverse range of expertise to the educational programmes.
- 4) Strong collaboration with SFRS - the partnership allows the College to engage expert practitioners as guest lecturers for specialized courses.
- 5) Comprehensive services, including academic, psychological, and medical support, are in place to meet student needs.

#### Weaknesses:

- 1) The College's governance structure, being tied to the Ministry of Interior, significantly limits its financial independence, making it difficult for the institution to respond swiftly to operational needs or pursue development initiatives without lengthy approval processes. The College's financial dependence on external approval limits its ability to invest in staff support, motivation programmes, and infrastructure.
- 2) Inadequate funding for high-cost educational programmes - despite offering highly specialized and costly rescue training, the College's current funding model does not fully account for these expenses, putting financial strain on the institution and limiting its ability to expand or improve these critical programmes.
- 3) While the college has made strides in upgrading its facilities, building, classrooms, and common areas are in need of renovation and modernisation to meet the demands of contemporary education and improve comfort for students and staff.
- 4) The difficulty in attracting full-time faculty members due to lower salaries compared to active

service roles poses a significant challenge for the College.

5) There are inconsistencies in the availability of digital solutions and support among educational institutions governed by the Ministry of the Interior, leading to inequalities.

6) A number of critical administrative functions, including student grade management and study plan tracking, remain manual, making them inefficient and adding unnecessary workload to both academic and administrative staff.

7) Insufficient use of international development opportunities - despite opportunities for international mobility, these are underutilized, with external factors such as the pandemic and geopolitical issues having a long-lasting impact.

## **1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation**

### **Analysis**

1.4.1 During the assessment visit it was concluded that the scientific activities at the College are deeply rooted in applied research specifically related to the professional education of firefighters. The research initiatives are structured to enhance students' knowledge, skills, and abilities, concentrating on strategic topics pertinent to firefighting, fire safety, and rescue service specializations. The objective is to bolster professional readiness for swift and effective actions in extreme situations, which is accomplished through study courses, practical seminars, internships, and individual research projects related to their qualification theses.

During the assessment it was recognised that alongside the teaching staff and students holding service ranks, it is essential to enhance their communication skills and gain national and international research experience. This can be achieved through participation in national and international scientific and practical conferences, collaboration on projects, workshops, exchange visits, and engagement in applied studies, along with the publication of their research findings.

According to the Regulations of the College, established by Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 82, adopted on February 6, 2024, and in accordance with the Law on Vocational Education, research activities are integral to the educational process at the College. Following this regulation, subparagraphs 7.5, 7.6, and 7.7 mandate that both teaching staff and students participate in research activities aligned with the tasks set forth by the SFRS. They are also encouraged to engage in public courses, workshops, and conferences, collaborating with Latvian and foreign educational institutions and employers in line with applicable research initiatives. These tasks align with the College's mission, particularly point 5, which emphasizes the promotion of research activities related to the SFRS tasks, and point 6, which focuses on organizing events—such as public courses, lectures, and conferences—in alignment with the College's core activities (SAR, p. 4).

Within the strategic specialization of "Civil and Military Defense," applied research activities are conducted in parallel with the educational process, reinforcing the strategic direction of the College and aligning with the educational programmes offered in fire safety and protection (SAR, p. 4).

According to College regulations, departments function as structural units ensuring the integration of research activities within the educational framework. The two relevant departments—the Department of Fire Safety and Civil Protection and the Department of Firefighting and Rescue Work—are responsible for organizing practical research activities through specific study programmes while facilitating the transfer of information to society (SAR, p. 7).

As outlined in the SAR (p. 33), research activities at the College involve both teaching staff and student participation in international and local conferences and seminars focused on fire safety, firefighting, and civil protection in accordance with the strategic direction of study programmes. Collaboration between teaching staff and students is essential for the development of the students' qualification theses.

The increased engagement of teaching staff in research activities in 2023 indicates that previous accreditation recommendations regarding the improvement of research initiatives have been taken

seriously. Furthermore, the SWOT analysis within this SAR (p. 13) suggests that the previously noted low involvement of teaching staff in research activities is gradually being addressed.

Both students and graduates highlighted the expanding opportunities offered by conferences organized at the College and expressed interest in participating in bilingual events (in Latvian and English) or conferences conducted solely in English, aimed at attracting foreign participants and enhancing international recognition.

It is important to note that teaching staff and students have engaged in various other national and international scientific conferences, including those organized by Riga Technical University and the Security Conference, as referenced in individual teaching staff CVs (see annex: Annex 12) and detailed in SAR (p. 34-35).

While the SWOT analysis indicates that a language barrier may limit teaching staff involvement in research activities (SAR, p. 12-13), the overall data presented in Annex 12 and SAR (p. 34-35), demonstrate a robust range of participation in professional conferences and meetings, including several published research papers authored by the majority of the teaching staff.

The growing involvement of students in research activities, particularly in relation to their qualification theses and overall workload, is noteworthy and indicates positive developments in this area.

1.4.2 Many student qualification thesis supervised by full-time assistant professors and lecturers at the College are closely aligned with applied research topics. These efforts have led to the development of practical measures that are subsequently utilized in the study process (SAR, p. 33-34). Notable examples include:

- Stands for material explosion analysis and testing of sprinkler systems.
- Simulators designed to enhance firefighters' mental resilience, specifically through a "labyrinth module system," which prepares them for difficult and extreme situations. These simulators also improve skills in rescue, decontamination, and other essential professional activities.
- Applications developed for locating fire hydrant systems, as reported during the site visit.
- Many of the reported stands and simulators are included in the infrastructure list and continue to be utilized for educational purposes, as confirmed during discussions with students and teaching staff (see Annex 24: "List of Material and Technical Support for Implementation").

The research activities carried out by students at the College, as seen from their qualification theses, are clearly and logically aligned with practical applications, especially in fields related to fire safety, decontamination, and the development of specialized simulators and tools for firefighting professionals. These projects demonstrate a strong focus on real-world problems and contribute directly to the training and preparedness of future professionals. However, the scientific rigor behind these research activities is not fully justified.

While the practical applications are well-integrated into the study process, as evidenced by the infrastructure and material support for such projects, there is a noticeable gap in the engagement with scientific literature. The literature analyses often rely on local regulations, academic books, and a limited range of online resources, with very few citations from scientific publications. Moreover, students expressed a desire for more structured guidance in utilizing scientific methodologies and accessing scientific literature, which are not fully emphasized in the current curriculum.

During the assessment visit, teaching staff, students, and graduates highlighted several successful initiatives derived from qualification theses and proposed new ideas for future research topics from third- and fourth-year students. For instance, research by a graduate from 2024 involved the development of an application to identify fire hydrant systems across Latvian regions, and this work was presented at conferences.

Additionally, students mentioned planned activities involving various testing stands for chemical safety and an exploration of drone systems for decontamination as potential topics for their qualification theses. It is important to note that professionals from the SFRS do not only supervise

the qualification work and review theses, they also serve on evaluation committees.

Recognizing that working on qualification theses often represents students' first experience with independent research, it is crucial for supervisors to provide professional support throughout this practical work. This includes guiding students in searching for scientific and professional literature, analyzing results, utilizing statistics, employing scientific methods for data evaluation, and presenting conclusions from their independent studies.

Special attention should be given to scientific literature when studying practical applications, including stands, prototypes, environmental contamination and decontamination methods, chemical-biological-radiological-nuclear-explosive (CBRNE) hazards, and the theoretical and practical application of modern technologies like drones or personal protective equipment used in rescue operations. These topics were among those discussed during the expert team's discussions with students and graduates about their interests in qualification theses, as well as in the annual reports available (publiskie pārskati – only in Latvian, <https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/gada-publiskie-parskati>) (accessed 02.09.2024).

A review of the available qualification theses revealed a strong focus on interesting SFRS topics and practical studies. However, it was noted that the literature analyses primarily relied on regulations from the Latvian Republic, academic books, and a limited number of online resources, with few scientific publications cited in their literature reviews and discussions of results.

During the assessment visit, college students indicated that they predominantly check scientific publications on their own initiative when preparing course essays, but they expressed a desire for more guidance on effectively searching for, analyzing, and utilizing scientific literature in their research and qualification work. They noted that scientific publications were not typically required or specifically recommended during the preparation of internship reports and qualification works, despite their interest in using such resources more effectively, provided they received additional information on literary analysis and methodology from teaching staff. Graduates suggested offering an additional course focused on scientific research methodologies could be beneficial. It is worth mentioning that the College library offers access to several scientific databases (SAR, p. 28).

An evaluation of the course description for “Qualification Work” (provided in Annex 21, Course Descriptions) revealed that the mandatory literature outlined in Internal Regulation No. 22/3-1.1-19/1 “Procedures for Development and Defense of Qualifications at the College of Fire Safety and Civil Protection” does not reference scientific literature or provide examples of relevant sources.

Additional methodological recommendations are available on the College’s homepage (in Latvian), although they do not include information regarding scientific sources for conference theses and publications. Instead, they provide necessary details for the successful preparation of essays, course works, or qualification theses, including:

- Procedures for Development and Defense of Qualifications at the College of Fire Safety and Civil Protection.
- Procedures for Development of Reports and Course Works at the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College.

Department representatives and programme managers clarified that foundational research activities are introduced not in the “Qualification Work” course but in the fifth semester of the “Fundamentals of Management” course. According to Annex 12, “Study Course Descriptions,” the “Fundamentals of Management” course consists of 7 credit points and spans five semesters (3 credit points in semesters 1 and 2, 3 credit points in semesters 3 and 4, and 1 credit point in semester 5). Research activity basics are taught through 12 hours of lectures in full-time studies and only 6 hours of lectures with a final test in part-time studies. However, the course outcomes are presented in general terms, lacking specific indications of the desired knowledge and competencies related to utilizing scientific resources and conducting research within the study process (Annex 21, p. 17-21). This could explain the expressed desire from part-time students and graduates for additional

lectures or courses on research methodologies within their programmes.

Teaching staff participates in various seminars and workshops, and the knowledge gained from these activities is integrated into the study process (see Annex 12).

Teaching staff, students, guest lecturers from the SFRS, and professionals from other sectors are actively involved in delivering the study programme. Students have expressed their appreciation for the dedication of teaching staff, both in imparting theoretical knowledge and organizing practical tasks, particularly those involving applied research during student internships and qualification theses as per SFRS - recommended research directions. Graduates have suggested that involving more professionals from other fields could be beneficial (notable examples suggested include the Radiation Safety Center and the State Environmental Service).

The expert team also visited the Fire Testing Laboratory, which provides standardized tests for material evaluation. During the assessment visit, the ISO standardized methods were outlined and demonstrated the available equipment used to teach the properties of materials and substances (e.g., liquids, paints, varnishes, fabrics), assess the safety of construction elements, evaluate fire-extinguishing agents, and analyze the combustibility of construction products. This includes methods for comparing flammability and ignition stages, and these characterization parameters are valuable for both student research activities and industrial applications, supported by experienced laboratory personnel. It is important to note that updated methods for material characterization using nondestructive techniques could be implemented. According to previous recommendations, collaboration between the College teaching staff and the Riga Technical University addresses these needs, allowing for integrated use of studies and equipment based on institutional partnerships (see Annex 14: Fire Safety and Firefighting Recommendation Follow-Up Report).

1.4.3 International cooperation is vital for facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience between international professionals and members of the Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), including the teaching staff and students at the College. Such collaboration allows them to acquire new insights beneficial for their research and professional activities during their studies at the College and throughout their service in Latvia. Participation in international workshops contributes to professional growth through collaborative educational activities on a European scale. The partnership between the College and Riga Technical University (RTU) has been instrumental in fostering collaboration. The engagement of lecturers from both institutions, as detailed in the available CVs (see Annex 9, Europasses), along with their participation in supervising and reviewing student diploma theses, has facilitated access to a range of programmes at different (including international) levels (SAR, p. 34-35).

Teaching staff from the College have participated in international research initiatives organized by partner institutions (see Annex 12). For instance, an assistant professor from the College presented an abstract titled "Improvement of Labour Protection Requirements by Taking Measures in Case of Leakage of Hazardous Chemical Substances" at the recent international scientific online conference "What is the New Normal in Societal Security," held as part of the NEEDS ERASMUS project. Furthermore, the assistant professor participated in an 8-hour Glossary project during this event (see Annex 12).

Additionally, both students and teaching staff took part in the European Union-funded project "Civil Protection Modular Training" in Moldova, as well as in full-scale field training exercises under the EURO-MED-REACT (FSX) initiative, also in Moldova.

The collaboration with RTU lecturers is commendable. Faculty members contribute to the development of scientific theses at RTU and oversee the creation of students' diploma theses (SAR, p. 34).

It is noteworthy that representatives from the Student Council have actively participated in various international conferences geared toward students and young scientists. These events, which focus on knowledge exchange related to rescue services, CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and

Nuclear) risk evaluation, prevention measures, and practical firefighter training, have taken place in Estonia, Belarus, Lisbon, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary (SAR, p. 35).

These examples demonstrate effective collaboration between the College and several European and neighboring countries in both applied research and rescue services. However, there is a lack of assessment regarding the frequency of student visits, as there is limited information about the years in which events were held and the number of students involved. This gap is similar to the data presented in Annex 12 (see annex: "Scientific or Applied Research Activities of the College's Academic Staff") as well as in the additional annex titled "Quantitative Data on Scientific Research" appended to the SAR, Section 2.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation, which summarizes the activities of teaching staff between 2015 and 2023.

International collaboration in scientific and applied research continued in 2023 with joint research efforts involving the Slovenian and German fire services. This research focused on assessing the concentration of smoke and gasses in confined spaces during fire incidents, utilizing an innovative smoke and gas container that was acquired by the College in 2023 (SAR, p. 35), and relevant data reported during the assessment visit.

Considering the available information obtained through the expert visit and the SAR, it can be concluded that the connection of applied research with the study process is justified as it is logically connected with the participation of the students in practical research activities resulting from new developments integrated in the study process.

The established networking and international collaboration will undoubtedly enhance not only applied research experience, but also will enhance the scientific research activities at the College and improve the international study experience for both the teaching staff and students.

1.4.4 According to the SAR (p. 35-36), the supervision of student qualification theses is highlighted as a major indicator of teaching staff involvement in research activities, which can be concluded as the main mechanism. The reported data on international experience in the SAR, along with examples of individual lecturers' and assistant professors' activities (see Annex 12), suggests that, within the constraints of budget and support from partner institutions, the College has successfully developed mechanisms to involve both students and teaching staff in international workshops and conferences. This collaboration fosters the integration of new experiences into the study process, as well as into the supervision of student qualification theses.

In Section 2.4.2 of the SAR (p. 34), examples of practical studies related to qualification theses indicate the development of tools and stands for explosion demonstrations, evaluations of sprinkler systems, roof cutting simulations, and other practical outcomes. The names of the supervising full-time assistant professors and lecturers associated with these theses suggest a direct connection between the knowledge transfer in courses taught by these faculty members and the applied research experience gained by students during their work on their qualification theses.

The Annex titled "Quantitative Data on Scientific Research" summarizes the frequency of qualification theses defended from 2014 to 2023, serving as an indicator of the teaching staff's research activities. In this timeframe, 17 theses were defended in 2014, followed by a decline to 8 theses in 2018. This was then succeeded by a peak of 27 theses defended in 2021, a drop to 12 in 2022, and a return to 17 theses in 2023 (SAR, Table 2.6., p. 35).

These fluctuations indicate a stable growth in the defense of the thesis from 2016 to 2021. The decline in 2022 may be attributed to the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, while the increase in 2023 could be linked to the end of the pandemic and possibly the finalization of previously delayed theses. However, the SAR lacks sufficient information discussing the factors influencing these changes. Furthermore, it does not clarify the differences in thesis submissions between full-time and part-time students, nor does it specify the range of theses evaluated by the College that result in practical developments attributable to applied research. Many examples of qualification thesis presented during the assessment visit and mentioned in the College's annual reports were primarily

related to statistical analysis, evaluations of the study process, or theoretical aspects.

From a practical standpoint, it is essential to emphasize that applied research also encompasses the development of products and practical application techniques. The inclusion of prototypes, simulation tools, and stands in the list of infrastructure (see Annex 24) is a positive indication of the practical relevance of these tools and the involvement of students in practical activities.

The qualification work is primarily defined as an independent study conducted by the student, demonstrating the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as methodological skills in their chosen profession. The knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies that correspond to the qualification are reflected in the development and defense of this work. Qualification work can embody research of practical importance if coordinated with the supervisor; however, it can also take the form of theoretical, statistical, or literature-based research, which may not necessarily align with scientific standards. Therefore, upon reviewing the College's reports available on its website, it is clear that not all qualification papers could be classified as scientific or applied research studies.

Consequently, simply indicating the number of qualification theses or qualification works listed in Table 2.6 of the SAR as "Qualification Projects" is insufficient for quantitatively measuring teaching staff involvement in scientific and/or applied research.

Scientific publications represent a direct measure of the academic and research activities of faculty members. As previously noted, insufficient knowledge of the English language may hinder the preparation of publications (information is derived from CVs, Annex 9). The low proficiency in English was identified as a concern by the College during its SWOT analysis in the SAR (p. 13). Additionally, the professional duties and workload during the study process were cited as factors contributing to the lower rate of publications.

As outlined in Annex 12, and in the individual CVs (see Annex 9) of full-time teaching staff summarized in Annex 8, more experienced members who participated in international visits and Erasmus+ internships have taken the time to prepare publications. A notable example from 2022 is the full-page paper titled "Improvement of the Methodology for the Use of Hazardous Substances," published in the online journal "Baltic Journal of Real Estate Economics and Construction Management" (available at: <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/bjreecm-2022-0011>) (accessed on 06.09.2024).

In 2023, six full-page reports published in Latvian were presented at the first conference organized by the College (available at: <https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/media/180/download?attachment>) (accessed on 02.09.2024).

According to the SAR (p. 36), the internal regulations of the College, dated June 19, 2020, No. 22/3-1.1.-19/3, titled "Procedures for Determining the Workload of Teachers, its Accounting, Control, and Determination of Salary," stipulate that assistant professors (referred to as "docent" in the SAR) must participate in at least one scientific conference at the national level during the academic year and at least two international scientific conferences during their period of appointment. Lecturers, on the other hand, must participate in at least one national scientific conference during the academic year and at least one international scientific conference during their term of appointment. This is a mechanism of the College trying to enhance the teaching staff involvement in the research activities that is partly successful due to the organization of the conference at the College, but it is still at the local level and does not have international impact.

It is important to note that this information is not included in the available job descriptions of lecturers and assistant professors found in the additional Higher Education Institution (HEI) annexes (which are available only in Latvian). English versions were provided upon request: "Amata\_apraksts\_Docents\_paraugs" and "Amata\_apraksts\_Lektors\_paraugs."

From the available CV data of full-time teaching staff, the aforementioned publication appears to be the only one produced in the recent period, excluding the previously mentioned publications in Latvian conference theses.

Considering the College's regulations, many lecturers are entering a new election phase, while for



some, this stage is nearing completion. As such, the College's regulations dated June 19, 2020, No. 22/3-1.1.-19/3, titled "Procedures for Determining the Workload of Teachers, its Accounting, Control, and Determination of Salary," regarding international publications may not be achieved unless collaborative papers are developed within the next few years in partnership with institutions or students.

In conclusion, the College has established a clear mechanism for involving teaching staff in research activities, particularly through the supervision of student qualification theses and participation in conferences. The supervision of student research is highlighted as the main mechanism for faculty involvement in applied research, with staff guiding students through practical projects such as developing tools and simulations for fire safety and protection. This mechanism is further supported by the College's internal regulations, which require faculty members to participate in national and international scientific conferences.

However, while there is a structure in place to encourage research involvement, its success is only partial. Although the College has organized local conferences and encouraged staff participation in national-level scientific activities, there is limited evidence of international impact. Scientific publications from teaching staff remain minimal, with only a few notable examples, such as the above mentioned scientific paper published in 2022.

1.4.5. According to the SAR (p. 36), the involvement of students in developing qualification theses related to applied research is a key mechanism for engaging students in research activities. Academic staff at the College supervise numerous students' qualification theses, with the number supervised during the review period presented in Table 2.6 (SAR, Table 2.6, p. 35).

To enhance teaching staff involvement in research, the College organized the first scientific research conference titled "Fire Safety and Fire Fighting" in 2023, with a follow-up conference in 2024. At these conferences, a student presented their report based on a qualification thesis, as noted by graduates. Additionally, both students and graduates expressed a desire for increased participation in research activities.

Participation in the conference can serve as a basis for students presenting their theses to receive additional scholarships, as indicated by the programme director during the expert team's visit. Another suggestion from graduates, students, and departmental representatives for improving the quality of qualification work is to prepare full conference papers detailing their results. This preparation would facilitate higher marks during thesis defenses in front of the SFRS professionals and could also enhance the overall quality of the research being conducted.

It is important to note that there are currently several untapped opportunities for participation in international conferences alongside Riga Technical University and other partner institutions. These include student conferences, short-term Erasmus+ visits, and networking opportunities during workshops.

It can be concluded that the higher education institution has made significant efforts to promote student involvement in research through various mechanisms, such as supervising qualification theses and organizing scientific conferences. These initiatives appear to be functioning well, as evidenced by student participation and feedback indicating a desire for increased engagement in research activities. Additionally, the potential for presenting at international conferences and participating in Erasmus+ visits highlights further opportunities for student involvement, though there is still room for improvement in fully utilizing these options. Overall, while the mechanisms established are promising, there is a need for more structured support and encouragement to maximize student participation in scientific and artistic research.

1.4.6. To facilitate the research endeavors of both students and lecturers, the College is actively engaged in the continuous restoration and enhancement of its technical facilities, infrastructure, and equipment. This effort is significantly supported by the SFRS, which plays a crucial role in the long-

term planning of new infrastructure.

The study process at the College is regularly improved, with the most recent technical and digital upgrades including the enhancement of library resources hosted in the Moodle system. This upgrade provides teaching staff and students access to new databases such as Technical Rescue from 2020, as well as online resources like "Wilderness SAR," "Park Ranger," and "Access & Rescue." Additionally, new projectors and other technical equipment have been incorporated (SAR, p. 36).

Several innovative solutions have been implemented to improve the study process, including new gas containers equipped with sensors to enhance training in combustion processes, developed roof stands for practicing rescue techniques, and various simulations for oil burning processes that explain the actions of firefighter foam mechanisms. These advancements in technology and infrastructure modernization contribute significantly to the learning environment (SAR, p. 36).

During the assessment visit, the expert team observed that a sufficient scientific database is available for theoretical research. However, due to restrictions imposed by the Ministry of the Interior, students often find it necessary to work outside of the College's network since access to the internet may be slower on the internal network. Consequently, many students use external resources for their research. The library is relatively well-renovated, with regular updates of books and study materials.

The expert team also visited the Fire Testing Laboratory, which functions similarly to a typical materials testing laboratory. While the facility may not boast a wide array of modern techniques, it provides standardized laboratory devices for flashpoint testing, evaluation of combustion, and foam formation. The methods and equipment available are adequate for research applications in material characterization.

It is important to note that the solutions and training stands have often been created during student practical work, ensuring an effective training process. These will continue to be utilized when the College initiates operations at the new training ground, as per the project's plans.

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

Despite the challenges posed by aging infrastructure, the professional duties and responsibilities of College lecturers, and the student workload, various mechanisms have been successfully implemented over the last few years to enhance research activities at the College. Students have the opportunity to develop their qualification theses under the guidance of teaching staff. Both graduates and current students are encouraged to increase their research potential, particularly with the establishment of a new annual conference aimed at promoting research activities in collaboration with faculty.

It is worth noting that students often face fewer language barriers when engaging in research activities, thanks to the variety of tools available to them, compared to teaching staff. Given the strong loyalty of students and their willingness to collaborate with faculty, as well as graduates' recommendations to increase the number of guest lecturers, the expertise and experiences of senior professionals in the field could greatly benefit emerging professionals. This collaboration is essential to enhance knowledge sharing, particularly in light of the low rate of international publications authored by the teaching staff. Students typically exhibit a quicker willingness to learn languages and participate in international activities, a point emphasized by graduates.

The development of scientific publications remains one of the most challenging aspects concerning the College's regulations for Assistant Professors and lecturers. The ongoing development of a new training facility and the enhancement of research capacity—supported by available infrastructure, simulation devices, and innovative ideas from both teaching staff and students—may increase collaboration in research at the College. However, securing funding for scientific activities, particularly for international applied research, relies heavily on project grants.

The lack of a dedicated department responsible for assessing project calls and preparing grant

applications poses a significant challenge that requires more thorough evaluation. With the anticipated growth of the College's capacity in the coming years, there exists a substantial opportunity to enhance international collaboration in applied research activities with other European fire safety and rescue services and educational institutions.

#### Strengths:

1. With support from the SFRS, the College is actively developing its infrastructure, utilizing innovative tools and planning for a new training facility and a new building in the coming years.
2. The College management team, teaching staff, and students are collaborating to plan and implement new ideas that have practical applications, showcasing their potential for enhancing education and research.
3. Since 2023, the College has been organizing a scientific and practical knowledge-based conference titled "Fire Safety and Fire Extinguishing." This event is intended to be held annually, aiming to enhance the research experience of both teaching staff and students.
4. Many qualification theses defended by students, under the guidance of academic staff, focus on applied research topics related to innovations in fire safety, fire extinguishing techniques, and the personal and collective protection of firefighters and rescue service personnel.
5. Technological solutions and methodologies developed in qualification works are further integrated into the training processes of various study courses.
6. The College has successfully formed effective partnerships, such as the collaboration with Riga Technical University, which serves as a strong example of positive engagement; however, this area overall presents more weaknesses, indicating significant potential for further development in building additional collaborations.

#### Weaknesses:

1. The academic and professional workload of the teaching staff limits their ability to allocate time for scientific research, aside from supervising qualification theses.
2. The limited proficiency in the English language among teaching staff restricts their participation in international research activities.
3. The level of participation by teaching staff in international publications is relatively low and does not meet the regulatory demands set by the College for academic positions (assistant professors and lecturers).
4. Student engagement in applied research activities is primarily confined to the development of qualification theses, with little consideration given to participation in the annual conference "Fire Safety and Fire Extinguishing" organized by the College.
5. The College has limited capacity to engage in research and applied research projects due to the absence of a dedicated unit responsible for project management.
6. Feedback from students and alumni indicates a desire for more guidance in enhancing the scientific standards of research papers and theses, reflecting a gap in research-focused support.

### 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

The evaluation of scientific activities reveals that while there is some involvement of teaching staff in guiding students and managing their academic journeys, this engagement is not yet fully realized. This partial compliance affects the promotion of professional development and the sustainability of academic positions in the context of international research. In the long term,

enhancing collaboration between faculty and students on research projects can improve the quality and volume of scientific publications, yet challenges in specific research areas persist. The collaboration between lecturers and students is crucial, as many topics explored in student projects—often showcased at the College Conference—hold potential for publication as articles or inclusion in international conference proceedings. However, the current level of collaboration is not sufficient to maximize these opportunities.

To fully address the deficiencies in publication rates for both faculty and student work, it is essential to establish robust support mechanisms for financing open access article publications. Attracting funding and fostering partnerships with other universities could significantly mitigate these shortcomings, providing access to resources that would enhance overall research output. Thus, while there are positive aspects to the scientific activities, the assessment indicates that further efforts are necessary to achieve full compliance with the standards expected.

## **1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

1.5.1. The College currently has memorandums of understanding with 7 national organizations, signed for an indefinite period of time. (Annex 13) This includes the SFRS, Riga Technical University, State Border Guard College, State Police College, Association of Latvian Colleges, Liepaja Maritime College, Saldus Technical school and Children and youth center "Daugmale". The subject of these memorandums varies and includes to provide internships, the improvement and development of the teaching process, raising the level of education, of scientific, pedagogical and methodological experience and cooperation in exchange of experience (conferences, seminars, joint training), methodological work, exchange of academic staff. It also includes peer-to-peer consultations, student exchanges and increasing pupils' fire safety awareness through educational activities.

The most critical of cooperation agreements is with the SFRS, their specialists are involved in delivering various lectures to college students, ensuring that the SFRS is up-to-date. The College recognises that without the involvement of SFRS in providing practice opportunities and examining the thesis of qualification works, it would not be possible to achieve the goal of the study programme and study results. Students are employed with the SFRS following graduation. Annual joint tactical training is organized with the National Police College and National Border Guard College and students of the Home Affairs College. This arrangement has been in place since 2015.

The College has developed the following selection criteria for working with partners: cooperation should lead to improvement of the quality of study programme goals and achievable results within the framework of regulatory acts, improvement of students' knowledge and competencies. Overall, the expert team considered that the institution has an important and appropriate range of national civil partnerships that enable the successful delivery of the programme, leading to employment for its graduates.

1.5.2 The College currently has memorandums of understanding with 4 international organizations, signed for an indefinite period of time. (Annex 13) They are the European Fire Service Colleges Association (EFSCA), Firefighting School of the Fire and Rescue Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, Fire Academy of the Ministry of the Interior of the Free Hanseatic City of Hamburg and the Estonian Security Academy. The subject of the agreements include to improve the work of the college, enable peer-to-peer consultations and exchange experience. The expert team considers that the institution has the capacity to establish significantly more agreements with international higher education students to advance research and staff and student mobility. Given the findings detailed elsewhere in this report relating to staff research and the institution acknowledgement that no staff or students participated in mobility (incoming or outgoing) during the reporting period expert team considers that the institution needs expand

cooperation with international organizations, in particular higher education institutions, to facilitate mobility (with an emphasis on short-term) and increased staff research. This should be part of a long-term strategy devised by the institution to grow this area of its work.

1.5.3. The institution informed the expert team that during the reporting period, the institution had not received any foreign students or teaching staff. (Annex Foreign Mobility) The Development Plan (Annex 2) includes an objective to attract foreign lecturers, which is assigned to the College Director. Practically speaking, the team was not able to identify a coherent strategy or definite plans that would enable the institution to realize this objective. The College should devise a coherent and credible strategy, using innovative and short-term solutions where appropriate, to ensure that it is making use of international teaching staff and attracting international students wherever possible. The institution informed the expert team that during the reporting period there has been no incoming and outgoing mobility of students or teaching staff. (Annex Foreign Mobility) As discussed under 1.5.2, the expert team considers that College has the capacity to establish significantly more agreements, in particular with international higher education institutions, to advance research and staff and student mobility. The College has rightly identified a series of challenges that create difficulty in facilitating mobility. Language competency, student employment and staff and student caring responsibilities all make longer mobility opportunities challenging. However, the expert team considered that while some trips have been organized historically there is an under emphasis and the absence of a considered long term plan (for instance raising language competency) to enable increased short-term mobility. Various stakeholders recognised that this form of mobility presented legitimate and valuable opportunities to learn from international colleagues and institutions.

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

During the assessment visit it was found that the College has a considered and suitable range of national partners to enable effective delivery of the programme. However, the institution has a limited range of formal partnerships in place with international organizations, especially other higher education institutions and this negatively impacts research efforts and staff and student mobility.

Strengths:

1. Appropriate range of national cooperation partners that helps to ensure successful delivery of the programme.

Weaknesses:

1. The institution has not facilitated any staff or student mobility during the reporting period  
2. The College has a limited range of memorandums and agreements with partner international higher institutions.

### **Assessment of the requirement [3]**

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The limited range of international partnerships and complete absence of staff and student mobility reduce the College's ability to advance its strategic objectives.

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

## Analysis

1.6.1. The previous assessment procedure related to the study field and corresponding study programmes was conducted more than a decade ago in 2012 (Previous recommendations UCAK). Consequently, and owing to changes in personnel at the College, there is only partial institutional memory relating to the recommendations of the previous team and their implementation. Nevertheless, the institution provided a follow-up report (Annex 14) and the expert team found clear evidence of progress in some areas. The recommendations were as follows:

1. To continue the cooperation between other HEI within the EU in order to improve the change of experience of students and academic staff.
2. To extend the use of laboratory for the study process, as a possibility to cooperate with other HEIs.
3. To extend research, engage more students.
4. To update cooperation with Riga Technical University regarding the use of laboratories and research.
5. To make a cooperation agreement with Lithuania Fire Fighters Training School (to improve the student experience exchange).
6. To improve library stock.

With respect to the low participation of academic staff in research, the institution has assisted staff to publish and attend conferences, including by organizing the College's own scientific conference in May 2023. In relation to improving the collaboration with Riga Technical University, academic staff have been involved in collaborative projects such as "Flexible interoperability for first responders - robotics for triage and reconnaissance tasks". Students have also carried out practical testing of a miniature furniture fire extinguisher. However, during the assessment visit, it was considered that there is the potential to expand collaboration further. Library resources have been enhanced, though it was found difficult to quantify this during the period since 2012. Nevertheless, students stated they were satisfied with the range of resources available.

During the assessment visit it was found evidence of cooperation with other higher education institutions in the European Union to improve exchanges between students and academic staff. This included participation in the annual training "Fenix" of the Polish Firefighting School (2007-2018), the Estonian Security Academy's annual "Sireen" training from (2012-2018), an annual field placement in Aluksne, Riga or Keipene with invited students and academic staff from Estonia and Lithuania (2014-2017) and participation of College academic staff and students in international training in Moldova as part of the "EURO-MED-REACT 2023". Notwithstanding the progress that has been made regarding the recommendations, it was considered by the expert team that there is significant scope for the institution to further develop in these areas, particularly staff research and staff and student mobility.

The recommendations provided have been partially implemented. The contribution of the college to the analysis of recommendations and their application to the specifics of the study field and the corresponding study programmes is evident.

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

The previous review was more than a decade ago and some of the previous recommendations were less relevant at the time of the current visit. The expert team found evidence of good progress in certain areas. However there has been limited progress regarding cooperation between other HEI within the EU in order to improve the change of experience of students and academic staff.

#### Strengths:

1. The effective and established cooperation with local partners, in particular the contribution it makes to training facilities.

#### Weaknesses:

1. The College lacks a robust and comprehensive process for addressing the recommendations within external quality assurance reports.

### 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

The College has progressed a number of recommendations from the previous report, however significant work still needs to be done regarding cooperation with international HEIs.

### 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

#### Short-term recommendations

- |   |
|---|
| 1. It is suggested to make the quality policy and other essential documents available in English on the College's website and conduct upcoming conferences in a bilingual format (Latvian and English) to enhance international recognition. (31.12.2025).  |
| 2. Develop and implement robust policies and training for staff on academic ethics and integrity, ensuring consistent standards for assessment and constructive alignment across programmes. (31.12.2026)   |
| 3. Revise the admissions process to clearly communicate programme requirements and provide detailed instructions for course papers and qualification theses, ensuring clarity in application processes and formatting. (31.12.2026)                         |
| 4. Revise the curriculum for scientific research-related courses, focusing on increasing study hours for literature analysis and data evaluation, with an aim to boost the number of research-based qualification theses relevant to the SFRS. (31.12.2026) |
| 5. Initiate discussions with government authorities to propose a framework for increased financial autonomy that allows the College to make faster financial decisions regarding operational needs and development projects. (31.12.2026)                   |
| 6. Address immediate refurbishment needs within classrooms and common areas to maintain functionality and comfort until the ongoing projects are developed. (31.12.2026)  |
| 7. Investigate cost-effective digital solutions to automate essential administrative processes, prioritizing tasks with a significant impact on efficiency. (31.12.2026)  |
| 8. Create a formal network of students and alumni to facilitate networking, knowledge exchange, and a stronger sense of community within the College. (31.12.2025)  |

#### Long-term recommendations

1. After the completion of the new training field, perform an in-depth analysis by to determine further ways to enrich the curriculum with practical methods and assess the necessity of broadening practical training opportunities. (31.12.2030)
2. Increase the involvement of guest lecturers, ensuring students are exposed to contemporary national and international issues relating to their programmes. (31.12.2028)
3. Explore and implement strategies for improving salary structures and benefits for teaching positions to enhance job attractiveness. (continuously)
4. Continue support for faculty involvement in networking activities and student-faculty collaboration, aiming for collaborative projects each academic year while ensuring implementation of external quality assurance recommendations. (continuously)
5. In cooperation with SFRS management, consider establishing a dedicated unit (commission/working group or such) that plans conferences and assesses potential research projects. This unit would engage teaching staff and enable students to develop their skills through practical involvement in research initiatives (31.12.2027).
6. Address reliance on state budget grants to ensure budget distribution principles align with educational needs and advocate for increased government funding for development initiatives in high-cost areas such as rescue. (31.12.2029)
7. Work with governmental bodies to advocate for a reassessment of the funding model for resource-intensive educational programmes, such as fire safety, fire-fighting, and rescue training, ensuring they receive appropriate financial support to sustain high-quality education. (31.12.2030)
8. Plan and implement a timeline for the complete digitization of all administrative and academic processes, including the development of a comprehensive student and academic management system, to improve efficiency and streamline operations. (31.12.2030)
9. Proactively seek new partnerships and opportunities for staff to engage in international development activities, ensuring that external circumstances do not hinder such initiatives. (31.12.2027)
10. Develop and implement a long-term strategy aimed at establishing new agreements with international higher education institutions to facilitate increased mobility for both staff and students while promoting collaborative research opportunities. (31.12.2027)

## II - "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Fire Safety and Firefighting" 41861 (Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting") aligns with the study field of "Internal Security and Civil Protection". The programme is designated with the code 41861, in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers' regulations No. 322 issued on June 13, 2017, regarding the classification of education in Latvia.

The first two digits of the code (41) signify that it is a short-cycle professional higher education programme (corresponding to a fifth-level professional qualification) that can be pursued following general or professional secondary education. The duration of full-time studies is three years. The



remaining three digits (861) represent the educational thematic group (Services) and thematic area (Civil and Military Protection), specifically within the educational programme group focused on the Protection of Persons and Property. Upon completion of this programme, graduates are awarded the qualification of Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician.

The College is a state-established institution of higher professional education operating under the supervision of the State Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). The study programme has been developed in close collaboration with this agency, ensuring full compliance with the relevant field of study.

2.1.2. The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting" designated with the code 41861 and leading to the qualification of Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician, is fully aligned with the objectives and expected outcomes of the programme. The strategic goals, operational directions, and tasks of the College are articulated in the College's regulations, which have been approved by Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 82. The primary duties, tasks, knowledge, and competencies associated with the study programme are defined by a professional standard that was approved by the Sub-Council for Tripartite Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment on December 14, 2022. Development of this professional standard involved key stakeholders, particularly employers such as the SFRS, to ensure that the programme's tasks remain relevant to the labour market. Moreover, the study programme and associated professional qualification align with the professional qualification system in Latvia, as outlined in the Vocational Education Law.

The college offers the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting" in both full-time studies and part-time studies. The duration of full-time studies is 3 years, while part-time studies last 3.5 years. To begin studies in the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting" a secondary education is required, but the admission requirements for full-time studies and part-time studies differ. For full-time studies applicants must meet the requirements stipulated in Articles 4 and 7 of the Law on Service in Institutions of the Ministry of the Interior and the Prison Administration for Officials with Special Service Ranks and the admission criteria are detailed in the College's Internal Regulations No. 22/3-1.1.-18/9, titled "Admission Rules for Full-Time On-Site Studies at the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College," ensuring compliance with the regulatory framework in Latvia. For part-time studies in the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting," only employees of the State Fire and Rescue Service with special service ranks are admitted, provided they are not older than 42 years of age on December 31 of the respective admission year and admission criteria are detailed in the College's Internal Regulations Nr.22/3-1.1.-18/8, titled "Admission Rules for part-time studies at the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College". Through the College's short-cycle SP, students can attain a 5th level professional qualification as a "Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician." Short-cycle SP duration and language adhere to regulatory requirements in Latvia.

However, during the assessment visit it was highlighted by students and alumni that for part-time extramural students, it would be more logical and easier if the curriculum were more modular, allowing students to focus on fewer topics at once, especially at the start of their studies. This approach would better accommodate those balancing full-time work and family life and potentially prevent thoughts of dropping out.

2.1.3. Since the previous accreditation of the field of study, the programme's objectives and expected outcomes have been clarified, explicitly defining the knowledge, skills, and competencies to be acquired in accordance with the updated professional standard "Fire safety and civil protection technician" approved by the Sub-Council for Tripartite Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment on December 14, 2022. In line with the revised Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician profession standard, a second foreign language—professional German—has been introduced, while the study course "Technical Graphics" has been removed, with the essential knowledge and skills integrated into the course "Fire Safety Supervision." Additionally, new courses on "Receiving and Handling 112 Calls" and "Physical Fitness" have been introduced.

According to Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 305 of June 13, 2023, titled "Regulations on the State Standard for Professional Higher Education," optional study courses "History of Firefighting" (2

credits, 2 ECTS) and "Emotional Intelligence and Leadership" (2 credits, 2 ECTS) have also been established (Paragraph 3.1.1.). In compliance with the legal provisions outlined in Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 238 of April 19, 2016, "Fire Safety Regulations," the title of the study course "Fire Protection Systems" has been changed to "Engineering Systems Essential for Fire Safety" (Paragraph 3.1.1.).

Based on expert recommendations to optimize the study courses by increasing credit hours while maintaining the same learning outcomes, the following courses have been merged:

- "Foundations of Pedagogy" and "Foundations of Management Studies" have been consolidated into a single course titled "Foundations of Management Studies."
- "Occupational Safety" and "Environmental Protection" have been merged into the course "Occupational and Environmental Protection."
- "Firefighting and Rescue Techniques and Equipment" and "Firefighting Training and Physical Training" have been combined to create the course "Working with Firefighting and Rescue Techniques and Equipment" (Paragraph 3.1.1.).

All modifications to the study programme have been implemented following the established methodology for ensuring educational quality - College Internal Regulations No. 25 "Development and Update of Study Programs at the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College" and Study Quality Assurance Handbook. While previous recommendations emphasized the need to introduce a second foreign language—German—into the programme as required by professional standards, evaluations during the assessment visit indicated that learning German may not be practical for firefighters working in Latvia, where the primary working languages are Latvian and Russian.

2.1.4. In its Operational Strategy for 2023–2027, the SFRS identifies a shortage of employees as one of the weaknesses in its SWOT analysis, which impacts the ability to ensure the quality and timely execution of functions. As a result, it can be concluded that specialists in the field of fire safety and firefighting are in high demand in the labor market.

The College trains specialists for the SFRS according to the education and development plan commissioned by the SFRS, which is approved annually by order. The number of additional students to be admitted over five years is outlined in the development planning document titled "Vocational Education Development Action Plan for Officials with Special Service Degrees of the Ministry of the Interior System," as stated in Ministry of the Interior Order No. 1-2/1450 from October 28, 2022 (Paragraph 3.1.3.).

Unfortunately, during the assessment visit it was realized that for the 2024/2025 academic year, a first-year student group could not be formed, as it is economically justified to open a group with at least 18 students, but this year saw fewer applications. According to Annex 16 (see annex: Annex 16 Statistics on students during the reporting period.xlsx), statistics indicate that admissions to the first year have been declining since 2021, with 20 students admitted in 2021, 15 in 2022, and 14 in 2023. Similarly, the total number of students has also decreased in recent years: there were 193 students in 2021, 151 in 2022, and 149 in 2023.

During the assessment visit it was explained that the College employs various methods to promote the profession among young people, including visits to general education schools to raise awareness about the profession, providing information to students at Saldus Technical School who are pursuing the 4th level professional qualification in "Firefighter," and participating in city celebrations and other events. However, the primary factor identified by young people is salary, as the College offers cadets lower salaries compared to other colleges under the Interior Ministry. Also during the assessment visit, it was clarified that the enrollment periods for colleges under the Ministry of Interior vary. College is the last one, which means that if students are already enrolled, for example, in the Police College, they will not be eligible to apply to College. The Ministry of Interior should consider unifying the promotion efforts and enrollment periods to ensure equal opportunities for all colleges.

Students enrolled in on-site studies at the College also hold official positions with a special service

rank while studying (cadets), and upon graduation, they are guaranteed employment with the SFRS. However, according to the professional standard for a Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician, specialists can also work in state or municipal institutions or companies to implement national policies in the areas of fire safety, firefighting, rescue, and civil protection.

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

The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting" complies with the regulatory framework in Latvia and is developed according to the professional standard. The College has a close collaboration with the SFRS, which directly influences the inclusion of the latest skills in the study programme. However, the profession of "Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician" is not as in demand among young people as other professions under the Ministry of the Interior. The College needs to continue working on promoting the profession to young people, possibly in collaboration with SFRS and Ministry of Interior, and may need to develop a specific plan for increasing the profession's visibility, to ensure the recruitment of at least one group each year.

#### **Strengths:**

1. All indicators describing the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting" are well and clearly prepared according to the Latvian and College regulations.
2. Close collaboration with the SFRS in the implementation of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting".

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. The profession of "Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician" is less in demand among young people compared to other professions in the field of internal affairs.

## **2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof**

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The Short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" 41861 (Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting") is aimed to prepare students' professional competence to work in the field of fire safety, firefighting, rescue and civil protection in accordance with the professional standard "Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician". (SAR, p. 42) According to annexes (see annex: "Annex 17 Compliance of the study programme Fire Safety and Fire Fighting with the national education standard.docx") graduates of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" have a possibility to continue studies at Riga Technical University to obtain the qualification - Fire Safety and Civil Protection Engineer (professional qualification level 6). During the assessment visit, it was noted that several graduates were alumni of both the College and Riga Technical University, confirming that students are interested in continuing their studies and that the study programmes are logically sequential.

Studies in College are designed in accordance with the national educational requirements, comparison is provided in Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" annexes between:

- "Regulations on the State Standard for Professional higher Education" (Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 305 of 21.06.2023 requirements) and Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" (see annex: "Annex 17 Compliance of the study programme Fire Safety and Fire Fighting with the national education standard.docx");
- professional standard "Fire and civil protection technician" (Professional qualification level 5) and Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" (see annex: "Annex 18 Relevance of the study programme to the professional standard.xlsx");

The Short-cycle SP “Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting” encompasses a variety of courses, including general knowledge acquisition, branch-specific courses, and freely optional courses, all outlined in the study plan (see annex: “Annex 20 Plan of the study programme Fire Safety and Fire Fighting.docx”). Each course provides information on its name, responsible individual, scope, prerequisites, objectives, planned outcomes, content, organization of independent work, evaluation criteria, and associated literature. This information is closely aligned with the goals of the courses and the overall objectives of the study programme. (SAR p. 48)

The interrelationship between study courses and Short-cycle SP “Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting” objectives is illustrated in the course mapping provided in Annex 19 (see annex: “Annex 19 Study programme in Fire Safety and Fire Fighting.docx”). Course descriptions are regularly updated to reflect labour market trends, regulatory changes, and proposals from the SFRS regarding necessary amendments to the content of the study programme. All changes to the study programme are coordinated with the SFRS, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the needs of employers. (SAR p. 48)

As the Short-cycle SP “Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting” pertains to a specialized field of study, the assessment visit confirmed the close collaboration between the College and the SFRS, ensuring that the content of the education meets employer needs. Feedback surveys discussed in section 1.2.4 of this report have shown satisfaction with graduates' abilities to successfully begin working immediately or with minimal additional practice. Overall, the education is up-to-date and meets stakeholder expectations. However, during the assessment visit, the issue was raised about the inclusion of German language in the curriculum, a requirement stemming from legislation and included in previous accreditation recommendations. However, the expert team saw no substantive need for German language studies in enhancing the service related to this field, thus recommending an attempt to introduce a legislative exception. It was suggested that German language studies could be replaced with a lecture related to research work involved in thesis preparation or a similar topic.

2.2.3. Study courses at the College are delivered through theoretical classes, practical sessions, and independent study, as outlined in the course descriptions. The choice of teaching methods is guided by the desired learning outcomes, with a strong emphasis on integrating theory and practice to enhance professional knowledge application. Most courses prioritize practical sessions that include simulations and role-plays designed to reflect real-life scenarios. (SAR, p. 49)

Lectures serve multiple functions, including introductory, advisory, summative, and evaluative roles. During lectures, students engage with questions that foster active participation, helping to develop their analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills. Visual aids are commonly used to enhance understanding, and materials are provided to support learning. Interactive methods, such as group work, discussions, presentations, and situational analyses, promote engagement between students and lecturers. (SAR, p. 49)

In independent lessons, students utilize various reference sources, study relevant legal acts, and complete assignments on specific topics. This format encourages the exchange of information and experiences, with lecturers acting as consultants and facilitators. By presenting their work, students enhance their language skills, presentation abilities, and capacity to articulate and defend their opinions. (SAR, p. 49) During the assessment visit, students who had previously studied at the college and now have work experience confirmed that they see progress at the institution. They expressed great appreciation for being able to discuss and occasionally even debate with instructors, ultimately reaching mutually satisfactory understandings.

Practical lessons incorporate applied games and realistic scenarios, allowing students to engage in problem-solving and analysis. For example, training exercises such as rescue operations in a smoke-

filled environment or responding to a road accident using hydraulic tools simulate real service situations, thereby deepening students' understanding of their future roles in rescue services. (SAR, p. 49) As previously emphasized several times in the report, the College has a strong collaboration with the SFRS, including in terms of educational resources. For larger technical equipment purchased by the service, the College is always on the list. It is also worth noting positively that the training field, which is crucial for conducting this type of education, is being developed with the support of various international projects. Therefore, the College has done impressive work in developing the training field despite the lack of a national budget for it. The expert team highly appreciates this proactivity, although the training field is not yet complete, and the current learning conditions remain modest.

2.2.4. All students at the College, being officers with special ranks, participate in internships conducted in units of the SFRS. These internships serve as a vital work-based learning component, facilitating a seamless transition into service upon graduation. The organization of internships adheres to the College's Internal Regulation No.22/3-1.1.-18/7, established on November 29, 2023, titled "Regulations on Internships," which is accessible on the College's website (only in Latvian). (SAR, p. 49-50)

The Internship Regulations outline specific outcomes, detailing that the total internship requirement is 29 credits (29 ECTS). For full-time, onsite students, the first internship of 3 credits occurs at the end of the first year, followed by a second internship of the same length at the end of the second year. In the third year, students complete a substantial internship segment totaling 8 credits and an additional 15 credits before embarking on their qualification work. Part-time extramural students, already active officers, complete their internships at the end of their studies, totaling 24 credits in the third year and 5 credits in the fourth year. (SAR, p. 49-50)

Each student is assigned a placement supervisor from both the College and the internship site to guide their learning experience. Throughout the internship, students maintain an internship diary and prepare a report summarizing their experiences. Upon completion, students defend their internship work, which is evaluated by an internship evaluation committee. This structured internship process not only enhances practical skills but also prepares students for their future roles in emergency services. (SAR, p. 49-50)

During the assessment visit, it was also explained that since the practical training takes place only in SFRS, the objectives and organization of the practice are familiar to the institution, and there is close cooperation in this regard. The expert team did not identify any problems or areas for development concerning the internships.

2.2.6. The selection of topics for qualification theses at the College is coordinated with the SFRS, following the internal regulation No.22/3-1.1.-19/1 established on February 18, 2015, titled "Procedure for Development and Defence of Qualification Theses." The Qualification Thesis Defence Board comprises qualified representatives from the SFRS, including the Deputy Chief of the SFRS as Chairperson and Chiefs of Independent Units as members. (SAR, p. 50-51)

To ensure the relevance of qualification theses to the needs of the SFRS and the labour market, all thesis topics are carefully aligned with current requirements. A notable example is the qualification work titled "Using the Geospatial Information System to Perform SFRS Functions," which addresses essential needs such as mapping water intake sites and modeling forest fire extinguishing and hazardous substance leakage scenarios, thereby enhancing SFRS operational efficiency. (SAR, p. 50-51)

The integration of student qualification theses with applied research topics at the College demonstrates a strong alignment with practical applications, particularly in areas related to fire

safety, decontamination, and the development of specialized tools for firefighting professionals. As outlined in Chapter 1.4.2 in this report, these efforts have led to the creation of innovative solutions, such as testing stands for material analysis and simulators designed to enhance firefighters' mental resilience. While these initiatives reflect a commitment to addressing real-world challenges faced by professionals in the field, there remains a significant gap in the scientific rigor underpinning these research activities.

Students primarily rely on local regulations and limited online resources for their literature analyses, often resulting in few citations from scientific publications. This reliance underscores the need for more structured guidance in accessing and utilizing scientific literature effectively. During the assessment visit the feedback from students and graduates indicates a desire for enhanced support in this area, including the implementation of additional courses focused on scientific research methodologies.

Moreover, the existing curriculum, specifically in the "Qualification Work" course, lacks sufficient emphasis on scientific literature, and the teaching of foundational research skills is currently introduced only at a late stage in the programme. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance the quality of qualification theses but also prepare students for more significant challenges within their future careers.

To further strengthen the research capabilities and practical readiness of students, it is crucial for the College to enhance its focus on scientific methodologies and literature within its educational framework, ensuring that students have the resources and guidance needed to engage with contemporary research effectively. By doing so, the College can better meet the expectations of employers and contribute to the overall development of proficient professionals in the fire safety and rescue sectors.

According to the statistics in the SAR (p. 50-51, Table 3.1), the assessment of students' final works shows a positive trend over the years. The grading scale ranges from "almost average" (4 points) to "with distinction" (10 points). Notably, in the last five years, 62% of students have successfully defended their qualification theses with scores classified as good, very good, excellent, or with distinction. This improvement reflects the increasing quality and relevance of the students' research efforts in alignment with the strategic goals of the SFRS. (SAR, p. 50-51) However, there is a trend to increasing quality, there are only few theses (3) rated to be outstanding during the last 10 years.

The topic of qualification theses was also discussed during the assessment visit. While several theses with very practical outcomes were highlighted for bringing changes to the service, alumni emphasized the need for significantly more support and guidance in the thesis writing process. Although there is a guideline available, producing an excellent research paper requires a bit more. It was noted that a supervisor from the school is available, but perhaps there could be greater encouragement and inclusion of alumni in the mentoring process since alumni were very interested in sharing their experiences and were ready to support students in this process.

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

In conclusion, the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" effectively meets the needs of the industry and aligns with national education standards, ensuring relevant content that helps students achieve desired learning outcomes. The programme demonstrates a strong integration of theoretical and practical elements, with students gaining essential skills through internships and coursework designed in collaboration with the SFRS.

Stakeholder feedback is positive, highlighting the programme's success in preparing graduates for immediate employment. However, while student qualification theses are relevant and often aligned with current industry demands, there is a notable gap in the scientific rigor of their research, as many students rely heavily on local regulations and limited online resources for literature analysis,

resulting in a lack of citations from scientific publications. Students have expressed a desire for additional support and structured guidance in utilizing scientific literature and research methodologies.

To further enhance the educational framework, the College should emphasize scientific methodologies more effectively within the curriculum and explore increased involvement of alumni in the mentorship process for thesis writing. Additionally, opportunities for improvement exist, such as introducing modular learning for part-time students and reconsidering the inclusion of German language courses.

The implementation methods emphasize practical training and interactive learning, providing valuable real-world experience through a well-organized internship structure. Qualification theses are aligned with SFRS needs, and enhanced alumni involvement in mentoring could further support thesis development. Overall, the College offers strong study programme content and delivery, maintaining relevance and quality through strategic partnerships and continuous improvements, while also identifying areas to refine modular learning and thesis support.

#### Strengths:

1. Robust collaboration with the SFRS ensures that the curriculum meets employer expectations and industry needs.
2. The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" emphasizes practical, hands-on experience, preparing students for immediate employment in fire safety and civil protection.
3. The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" is responsive to changes in legislation and market trends, maintaining its relevance.

#### Weaknesses:

1. There is a need to increase alumni participation in the thesis mentoring process to provide students with additional guidance and support in developing their research projects.
2. The curriculum lacks specific courses aimed at enhancing students' research experience, which could help develop their skills in conducting independent research and preparing for academic publications.
3. Research activities related to the preparation of publications require improvement, with faculty needing to better facilitate and support students in the publication process and promote overall academic growth.
4. There is room for improvement in providing a modular course structure to better accommodate part-time students balancing work and study.
5. The necessity of German language courses is questioned, suggesting a reevaluation of curriculum components and having an exception from the regulations.

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

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

### **2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme**

#### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The general facilities and provisions for the delivery of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" are detailed in the SAR (sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). The College ensures a well-

structured study provision that is tailored to the specific needs of vocational higher education in fire safety and firefighting. The curriculum is designed to meet both academic and professional standards, providing students with a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills essential for their future roles in the State Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). The inclusion of experienced practitioners as guest lecturers further strengthens the relevance and practical application of the study content. Overall, the resources and facilities associated with the programme align well with the intended outcomes, and each year, the material and technical base is expanded to enhance study results.

The College's informative resources, including the library, are sufficient for supporting student learning and research activities. The library offers access to relevant literature, both in print and digital formats, with a focus on materials related to fire safety, emergency response, and related fields (SAR, p. 27-28, Assessment visit, tour of the College). The integration of the Moodle e-learning platform facilitates access to course materials and other resources, enhancing the flexibility and efficiency of the study process (SAR, p. 28, Assessment visit, presentation of the Moodle). However, the library's collection could benefit from regular updates to reflect the latest advancements in fire safety and rescue techniques, as well as broader access to international academic journals.

The College provides a solid material and technical base, with specialized equipment, simulation facilities, and practical training environments that closely replicate real-life fire and rescue scenarios. These facilities allow students to develop hands-on skills and apply theoretical knowledge in a controlled, safe setting. The College also ensures that students have access to personal protective equipment and the necessary tools for practical exercises, further aligning with the professional requirements of their future careers. List of special equipment related to the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" is provided in annexes (see annex: 24piel\_materialtehniska\_nodrosinajuma\_saraksts-t.xlsx - only in Latvian). Nevertheless, continued investment in modernizing and expanding the technical infrastructure, such as upgrading simulation technologies and practical training facilities, would enhance the quality of the learning experience.

To further improve the quality of education, a training ground is being constructed as part of the Internal Security Fund project, in collaboration with the State Agency for Assurance. This project, set to conclude by the end of May 2024, aims to enhance CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive) and man-made disaster management processes while also improving professional skills and disaster response preparedness. The training ground will feature various facilities, including (SAR, p. 51-52):

- Ground maintenance equipment (a multifunctional tractor with interchangeable implements).
- An obstacle course for students.
- Flood barriers and a three-store tactical house for CBRN, firefighting, and rescue training, equipped with a process control room and necessary instrumentation.
- Dividing barriers for various apartment layouts and a tree-sawing stand with variable loads.
- Collapsible swimming pools, industrial shelving, a decontamination trailer, a weather station, a thermal camera, and a hydraulic tool kit with battery-powered tools.

The second phase of the project, expected to be completed by the end of 2024, will involve the acquisition of training simulators and additional equipment, including a training truck, portable devices (e.g., microscopes, vibraphones), a public transport evacuation simulator, laboratory equipment, and the relocation of a railway tanker purchased in 2022 to the training ground, along with the tactical house. (SAR, p 52) However during the assessment visit it was realized that some obstacles have arisen, and the project's completion time has been postponed, but activities are ongoing.

The financial provision for the College is more constrained, with limited autonomy in deciding how funds are allocated. Much of the College's financial planning and spending require approval from higher authorities, notably the Ministry of the Interior and SFRS (Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 27 June 2023 No.354 "Regulations on Financing of Colleges of the System of the Ministry of the



Interior" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/343160-iekšlietu-ministrijas-sistemas-koledzu-finansesanas-noteikumi>) and Assessment visit, meeting with College management). This dependence restricts the College's ability to invest in staff development, infrastructure improvements, and new technologies. While the College manages its resources efficiently within these limitations, additional funding and financial independence would significantly improve its capacity to provide high-quality education, support innovative teaching practices, and expand its scientific provision.

2.3.3. The funding available for the College's study programme, along with its sources and utilization, is generally sufficient to ensure the full implementation of the study process. The sources of funding for the College, detailed in SAR section 2.3.1, include allocations from EU policy instruments and other foreign financial aid, which contribute to the development of study programmes. Notable projects undertaken by the College include the development of comprehensive civil protection and disaster management training for various institutions, including the SFRS College of Fire Safety and Civil Protection, which is co-financed through EU policy instruments (project code: ECHO/SUB/2022/TRACK1/884396). Additionally, the College is involved in a project aimed at preparing for CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive) contingencies and establishing a training ground for rescue operations related to man-made disasters, funded by the Internal Security, Asylum, Migration, and Integration Funds (2014-2020) (project code: CESPI/IEM/18). (SAR, p. 52)

However, certain financial constraints and limitations may impact the long-term sustainability and development of the programme, particularly concerning staff motivation, infrastructure upgrades, and programme innovation.

The primary source of funding for the study programme comes from the State budget grant under the Ministry of the Interior, which oversees the College's budget allocation. The available funding is used for covering essential operational costs, including staff salaries, teaching materials, and practical training resources (SAR, p.24-25, Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 27 June 2023 No.354 "Regulations on Financing of Colleges of the System of the Ministry of the Interior" (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/343160-iekšlietu-ministrijas-sistemas-koledzu-finansesanas-noteikumi>) and Assessment visit, meeting with College management). However, the College has limited financial autonomy, with most major expenditures requiring approval from higher authorities. This limits the flexibility to allocate resources in areas that could enhance the study programme, such as further staff development, new teaching technologies, or expanding research activities.

The basic cost of the study place is determined by the Ministry of Education and Science, with specific calculations for full-time and part-time extramural studies. For full-time studies, the basic cost per student is calculated annually, while for part-time studies, a reduced coefficient of 0.75 is applied. The minimum number of students required for programme profitability is not calculated due to the allocation of state budget grants for the implementation of the study programmes. (SAR, p. 52-53)

Table 3.2 (SAR, p. 53) provides an overview of study place costs from 2014 to 2023, indicating a gradual increase in costs for both full-time and part-time extramural studies. As of September 1, 2023, costs have changed to €1,746.14 for full-time studies and €1,309.60 for part-time extramural studies.

Although the cost of study places was previously discussed in this report, it became evident during the assessment visit that the financing principles effectively keep the College operational. However, they do not support development activities relating to either personnel or infrastructure, which was highlighted as a significant influencer to attract the students during the assessment visit, while no study group was opened for the 2024/2025 academic year, as an insufficient number of suitable candidates applied to establish the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting". The main reasons cited for this situation include the salaries paid to students, which are not competitive, and the

learning conditions that affect the professional image of the field. Thus, while there may be minimal necessary funding available for conducting studies, more is required for sustainable operation. The lack of financial independence and funding hinders the College's ability to invest in innovative teaching methods, modern technologies, or expanded research activities. Moreover, the relatively low salaries offered to teaching staff, compared to those in active service roles, make it difficult to attract and retain qualified full-time lecturers, which could have long-term implications for the quality of the study programme (Assessment visit, meetings with College management and Teaching Staff). Addressing this issue requires a reconsideration of funding models and greater flexibility in how resources are managed.

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

In conclusion, the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" is well-supported by appropriate study provision, scientific and informative resources, material and technical facilities, and adequate financial resources, all of which contribute to the effective implementation of the programme and alignment with educational goals. The integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills is facilitated by collaboration with the SFRS and the inclusion of experienced practitioners as guest lecturers.

Although the College has successfully secured funding through EU policy instruments and other foreign financial aid to advance critical projects in civil protection and disaster management, challenges remain. The programme has faced difficulties in opening a study group for the 2024/2025 academic year due to a lack of suitable candidates, largely attributed to non-competitive salaries and suboptimal learning conditions. While the financial resources available are sufficient to maintain basic operations, the College lacks financial autonomy and additional funding necessary for development, limiting its capacity to invest in staff development, infrastructure upgrades, and programme innovation.

Furthermore, despite efficient resource management, issues such as declining student numbers and low staff salaries may threaten the long-term viability of the study programme. Therefore, while the College effectively meets essential operational requirements and provides strong educational support, addressing these financial limitations and enhancing resources remains crucial for future improvements and the preparation of competent professionals in fire safety and rescue services.

#### **Strengths:**

1. The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" is supported by relevant funding sources, including EU policy instruments and other foreign financial aid.
2. Notable projects, such as comprehensive training for civil protection and disaster management, underscore the effective use of financial resources.
3. The implementation of critical projects signifies the College's proactive approach to enhancing educational quality.
4. The construction of a new training ground, albeit delayed, is a promising enhancement of the study programme's material and technical base.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. The College has limited funding and restricted control over its budget, limiting its ability to invest in staff development, infrastructure, and programme innovation.
2. The College has been unable to open a study group for the 2024/2025 academic year due to a lack of suitable candidates, which can undermine the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" continuity.
3. This situation has been attributed to non-competitive salaries and suboptimal learning conditions,

which negatively affect the attractiveness of the College's offerings.

4. While current funding supports the operation of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting", there is an urgent need for increased financial resources to enhance developmental activities related to both personnel and infrastructure for sustainable success.

## **Assessment of the requirement [6]**

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

### **Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The College's study provision, including scientific, informative, material, and technical resources, largely meets the conditions necessary for implementing the Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting study programme and achieving learning outcomes. The curriculum effectively integrates theoretical and practical elements, supported by experienced academic personnel. However, the study programme faces challenges due to a decreasing number of students and insufficient funding and financial autonomy, which limits investments in staff development, infrastructure, and modern technologies. The library resources are adequate but could benefit from more frequent updates and broader access to international journals. While the material and technical base is strong, ongoing delays in infrastructure projects highlight the need for continued investment. Overall, the College's provision is mostly compliant, but addressing financial and infrastructural constraints would enhance its effectiveness and sustainability.

## **2.4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

2.4.1. According to the information provided from the SAR and the additional annexes the teaching staff involved in the implementation of both full time and part time extramural study forms of the Programme include 23 members - 14 elected full time academic staff members (7 assistant professors and 7 lecturers from the SFRS and 9 guest lecturers - the education of 5 members is doctor of Philosophy (PhD, it should be indicated that these are guest lecturers), 11 have master degree in science (MSc) and 7 lecturers are with bachelor's degree or higher education (SAR, p. 53). The Annex 8 (see annex: "Basic information of the teaching staff involved in the short cycle vocational higher education study Programme "Fire Safety and Fire Fighting" (main place of work College)") provide the necessary information both full time and guest lecturers - the professional duty experience in the SFRS of the full time teaching staff range between 19 to 31 days per year that indicate high quality of the teaching staff considering they professional duties.

According to the additional annexes such as CVs of the teaching staff, Annex 20 "Plan of the study Programme "Fire Safety and Fire Fighting"" and the Annex 21 "Course description", the study process is organized by 25 not 23 members, not counting the guest lecturers, invited by the full time or guest lecturers, who have contracts with the College to teach some specific course (as example, some graduates, who have thought one of few lectures within some specific course as explained during the visit of the expert team).

It should be noted that the heads of both departments of the College are involved in the implementation of seven courses including strategic courses related to research, internship and qualification thesis supervision, while they are not included in the list of teaching staff.

The information provided by the SAR does not explain, why both leaders of the College departments involved in the organization of the College training process as lecturers in several courses according to Annex 21 "Course Descriptions", but does not specify their academic position or explained why

they do not have such - The head of the Department of Fire Safety and Civil Protection service is Responsible for Five Courses "Professional German" (Annex 21, p.7), "Receiving and Handling 112 Calls" (Annex 21, p.113), "History of Firefighting" (Annex 21, p.117), "Internship" (Annex 21, p. 121), and "Qualification work" (Annex 21, p.123), whereas the head of the department of the State Fire and Rescue Service is responsible also for the courses of "Internship", "Qualification work".

It may raise questions about the student availability to evaluate the courses, in the case the teaching staff do not have positions of lecturer or associate professor. This is an important issue considering the student interest to improve their research activities, considering that department work may relate to many duties and the course lecturing should be also included in the workload.

It should be also attributed to the course "Professional German", for which one of the heads of the departments was pointed out in the Annex 20 and Annex 21 as the responsible teaching staff member, while after additional request of the CVs of both College members, it was clarified that the CV does not indicate any knowledge of foreign languages - especially German that may be some misunderstanding raised due to the lack of explanation in the SAR about new course developed due to the change of the professional standard.

It should be emphasized that by evaluating the CVs of the full time teaching staff members that their professional expertise is sufficient to teach the courses (Annex 9, "Europasses").

The 9 guest lecturers involved in the implementation of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" are mainly with academic experience in the field - six guest lecturers from the Riga Technical University and the University of Latvia with PhD degree are teaching Mathematics", Applied Chemistry", "Applied physics" and "Special Chemistry", study courses related to engineering (e.g., study course "Electrical engineering and fire safety", "Requirements for electrical installations", "Theoretical Mechanics" as well as the courses "Analysis and Statistics" and "Economic Theory" (Annex 8, "Basic information of the teaching staff involved in the study process"), whereas professional MSc degree guest lecturers teach study courses "Professional English", "Hydraulics" un "Thermodynamics".

The qualification of the College teaching staff and professional knowledge is regulated by several legislative documents adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers, and Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, and several adopted internal regulatory documents mentioned below that indicate the full comply of the teaching staff with the requirements for the implementation of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" at the College that determine need of both academic education and the professional education of the teaching staff.

For example, according to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, adopted 02.11.1995., link: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/37967>, translated by State Language Centre), Section 39. the positions of a docent, lecturer, and assistant in the subjects of the higher vocational education Programme (vocational study Programme) profile may be held by a person with higher education that does not demand the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) grade if the professional experience in the field of the study topic is guaranteed by the teaching staff member.

According to these regulations, the election of a person in a position of a docent who has no PhD, such person requires at least a seven-year practical work experience. Lecturers and assistants who do not have a scientific and academic degree need a five-year practical work experience corresponding to the study course to be taught according to these regulations.

During the SWOT analysis the College reported of the low motivation of the Colleges full time teaching staff to continue their academic growth from bachelor to MSc and PhD studies, followed by different mechanisms and supportive activities at the College to increase the rate of teaching staff academic growth (SAR, p. 14).

It was established during the assessment visit that actually the teaching staff should be divided in two groups - retired lecturers who teach theoretical and practical knowledge and the mid-age professionals whose job duties, academic work and private circumstances determine the lack of time for the studies, while they noted to further plans to continue studying in the Master's degree

programmes, whereas the main problem of doctoral studies was indicated the low opportunity to get budget or pay for the study process.

Meanwhile some of the graduates, who continue to work professionally and partly participate in the study process within the additional guest lectures in the course also indicated potential plans for further studies and continuation of the collaboration with the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting".

Returning to the full-time teaching staff, their education degree is connected also with their academic degree and responsibilities according to the governmental regulations as well as the regulations of their positions in the College.

The College Regulations issued under the first paragraph of Article 15 of the Vocational Education Act in agreement with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 82 of 6 February 2024 determine the regulation of assistant professors, lecturers and assistants elected for 6 years in the study process (available in Latvian at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/349706-ugunsdrošibas-un-civilas-aizsardzibas-koledzas-nolikums>).

It should be noted that the Annex 15 (see AIC coordinator added annex: Annex15\_Regulation\_of\_academic\_and\_administrative\_positions") of the College "Bylaws on Fire Safety and Civil Protection College academic and administrative posts" was given to the expert team, but this document is outdated and is replaced by above mentioned regulation issued in agreement with the agreement with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 82 of 6 February 2024, which is also included in the list of the College's home page, section of the regulations, where more regulations attributed to the academic staff and the study process are available in Latvian (available at: <https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/koledzas-normative-akti>).

As noted by the SAR (p. 54), the qualifications acquired by teaching staff are important as they may be related not only to the academic career, but also with enabling students to acquire a broad knowledge and versatile skills and to develop professional competences under the guidance of teaching staff.

During the assessment visit, the students indicated the need of the full time teaching staff besides good collaboration in internship activities, organizing and supervising the qualification thesis, also to invite some new experts from the specific fields to give more guest lectures – an example a guest lecturing about radiation and nuclear hazards from the Radiation Safety Centre of the State Environmental Service was mentioned by the graduates and the students.

According to the requirements of the national legislation, the study process of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" is implemented in the Latvian. According to the Annex 10 (see annex: Annex 10 CERTIFICATE.docx), the College director has confirmed that the knowledge of the state language of all teaching staff of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" meets the requirements of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.157 of 8 March 2022 "Regulations on the Scope of Knowledge of the State Language, Procedure for Testing Proficiency in the State Language and State Fee for Testing Proficiency in the State Language" for performing professional and official duties.

2.4.2. During the assessment visit, it was observed that various mechanisms are employed to enhance the study process, such as participation in workshops and experience exchange during seminars and educational conferences. Guest lecturers are regularly invited to contribute to this improvement.

According to the information provided in the SAR (p. 54), there have not been any significant changes in the teaching staff affecting the study process. The only changes noted were the replacement of the lecturer for the course "Fire Safety Monitoring" in 2015, a change in the instructor for the "Civil Defense" course in 2017, and updates to the expanded course on "Rescue Operations," which included additional lectures on water rescue and was revised in 2021. It should also be noted that the course names "Civil Defense" and "Rescue Operations" were inaccurately

translated; the correct names are "Civil Protection" and "Rescue Work," as indicated in Annexes 21 and 8, which detail the course descriptions and the teaching staff involved.

As stated in Annex 21, the course "Fire Safety Monitoring" is conducted by two lecturers with over 20 years of experience in the SFRS. One of these lecturers is also involved, alongside an experienced expert, in the implementation of the "Civil Protection" course. Discussions with the teaching staff during the visit revealed that these changes aim to attract new specialists from the SFRS to teach courses, contributing to the transfer and development of knowledge and expertise, which ultimately enhances course content.

The recent updates to the "Rescue Operations" course were highlighted as a successful example of course improvement, as many teaching staff members participated in the study process, each responsible for their respective topics. The CVs of these instructors confirmed their relevant expertise.

Programme managers and representatives from the SFRS emphasized the importance of involving retired specialists in the teaching process while also attracting new experts. However, college management and department heads noted the challenges posed by regulatory constraints on increasing staff salaries, which hinders efforts to recruit young professionals. This has led to a reliance on short-term guest lecturers, a concern echoed by graduates during the visit, who emphasized the need for more expert involvement.

Feedback from students indicated a growing interest in contemporary topics, such as radiation safety and drone systems. There is a necessity to explore additional mechanisms for attracting young professionals through guest lectures and collaboration with partner universities to enhance the study process.

2.4.4. An overview of the teaching staff's research activities from 2014 to 2023 is provided in the additional annex (see annex: "Quantitative Data on Scientific Research"). Detailed information regarding the primary conferences and seminars attended by the teaching staff is also summarized in Annex 12 (see annex: "Scientific or Applied Research Activities of the College's Academic Staff"). This annex includes data on the number of qualification theses prepared by students in the study programme.

The data shows a significant positive trend in the research activities of teaching staff for the year 2023, with participation in eight conferences, the publication of six scientific papers, and involvement in four scientific projects. This contrasts sharply with previous years, where participation was limited to one or two conferences and/or scientific publications. Notably, the year 2019 was an exception, with three projects involving teaching staff participation.

An analysis of conference participation detailed in Annex 12 (see annex: "Scientific or Applied Research Activities of the College's Academic Staff") shows that eleven out of fourteen full-time teaching staff members (including six assistant professors and five lecturers) participated in scientific conferences from 2015 to 2023. It is essential to highlight that some of these conferences were local, while others were international.

Proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English, is crucial for gaining experience in networking at conferences, delivering oral or poster presentations, and preparing peer-reviewed publications and conference abstracts. According to the CV data of teaching staff who reported on research activities (Annex 12), only five indicated proficiency in English, primarily those engaged in presenting at conferences and working on publications (further information can be found in Annex 12 and individual CVs from Annex 9, Europasses). Four assistant professors and one lecturer did not provide any indication of English proficiency in their CVs, although one lecturer mentioned attending English study courses.

Additionally, guest lecturers, as indicated by their CVs, have participated in scientific conferences and workshops from 2015 to 2023 based on their academic research topics or professional

development (see Annex 9, "Europasses").

The rise in teaching staff participation in conferences in 2023 may be linked to the first Scientific and Practical Conference titled "Fire Safety and Fire Fighting" organized at the College, held in May 2023 via Cisco Webex multimedia. The thesis from this conference has been published in full in Latvian at: <https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/media/180/download?attachment> (accessed on 02.09.2024).

Data from Annex 12 indicates that four teaching staff presentations at this inaugural conference addressed practical aspects of the firefighter profession, including safety issues and the physical and mental wellbeing of firefighters. The conference is planned to become an annual event at the College (SAR, p. 36). Subsequently, the second conference titled "Fire Safety and Fire Fighting" was held in June 2024, as detailed on the College's website (link: <https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/koledzas-2zinatniski-praktiska-konference-ugunsdrosiba-un-ugunsdzesiba> (accessed on 02.09.2024)). Both conferences were conducted in Latvian.

During the assessment visit, teaching staff and students expressed a desire to participate in future conferences organized by the College. Graduates from 2024 and third- and fourth-year students identified the scientific conference as an opportunity to present their research work and receive valuable feedback before formally defending their qualification projects. For instance, a graduate from 2024 presented the results of their qualification thesis during the second conference and received significant insights from industry professionals, including staff members from the College.

As noted in the description of the research component (SAR, p. 35), there is currently only one international scientific publication authored by one of the lecturers responsible for the courses "Rescue Work - Rescue Work in Collapsed Buildings" and "Work in Chemical and Radioactive Accidents."

An analysis of the individual CVs of the full-time lecturers and assistant professors involved in the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting", alongside their election terms outlined in Annex 8 (see annex: "Annex 8 Basic information of the teaching staff involved in the study programme.xlsx"), indicates that three assistant professors and three lecturers will need to prepare for reelection in the autumn of 2025. These staff members are required to have at least one peer-reviewed scientific publication in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

This situation necessitates that the College implement mechanisms to encourage collaboration among teaching staff in the preparation of internationally peer-reviewed scientific papers. This collaboration can be stimulated by leveraging topics explored in student qualification theses and individual faculty activities during conferences. Evidence of progress in this area includes full-page reports presented by the teaching staff at the College's conference organized in 2023, with the themes listed in Latvian on the College's homepage (available at: <https://www.ucak.vugd.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/ugunsdrosibas-un-civilas-aizsardzibas-koledzas-zinatniski-praktiska-konference-ugunsdrosiba-un-ugunsdzesiba>).

Other faculty members elected as lecturers and assistant professors in 2020 and 2023 will serve until 2026 and 2029, respectively. While most of the teaching staff have a low rate of scientific publications, their professional experience and knowledge transfer to students during the practical study process, internship activities, revision and supervision of the student qualification thesis cover the applied research activities, and the involvement of in the national conferences such as the College organized annual events and the international involvement in the conferences and workshops covers the scientific research activities of the teaching staff.

2.4.5. During the assessment visit, the expert team concluded that the College management and teaching staff collaborate effectively to enhance the study process. A notable example of this cooperation is the conference organized at the College, along with the partnership with students during practical courses and internship activities. The integration of the results from qualification theses into study courses and practical instruction further exemplifies this collaboration, as

highlighted by both students and faculty during the visit.

As stated in the SAR (p. 55), the College has established mechanisms for cooperation among teaching staff to provide inclusive content in study courses. For instance, the skills developed in the course "Rescue Work" are supplemented by the additional knowledge gained from "Firefighting and Rescue Tactics." This collaborative approach enriches the educational experience by aligning different firefighting-specific courses and utilizing the expertise of various teaching professionals.

The student-to-teaching staff ratio within the study programme is 1 to 5, which further indicates the successful collaboration between faculty members in supporting students (SAR, p. 55). According to the course descriptions and plans for continued collaboration, the involvement of multiple experts in specific courses enhances support for students, a factor highly appreciated by both current students and graduates. Graduates have noted the practical experience gained during internship activities and how shared knowledge contributed to the development of practical tools for further study. This collaboration has resulted in highly rated qualification theses and positive post-graduation experiences, with former students returning as guest lecturers, as confirmed by information shared during the visit.

In summary, the aims of improving collaboration, enhancing practical application, and integrating course content are effectively interconnected, contributing to a supportive and enriching educational experience for students.

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

The teaching staff at the College primarily consists of full-time faculty members who are professionals from SFRS, including lecturers and assistant professors, as well as department heads involved in strategic courses, internship development, and qualification work. Additionally, academic professionals contribute as guest lecturers for specific theoretical courses.

Students and graduates highly evaluate the professionalism of the teaching staff.

Despite the professional growth and collaborative efforts in course development, the teaching staff also bears the responsibility of research activities in accordance with regulatory requirements. Although faculty members have gained valuable experience through conference attendance, the preparation of publications remains an ongoing issue that requires attention. There is also a need for support to foster the academic growth and interests of the teaching staff.

#### **Strengths:**

1. The full time teaching staff includes professionals with 19-31 year personal experience in the SFRS.
2. The teaching staff collaborate with the heads of the department and together in order to improve the course materials.
3. The practical studies are based on the professional expert involvement and open minded collaboration with the students.
4. The guest lecturers are from the academic universities providing modern equipment and high level theoretical studies.
5. The teaching staff is open for the consultations, explanations, and participation in applied research activities.

#### **Weaknesses:**

1. The involvement of only experienced SFRS teaching staff limits exposure to modern hazards, materials, and technologies. There is a need for greater inclusion of researchers from other sectors and institutions to provide students with diverse perspectives and practical experience, as highlighted by graduates.



2. The research activities of teaching staff, particularly in preparing publications, are underdeveloped, which hinders their academic evaluation and growth.
3. The current support mechanisms for academic staff are insufficient in fostering academic growth. There is a lack of clear initiatives to identify and support assistant professors and lecturers with potential in applied research, as well as those interested in pursuing PhD or MSc studies. This limits opportunities for enhanced collaboration and increased research activity.

## **Assessment of the requirement [7]**

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

### **Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The SFRS professionals involved in the implementation of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" are highly regarded by both students and graduates. However, the increasing complexity of theoretical and practical aspects related to modern technologies and evolving hazards has highlighted a gap in crucial new knowledge and practical skills that could be addressed by experts familiar with the latest techniques for tackling contemporary firefighting challenges, environmental pollution, and global risk hazards.

While the professional competencies of the teaching staff—many of whom have over 19 years of experience—are commendable, there remains potential for improvement through collaboration. The assessment of professionalism should not only reflect their extensive service but also act as a recommendation for continued development through experience exchange and integration of research within the study process. Feedback from graduates and students emphasizes the importance of these new ideas and discussions among teaching staff to enhance the overall educational experience.

## **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

Annex (see annex: Annex 17 Compliance of the study programme Fire Safety and Fire Fighting with the national education standard.docx) confirms that the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" fully complies with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 305 "Regulations on the State Standard of Professional Higher Education".

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

### **Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The professional standard for "FIRE SAFETY AND CIVIL PROTECTION TECHNICIAN" was approved in 2022, and the study programme has been developed in accordance with the content of this professional standard. Given that the format of the professional standard has changed, any necessary updates to the standard must be made using the updated format approved by the National Centre for Education. The recommended review period for the professional standard is

5 years.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Annex (see annex: Annex 21 Course description.docx) confirms that the description of the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" have been prepared in Latvian (only language in which study programme is implemented). All descriptions comply with the requirements set in Section 561, paragraph 2 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. However, the College could consider balancing the scope of the learning outcomes of the courses with the scope of the study course, as it is observed that some courses which are small in size (2-3CP) have many different learning outcomes which are equivalent in size to larger courses, e.g. "Professional Psychology of Firefighters" (3CP), "112 Call Receiving and Processing" (3CP), "Economic Theory" (2CP).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of diploma and its supplement is provided in annexes (see annex: Annex 15 DIPLOMA.pdf) and fully complies with the procedure described in Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 202 "Procedure for Issuing State-Recognized Documents Certifying Higher Education".

- 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

Annex 8 (see annex: "Annex 8 Basic information of the teaching staff involved in the study programme.xlsx" and College director's signed confirmation (annex: Annex 10 CERTIFICATE.docx) fully complies with Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 157 "Regulations on the Scope of Knowledge of the State Language, the Procedure for Testing State Language Proficiency, and the State Fee for State Language Proficiency Testing."

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement (see annex: "Annex 6 Agreement for full-time on-site studies.docx") fully complies with the provisions to be included in the study agreement according to Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 70 "Mandatory Provisions to be Included in the Study Contract."

- 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 attached annex, 'Annex 4 COOPERATION AGREEMENT.docx' (Agreement between the College and Riga Technical University, 31.05.2024), confirms that students are provided with opportunities to continue their education at the Riga Technical University (RTU) in first cycle professional higher education study programme "Security Engineering", education classification code 42862, which is offered in Latvian. The degree awarded by the study programme at RTU is a Professional bachelor degree in safety engineering, and the professional qualification awarded is Occupational safety engineer. It should be noted that this study programme is implemented only as a full-time study programme and does not provide for extramural studies. In addition, this programme provides another professional qualification, however, there is currently no study programme in Latvia at other higher education institutions outside the College that provides the qualification of Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician (fifth level of professional qualification).

In addition, the College has submitted an annex (cooperation\_ligument\_vpk\_ucak.edoc) (in Latvian) between the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College and the State Police College dated 18.06.2024. The cooperation agreement has been concluded, which stipulates that if the short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Fire Protection and Fire Fighting", educational programme code 41861, implemented by the College is closed, the State Police College undertakes to provide the students of the study programme "Fire Protection and Fire Fighting" with the possibility to continue their studies in the short-cycle professional higher education study programme "Police Work", educational programme code 41861, qualification to be obtained "Junior Officer of the State Police".

- 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

Provided annex "Annex 5 Proof of loss.docx" states that the College based on Cabinet of Ministers No 795 of 11 December 2018 "Regulations on Licensing of study programmes", Paragraph 13.4, confirms, that the students of the short-cycle professional higher education programme "Fire Safety and Fire Fighting" are guaranteed compensation of losses in case the study programme is not accredited or the study programme license is revoked due to the Fire Safety and Civil Protection College (action or inaction) and the student does not wish to continue his/her studies in another study programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study programme complies with the Law on the Service of Institutions of the Ministry of the Interior System and Officials of the Prisons Administration with Special Service Ranks, Cabinet of Ministers 29.08.2023. regulations no. 496 "Rules on the procedure by which law enforcement officials are sent to receive education, as well as the procedure for covering and reimbursing educational expenses".

### **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

Short-cycle professional higher education programme "Fire Safety and Fire Fighting" fully complies with the requirements set in national regulatory enactments.

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

The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Firefighting" aligns with Latvia's regulatory framework and is developed in collaboration with the SFRS to include current skills relevant to the field. While the programme effectively prepares students for careers in fire safety and civil protection, it faces challenges in attracting young people to the profession and has struggled to recruit sufficient candidates for the 2024/2025 academic year due to non-competitive salaries and inadequate learning conditions.

To enhance visibility and appeal, the College should work with the SFRS and the Ministry of the Interior to promote the profession and develop strategic initiatives for recruitment. Positive feedback indicates that the curriculum is responsive to legislative changes and market needs, and that it

includes valuable practical training and internship opportunities. However, improvements such as modular learning for part-time students and reconsidering the necessity of German language courses are needed.

Additionally, while the teaching staff is well regarded, there is an ongoing need to support their research activities and academic growth, particularly regarding publication preparation. Overall, the College demonstrates a strong commitment to quality education and stakeholder alignment but must address the highlighted challenges to ensure sustainable success and continued relevance in the field.

In conclusion, the evaluation indicates that the College's study provision for the Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting programme largely meets the necessary conditions for effective implementation and achieving learning outcomes. The integration of theoretical and practical elements, supported by experienced academic personnel, is commendable. The expert commission acknowledges the impressive work and development efforts undertaken by the College; however, financial support remains insufficient to fully meet all necessary requirements, such as updating library resources, enhancing infrastructure as well as promotion work to attract more students and teaching staff. Challenges such as a declining student population and delays in infrastructure projects hinder the programme's potential for growth and improvement. While the library resources are satisfactory, enhancing access to up-to-date international journals is essential. Additionally, although the teaching staff possesses significant professional expertise, there is an opportunity to further advance their skills through collaboration and exposure to current practices. Addressing these financial and infrastructural constraints, along with fostering knowledge exchange, would significantly enhance the programme's effectiveness and sustainability, ultimately enriching the educational experience for students.

#### Strengths:

1. Close collaboration with the SFRS ensures that the curriculum meets employer expectations and industry needs, and is responsive to changes in legislation and market trends, maintaining its relevance.
2. The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" emphasizes practical, hands-on experience, effectively preparing students for immediate employment in fire safety and civil protection.
3. The College is the only institution in Latvia that trains specialists in the profession of "Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician" and offers a wide range of educational programmes.
4. The Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting" is well-supported by relevant funding sources, including EU policy instruments and foreign financial aid, with notable projects that underscore the effective use of financial resources to enhance educational quality.
5. The full-time teaching staff consists of professionals with 19 to 31 years of personal experience in the SFRS, and they actively collaborate with department heads to improve course materials.
6. Practical studies are based on the involvement of professional experts and promote open collaboration with students, enhancing the learning experience.
7. The teaching staff is open to consultations, willing to provide explanations, and actively participates in applied research activities.

#### Weaknesses:

1. There is a need to provide a modular course structure to better accommodate part-time students who are balancing work and study commitments.
2. Increasing alumni involvement in the qualification thesis mentoring process could provide valuable guidance for current students in thesis development.
3. The necessity of German language courses is questioned, suggesting a reevaluation of this requirement and consideration for an exception from existing regulations.

4. The profession of "Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician" is less in demand among young people compared to other professions within internal affairs, contributing to a decrease in first-year student enrollment. This has resulted in the College's inability to open a study group for the 2024/2025 academic year, which could undermine the programme's continuity.
5. Non-competitive salaries and suboptimal learning conditions are negatively impacting the attractiveness of the College's offerings. Therefore, there is an urgent need for increased financial resources to enhance developmental activities related to both personnel and infrastructure.
6. The need for specific courses related to research experience and the inclusion of researchers from other sectors and institutions in training processes is crucial, especially given the modern hazards, materials, and technologies involved.
7. The College should focus on improving research activities related to preparing publications, with an emphasis on evaluation and academic growth.
8. Enhancing mechanisms to support academic personnel in their growth, particularly for selected assistant professors and lecturers with potential for applied research and interest in pursuing PhD and MSc studies, may lead to improved collaboration and increased research activities.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

### **2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting"**

#### **Short-term recommendations**

1. Increase the involvement of alumni in the thesis mentoring process to provide current students with valuable guidance and support in their thesis development. (31.12.2026)
2. Conduct a thorough evaluation of the necessity of German language courses in the curriculum, considering potential exceptions from existing regulations if deemed unnecessary, and explore alternative topics that may better serve students' needs. (31.12.2026)
3. Launch targeted promotional campaigns in collaboration with the SFRS and the Ministry of the Interior to raise awareness of the "Fire Safety and Civil Protection Technician" profession among young people, aiming to increase interest and enrollment in the Short-cycle SP "Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting". (continuously)
4. Enhance mechanisms to support the professional growth of academic personnel, particularly for selected assistant professors and lecturers with potential for applied research. Encourage their interest in pursuing PhD and MSc studies to foster collaboration and increase research activities within the College. (31.12.2026)
5. Regularly update the library's resources to include the latest advancements in fire safety and rescue techniques. This can be done by subscribing to international academic journals and expanding digital access. (continuously)

#### **Long-term recommendations**

1. Develop and introduce a modular course structure designed to better accommodate part-time students, allowing them to balance work and study commitments more effectively. (31.12.2027)

2. Address the issue of non-competitive salaries and enhance learning conditions to improve the attractiveness of the College's offerings. Seek increased financial resources to support these initiatives and ensure sustainable operation. (31.12.2029)
3. Introduce specific courses related to research experience and actively involve researchers from other sectors and institutions in the training process to reflect modern hazards, materials, and technologies. (31.12.2027)
4. Prioritize the enhancement of research activities related to publication preparation, providing faculty with the necessary support and resources to improve evaluation processes and foster academic growth. (31.12.2028)
5. Advocate for greater financial autonomy to enable more flexible budget allocation. This could involve lobbying higher authorities or negotiating agreements that grant the College more control over its funding. (31.12.2028)
6. Develop long-term strategies to boost enrolment, such as partnerships with secondary schools, bringing cadets' pay in line with the defense sector, adding service in the SFRS and studies as part of the National Compulsory Defence Service, and improving the professional image of the field through media outreach. (31.12.2029)

### **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**

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Requirement Evaluation</b>		<b>Comment</b>
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:	Fully compliant		The evaluation determined that compliance was fully met according to the criteria; however, areas for improvement still exist. It underscored the need to strengthen the development planning process and to fully address all aspects of academic integrity within the College's procedures. While there are solid frameworks established, there is considerable potential for further development in these areas.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)		Partially compliant	<p>The evaluation of scientific activities reveals that while there is some involvement of teaching staff in guiding students and managing their academic journeys, this engagement is not yet fully realized. This partial compliance affects the promotion of professional development and the sustainability of academic positions in the context of international research. In the long term, enhancing collaboration between faculty and students on research projects can improve the quality and volume of scientific publications, yet challenges in specific research areas persist.</p> <p>The collaboration between lecturers and students is crucial, as many topics explored in student projects—often showcased at the College Conference—hold potential for publication as articles or inclusion in international conference proceedings. However, the current level of collaboration is not sufficient to maximize these opportunities. To fully address the deficiencies in publication rates for both faculty and student work, it is essential to establish robust support mechanisms for financing open access article publications. Attracting funding and fostering partnerships with other universities could significantly mitigate these shortcomings, providing access to resources that would enhance overall research output. Thus, while there are positive aspects to the scientific activities, the assessment indicates that further efforts are necessary to achieve full compliance with the standards expected.</p>



Requirements	Requirement Evaluation			Comment
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.		Partially compliant		The limited range of international partnerships and complete absence of staff and student mobility reduce the College's ability to advance its strategic objectives.
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		The College has progressed a number of recommendations from the previous report, however significant work still needs to be done regarding cooperation with international HEIs.

#### 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	Fire Safety and Fire-Fighting (41861)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Good

#### The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

None